

John Lonergan,  
Governor of Mountjoy Prison.  
Conference 2008

He opened his address by saying it was a pleasure to be in Tipperary and have the benefit of the whole air. He addressed conference on the different stages of parenting with the final stage being pay back time but he said that after 30 years he is still waiting for this and is still waiting for the cheque in the post.

Individuals are all different and everyone is special. We are into an era where perception is everything. Perhaps parents are at fault here rather than the child. Everyone is unique. Formal education is only a tiny part and life is the real education. While academic is important it is not the be all and end all and we must always go back to the person. We would all be perfect parents when our children are reared but we cannot go back and we will have left an impression whether for good or bad.

Health is the most important thing when we think of our children and there is no worse news a parent can get from a doctor than that the news is not good about a child's health.

He then went on to say that mothers are the real heroes in all of this. The mother and the grandmother who continues to visit their sons and daughters in prison do not get the recognition that they deserve. It is easy to be there for your children when they are being a success but it is in the difficult times that this role is tough.

Mothers, he said, are special and in Dublin a mother can hear their children get in to a taxi in O'Connell Street after a night out and also when they arrive home and put the key in the lock. That is what care is and that is what love is and while teenagers may not show it they do appreciate it that someone cares. The worst thing for a child must be that no one cares.

On expectations, he said we must stop planning our child's future. We do not own our child's life and the gift is to be able to nurture the child. He referred to the late Christina Murphy and her very valuable talks. A student must always study at least one subject they enjoy - it can make an otherwise difficult day bearable.

He paid particular tribute to the teachers who discover a particular talent a student may have and nurture this talent before, even the child or the parents may be aware of this talent. The influence such a person can have on a child can be immeasurable.

Happiness - Now we must try to make sure children are happy and contented but with the best intentions this can be disastrous. Always read to your children and make up stories. This will give them the gift of a love of reading. The simple things - he quoted a story of what a little child had found the most enjoyable in her day and it was holding the parents hand on her way to school.

Do not be negative about your child's performance in school - praise their achievements and keep your expectations to match your child's ability and only measure your child against reality.

As parents we must strive to nurture and guide and treasure our kids and be there for them. He illustrated his address with anecdotes from his own family which were both illuminating and amusing.