

# Raising an ORCHID

Elaine Halligan's amazing journey from desperate parent to proud mother and inspiring parenting coach

I never imagined in my wildest dreams that becoming a mother was going to be such a hard work and I have to admit I haven't always enjoyed my time as a parent. I have found being a mum exhausting, bewildering, and complicated.

I frequently felt overwhelmed and guilty when I got things wrong and in the early days I made many mistakes.

For the past fifteen years, my family and I have been riding a rollercoaster. Not the fast, fun, three-minute ride you can walk away from afterwards, but the emotional kind. You know the one. The kind that rattles you around and strips you raw, that elates you and thrills you, overwhelms and terrifies you. We have lived it all, from utter despair and hopelessness to profound joy and the greatest celebrations of life.

Initially I bought into the parenting myth that if my son didn't listen to me, I needed to repeat instructions, nag, remind, bribe, cajole, threaten and punish. All these techniques however did not really put me in charge.

It took me a while to realise that a large part of my son's behaviour was due to his inborn temperament and his special needs and that I had an orchid child who needed careful greenhouse-type nurturing. My husband and I struggled to know how to deal with him and by the time he was seven Sam had been excluded



Elaine and Melissa

from three schools and was burdened with a plethora of diagnostic abbreviations that led to him becoming known as the Alphabet Kid. He was incredibly impulsive and had little self-control. We knew he was a good boy with a strong moral compass, but it took us many years to really understand his needs and temperament. As a family, we spent many years in crisis.

And Sam began to feel very different and inadequate. He thought he was a bad boy.

Society expects children, and adults,

to conform. We are quick to judge those who present differently, and if our children behave inappropriately, we often believe this behaviour is a reflection on our parenting and that any criticism is directed at us. We feel judged.

The transformation in my family happened when I sought help and got parenting coaching. I started to understand that all behaviour is a form of communication and learnt new skills to understand and support my child. I learnt that parents play a vital role in unlocking their children's potential and no matter what needs your child has, with the right positive parenting input, understanding and compassion, there is always hope.

When we understood our son was not BEING a problem but HAVING a problem, and that he was severely dyslexic, that led us to discover a brilliant



Sam Halligan

sparkling diamond, a young man who has kindness, resilience and clarity of vision as well as inner strength and confidence that belied his past experience.

Imagine his immense pride when, having been written off in society, he finally finished his

schooling as Head Boy and his story has now been told in my book 'My Child's Different' published last year by Crown House Publishing. It tells of the lessons we learned from Sam's transformational journey from difficult child to budding entrepreneur. The book has led me to opportunities that I would never have predicted such as the TedX stage in Oxford, speaking at our beloved Wimbledon Book Fest, the Wellington College Festival of Education and last month we had days of fun recording the audio book. We had so many requests from dyslexic parents who desperately wanted to hear the story but reading was not their preferred choice. So having it on audible makes it more accessible. Sam's voice is very powerful and is giving hope to so many other neuro diverse children and young adults.

My parenting coach, Melissa Hood, is now my business partner and friend, and I joined her running The Parent Practice in 2009. We use these skills to help parents of all children, whether they be challenging, difficult, different or not, to

- raise confident and happy kids
- have a happier and easier home life
- unlock their child's potential and maximise their strengths
- find the holy grail of parenting - the ability to stay calm!

We LOVE our work. We have so much fun running classes, school and corporate workshops and helping parents in our bespoke parent sessions. We have just launched our Parent Practice Podcast which incredibly reached No 1 in the Apple podcasts in the parenting category!

**Don't you want to ensure you raise happy, confident children?**

I feel so privileged to do the work I do as there is no better gift than helping the future generation lead happy, healthy and productive lives.

[theparentpractice.com](http://theparentpractice.com)

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