

DO PARENTING CLASSES  
REALLY WORK? AND CAN YOU  
GRADUATE WITH HONOURS?  
FIND OUT IN THE CONCLUDING  
PART OF OUR SPECIAL SERIES

# schools out!

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**T**wo months ago, I embarked on a weekly parenting course. It's not something I ever imagined I'd do – I hate group things and the thought of spending my evenings looking at flip charts rather than collapsing on the sofa with a glass of wine seemed incongruous to me. But I was curious... What sort of people went on these courses? Why did they do them? And what superior knowledge did they have, that I didn't? I wasn't in any serious doubt about my own parenting abilities, but I did have a niggling feeling there might be a calmer, less hysterical way to deal with my 'sparky' three-year-old and her 'determined' 22-month-old sister.

As it turned out, my classmates were not a bunch of desperados, but a mixture of very respectable professionals and a few stay-at-home mothers and fathers. Their children ranged in age from two to 12, some were more tricky than others, but most parents were there because they were fed up with shouting, nagging and pleading with their offspring. They wanted to get back to being the parents they always hoped they'd be. Every Tuesday night, we sit in semi-circle sharing our parenting highs and lows before being led through a series of skills by ex-school teacher, Gillian. There is, I have to admit, a touch of the evangelical about the whole thing, but generally it's common-sense stuff designed to keep the children cooperative and the parents in control. (At least, I think that's the right way around.) You must be positive, firm and consistent, she tells us.

The course is big on acronyms. So far we've been introduced to the overnight benefits of DP (Descriptive Praise) – it's not OK to just say "good boy" or "well done", you have to describe what you're praising as well. The importance of RL (Reflective Listening) – tricky in that it requires you to remain impartial while your children are being completely unreasonable, and the very helpful PFS (Preparing For Success) – if you let your children

