

The Four Agreements

(For parents)



The Four Agreements is a book by Don Miguel Ruiz published in 1997. For many, The Four Agreements is a life-changing book, whose ideas come from the ancient Toltec wisdom of the native people of Southern Mexico. The Toltec were 'people of knowledge' - scientists and artists who created a society to explore and conserve the traditional spiritual knowledge and practices of their ancestors.

The Four Agreements are, effectively, four principles to practice in order to create love, happiness and peace in your life. It looks at how we have self limiting beliefs that impact our lives and relationships. By adopting these four new agreements and challenging those beliefs we can transform our lives and those relationships.

Adopting and committing to these agreements is simple. Actually living and keeping these Four Agreements can be much harder!

Below is a short summary of the four agreements and how they can be powerful when applied in a parenting context.

1. Be Impeccable with your Word:

Realise how powerful the words we use are, both when we speak about others and our own 'self talk'. Often we are more negative towards ourselves than we might ever be to others.

'I am useless....'

'I am not as good, talented, clever, funny.....'

'I was so stupid to do/say that'

Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using your word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your Word in the direction of truth and love.

As a parent this covers how we speak to or about our child/children. Many of us know someone (or are someone!) who was told something as a child that still has an impact today. Often it can become a self fulfilling prophecy. For example, research has shown that one of the biggest differences between people who are creative and those who are not, is that the creative people believe they are creative. If you believe that you are, you will try and do more of it. The more you do the better you get etc.....

Another way to apply this agreement is to avoid using labels. We may say it directly to them, within their earshot or to others. We may think it ourselves and those thoughts create our attitude and approach. They are the 'difficult' one, the 'messy' one, the 'picky eater'. Labels are something they live up to so even the so called 'good' ones are difficult. Being the 'good one' and getting positive recognition for that may mean that they don't assert themselves with their siblings or friends in a balanced way.

Catch yourself 'giving out' or on a 'rant' (not, of course, that it would happen often!). If you heard someone else using those words or speaking to them in the same way, how would you feel? Often we would not be very happy about it! Take a breath or count to 10 before you respond so that you have the chance to do it in a way you would like to, rather than reacting out of habit and saying things because we are emotionally charged and which we may or may not mean.

2. Don't Take Anything Personally

Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own beliefs. If we take things personally, we often 'shoot the messenger'. Rather than hearing what is said, we get defensive. If we do not take it personally, we can hear what is being said and ask ourselves 'Is that true?' or 'Might that be the case?'

If it is, we can take the feedback and use it in a constructive way.

If it is not, then we can recognise that is their interpretation or projection and not be impacted by it.

This agreement states that when you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

As a parent if we remember this we can deal with what is happening without getting caught up in our own 'stuff' at the same time. If we want to be there to help our child deal with what is happening in their world, we can do not much more effectively when we are not feeling guilty, angry or the 'martyr'.

They won't put on their shoes when going out or insist on wearing a short sleeved T Shirt in winter. They are not deliberately trying to get you going. More likely they are trying to assert their independence (their stuff) or perhaps just don't like the feel of long sleeves.

They say they hate you...if you don't take it personally in that minute you can look behind their words and see that, for example, they are feeling left out because they cannot join their friends at the park, disco etc.

They say you don't care about me..... You can see it is because you are not providing new runners and they are experiencing disappointment or wanting to look cool to fit in. Or perhaps you can see that you have been caught up recently and have not been able to spend as much time with them. What they might really be saying is 'I miss you!' As a parent we often have to look way behind the surface to see what is really going on. If we don't take it personally we have a chance to be able to do that without getting hijacked by our own emotional response to the words.

3. Don't Make Assumptions

Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

As a parent, this leads on from the above. If we don't take it personally we are then free to see what is under the surface.

They say they hate Granny and we react. By asking a question or two we may discover that they just don't like having to leave their game or friends to go visit Granny.

They come home late, we cannot get them on the phone and they are fighting with a sibling.....

Ask some questions before shooting from the hip (a great old expression from the Wild West which may have saved a life back then but life and death situations are less common on a day to day basis in parenting despite what it might feel like at the time).

4. Always Do Your Best

Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. It may be different on a Monday morning than it is on a Friday evening. If you know you have done your best, you can pick up and start again. Under any circumstance, simply do your best and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret!

As a parent we can only ever do our best. Usually we come to parenting with no experience and a baby does not come with a handbook or set of instructions. A lot is intuition.

Our best, however, can get better when we read up or listen to others speaking about parenting.

Our best can get better when we become more aware of ourselves.

Our best can get better if we take the time and make the effort to apply these agreements.

QUOTES

Agreement 1

'The first agreement is the most important one and also the most difficult one to honour. It is so important that with just this first agreement you will be able to transcend to the level of existence I call heaven on earth. The first agreement is to be impeccable with your word. It sounds very simple, but it is very, very powerful'.

Agreement 2

'Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves'.

Agreement 3

'We have the tendency to make assumptions about everything. The problem with making assumptions is that we believe they are the truth. We could swear they are real. We make assumptions about what others are doing or thinking-we take it personally-then we blame them and react by sending emotional poison with our word. That is why when we make assumptions, we're asking for problems. We make an assumption, we misunderstand, we take it personally, and we end up creating a whole big drama for nothing'.

Agreement 4

'Under any circumstance, always do your best, no more and no less. But keep in mind that your best is never going to be the same from one moment to the next. Everything is alive and changing all the time, so your best will sometimes be high quality, and other times it will not be as good'.

General Quotes

'Who stops us from being free? We blame the government, we blame the weather, we blame our parents, we blame religion and we blame God. Who really stops us from being free? We stop ourselves'.

'Death is not the biggest fear we have; our biggest fear is taking the risk to be alive-the risk to be alive and express what we really are'.

Don Miguel Ruiz from The Four Agreements