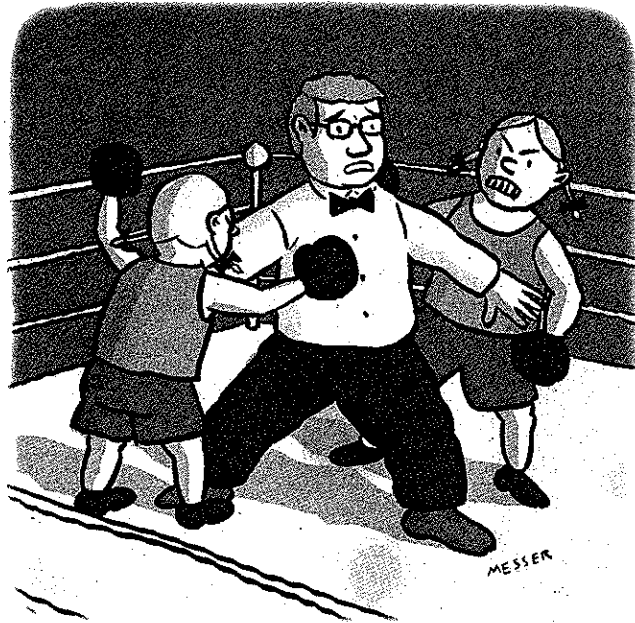


Because I say so...

IT WAS THE PURPLE PIG INCIDENT THAT marked the beginning of my disillusionment with modern advanced parenting theories. I'd just completed an eight-week training course designed to transform me into the perfect father, a calm and rational yet emotionally engaged authority figure – something like a cross between Steve Biddulph, Henry Kissinger and Jesus Christ. Naturally, I was bursting to use my newly honed skills of negotiation and diplomacy, and when I spotted two young girls wrestling angrily for possession of a 25-centimetre stuffed purple pig in their bedroom, I seized my chance.

These feuding girls weren't my children, of course. My daughters are a pair of angelic innocents whose lives are spent in pursuit of selfless virtue and the harmonious play of perfect six- to eight-year-olds. These two girls were vicious, selfish psychopaths whose spirits had somehow entered the bodies of my daughters, transforming them into their evil



alter-egos, Tooth and Claw. Tooth had her hands around the purple pig's throat, Claw had her hands around its butt, and both were screaming, "It's mine!!! Let go!!!!" while kicking each other in various vulnerable parts of the small-girl anatomy.

"Now, Tooth," I said, crouching down to kid level with the benign smile of a fully qualified Advanced Parenting graduate, "perhaps we can sort this out. Claw here says the purple pig belongs to her. What do you say to that?"

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeearrrrggggghhhhh hhhhhheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeearrrrrrrgghhh!!!!!!!" replied Tooth, whose speech rises to an incomprehensible banshee shriek during moments of peak emotional stress.

"Well! You certainly seem angry!" I said, employing the cheerful empathy I'd just spent eight weeks and \$200 acquiring. "Perhaps your older sister can help us?"

"The pig's minemineMINE!!MINE!!!MINE!!!!," yelled Claw, delivering a vicious rabbit punch to her sister's solar plexus and nearly ripping the pig's head off. "I want to kill her!!!! She's nothing but a smelly farting poo-bum bottomhead dog's dropping wee-wee brain ... [etc etc ad nauseum]."

"Well! You certainly seem angry!" I replied. I was relishing my powers as Mr Genial Facilitator, murmuring non-judgmental affirmations at the two screaming miniature harridans.

That's the way it went for five minutes, then 10 minutes, until something snapped in Mr Genial Facilitator's brain. I lunged at the pig, grabbed it by its abdomen and started bellowing "Give me the Pig!!!" repeatedly at the top of my lungs.

Just then my mother appeared in the doorway. My mother, who was staying at our house, is 70, with a philosophy of child-rearing steeped in the phlegmatic wisdom of working-class northern England. She looked at the pig; she looked at Tooth and Claw; she looked at me.

She said: "You daft pillock!!! Ah cahn't believe you're spending all this tahn arguing over a flippin' purple pig!!!!!"

A pertinent observation, and one that can serve as a valuable compass in the dark, impenetrable jungle of child-rearing theory. After all, never in the history of mankind have parents been able to consult so much reasoned, professional advice from psychologists, social workers, counsellors and gurus dedicated to unravelling the mysteries of parenting. Bookshops are choked with hundreds of titles devoted to the subject, and Australian authors like Steve Biddulph have carved out international careers from the genre. Television shows, intensive seminars and government programs are dedicated to spreading the very latest knowledge. Yet there are some things that only cold, hard experience can teach you – like the fact that spending 15 minutes negotiating the ownership of a stuffed purple pig is really, really stupid.