

## Parenting playbook

Professionals  
help bring  
families closer  
together

Stories by **JEANETTE TALLANT**  
TRIBUNE



PHOTOS BY LISA OLSON, FOR THE TRIBUNE

**GOOD TIMES:** Top, parent coach Keri Maughan jumps on the trampoline with Dallin Huish, front, and his siblings, Kylee and Chandler, while their mother, Kaye Lynn, watches. Above, Chandler gives his mom a hug as part of an exercise given by Maughan.

Coaches have  
different  
approaches,  
similar goals

Not all parent coaches take the same approach to counseling families, but most work to instill similar qualities — confidence, consistency and empathy — in their students.

Kris Meyers, a parent coach-in-training who lives in Ahwatukee Foothills, tells moms not to beat themselves up over small mistakes. Understanding that, she says, makes all the difference in the world.

“It really does make it feel like they can do it, and they like the support,” says Meyers. “But they don’t feel like if they don’t call me, things will fall apart.”

Meyers is a former teacher and teacher coach with a background in child development.



hores used to spark battles in the Wirtner household. Like most kids, 12-year-old Sean Wirtner and his brother Casey, 9, fought dish duty and picking up around the house.

"I would be so worked up because they wouldn't do them or they wouldn't do them on my timetable or to my liking," mom Shelly Wirtner says.

Inevitably, a shouting match would ensue in their Mesa home. Mom would be furious, the boys upset. Shelly hated fighting with her sons.

"Everyone basically ends up in those situations," dad Tim Wirtner says. "How do you deal with it? You get advice from relatives and friends, but that doesn't always mean it's good or right."

To alleviate tension and strengthen, rather than destroy, their relationships with their sons, Shelly and Tim called a parent coach.

Despite portrayals on television shows like Fox's "Nanny 911" and ABC's "SuperNanny," parent coaches do not don petticoats, carry fabric bags and invade a family's home.

Keri Maughan, the Wirtners' coach, acts more like an objective third party — a mediator, confidante and friend. She helps families fix what's wrong by teaching different approaches to problems that exist in many homes.

After a year of meetings, telephone calls and e-mail exchanges with Maughan, the Wirtner household runs more smoothly with a lot less yelling. The boys know mom and dad mean business and are learning, the hard way, to make the right decisions.

Problems still arise, and when they do, the Wirtners look to Maughan as a guide.

"You don't want to do something wrong and take three steps backward from what you've been trying to do," Shelly says. "I'm glad I have her. She's been there, done that."

#### DAUGHTER IN TROUBLE

Maughan admits she is a recovering bad parent. The Mesa mom used to communicate with her kids

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She's also a mother. She wanted to use her education experience to help other mothers do the best job possible and give them the tools to build strong relationships with their kids.

Six months ago she began studying with Parent Coaching Institute, based in Washington. She has worked with four families since beginning her training.

She counsels parents over the phone and through e-mail in weekly or bimonthly sessions.

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**Family Matters**  
'Sesame Street' starts healthy road trip in Valley.  
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#### COMING WEDNESDAY

**In East Valley Life:**  
Queen Creek festival celebrates the plumpest crop of peaches seen in years.

#### Get Out Today . . .

Florida punk-pop band **New Found Glory** will perform 6 p.m. at Marquee Theatre, 730 N. Mill Ave., Tempe. With Reggie and the Full Effect and Eisleys.

Cost: \$18. Information: (480) 829-0607.



# PARENTING: Coaches are new trend

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by yelling and losing control.

It didn't work.

At age 16, Maughan's oldest daughter was in trouble.

"She was making a lot of choices you wish your kids wouldn't make," says Maughan. This weighed heavily on Maughan's heart, but she couldn't get through to her daughter.

The entire family began a healing process that included a year of parenting classes and counseling sessions.

Maughan discovered she was good at helping others in the program, acting as a confidante to children and families. After her own family was done with counseling, she continued to read books, study and research.

Soon, her relationship with her daughters improved dramatically. Her family and friends took notice.

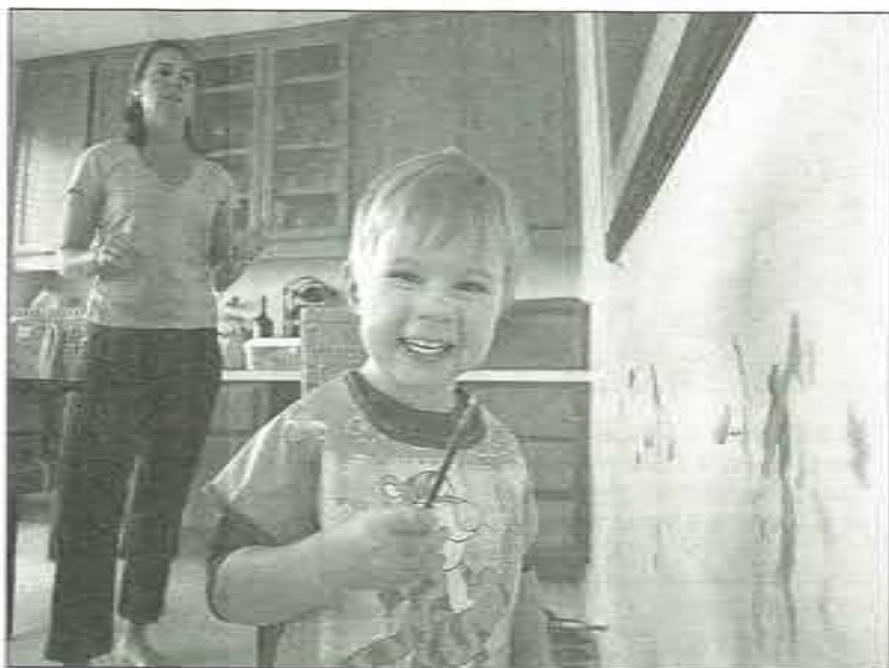
"They would say, 'Wow! You have four teenagers and they all like you,'" Maughan recalls.

Maughan attended the Thomas Leonard School of Coaching and is now a member of the International Association of Coaches.

While coaches have been around for 20 years — business and life coaches are the most recognizable — Maughan says parent coaching is the new trend.

She has been working with families for a decade, acting as a parent coach for the last five years. She says her clientele has tripled since 2002.

Maughan says most families come to her with typical problems: Kids won't do homework or chores, or won't go to bed on time; parents can't stop the back talk and disrespect; communication between parents and children is at a standstill.



**AT PLAY:** Jane Husnik watches son Henry, 2, paint in the kitchen of their Tempe home. Husnik has been working on creative play techniques with parent coach Kris Meyers. PAUL O'NEILL, TRIBUNE

Parents can handle these situations in two ways — by building a relationship, or by inflaming an already bad one, says Maughan.

"We parent the way we were parented," she says. "One of the reasons people seek help is because they know it's not working."

Maughan has clients across the country and coaches them over the telephone and via e-mail. She forms strong relationships with her East Valley clients through meetings with adults and children.

When she encounters parent-coach skeptics, she asks, "How well is your relationship working for you?" and "Are you getting the kind of relationship you want with your kids?"

The answer is usually no.

## MENDING A BROKEN BONE

Kaye Lynn Huish of Chandler was not happy with the direction her relationships were headed when she called Maughan.

The single mom is raising four kids angry about their parents' divorce. She also runs two businesses and tries to create a social life for herself.

As a single mom, Huish says she never feels adequate. When her kids' behavior started spiraling out of control, she'd often panic.

"It's very disheartening a lot of times when things come up with the kids and I don't have anyone to talk to," says Huish. "It's really frustrating, because we want to be so amazing and good at everything, and you can't be."

She compares fixing her family to mending a broken bone — when something goes wrong with your body, you automatically see a doctor, she says.

Working with Maughan has given Huish the confidence to be a stronger parent. That means sometimes making difficult decisions into powerful lessons for her children.

During winter break from school, she took 13-year-old

Kylee on a weekend retreat to a spa in Scottsdale. Her sons Chandler, 10, and Dallin, 7, had spent weeks before fighting and misbehaving. They had to stay home.

"It was really, really hard because I wanted them to be a part of this," she says.

She told the boys calmly, "I really want to have fun on my vacation and I want to have fun with you, but this isn't fun for me. Sorry."

This, she hopes, will help her children become better adults.

"I look at things differently now," says Huish. "I make it so they have choices and that they are choices I can live with."

Kylee says her family works better now that mom is handling things differently.

"There's no hostility," she says. "We feel like we can have control in our lives and that she's not controlling our lives. I have an excellent role model to look up to in my mom."

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