

Mom's

Every day is Mother's Day for fans of *Live With Regis and Kelly*. That's because Kelly Ripa—the prettier and perkier half of the popular morning talk show—regularly amuses her audience with hilarious tales of pregnancy, parenthood, and, yes, the occasional poop story. This is a woman who once famously joked, “I think children are like pancakes: You sort of ruin the first one, and you get better at it the second time around.” Ripa knows of what she speaks: She has three kids—Michael, 10; Lola, 6; and Joaquin, 4—with her husband, actor Mark Consuelos.

So what makes Ripa's televised take on motherhood worth tuning in to, and not simply a broadcast version of swapping wallet-sized photos on PTA night? Unlike her predecessor, Kathie Lee Gifford, Ripa has managed to escape the cloying trap and win over devotees with her self-deprecating good humor and wise approach to the tricky trials of child rearing. In other words, this ain't the Cody and Cassidy show by a long shot.

She's definitely on to something. Being able to laugh—at your kids and yourself—is essential, says Steven Parker, MD, WebMD's children's health expert and a pediatrician who co-authored the 1998 edition of *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* and wrote a textbook for pediatricians titled *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics: A Handbook for Primary Care*. “Children are born to give us a run for our money. Even tough situations we face with them can ultimately be very, very funny. So be ready to have a rueful, good sense of humor.”

Ripa, 37, is clearly on board. She recounts the time her eldest, Michael, screamed he was being kidnapped after Ripa told him it was time to leave a toy store. “He took everything I'd taught him about what to do in that kind of situation and used it against me,” she says with wry indignation. Or when Joaquin decided to play hide-and-seek

When it comes to raising kids while balancing a high-profile career, talk show host **Kelly Ripa** is guided by old-fashioned values, a sense of humor, and her own mom's advice—and she's getting it right, say top child experts

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word



under his bed—long after being tucked in for the night—causing a four-alarm meltdown among his family members, who scoured the apartment as they called his name in vain. “The only thing left to do was to call 911,” says Ripa, but just as she reached for the phone, Mark discovered their son. “I was shaking, I was so relieved—and so angry, too! That kid!” Ripa laughs about it—now.

And then there is her daughter. According to Ripa’s mother, Esther Ripa, Lola is Kelly’s very own Mini Me. “Kelly was an old soul from the beginning, just full of her own opinions from a very young age, and always so chatty and mentally ahead, and Lola is exactly the same. ... Girls do love to press your buttons.”

“Lola challenges me,” Ripa agrees with affection. Which raises the question: Are

it’s the luck of the draw: Both genetics and environment play a role. Children are born with their own unique temperaments, and, individually, you might have a very chatty boy and a more activity-oriented girl. It’s only within groups that we see them behaving more uniformly.”

Parker agrees: “If [Ripa] had another five kids, let’s see if she doesn’t get a nice, compliant girl!” and a boy who pushes boundaries just like Lola does, he speculates.

Still, Ripa wonders how she’ll handle her exceptionally articulate daughter in a crisis. “This is New York. There could be a terrorist attack. And I can just see me having to debate with Lola about why we have to leave right this minute. I’ve literally had to say to her: ‘Honey, if there’s an emergency, you don’t have the liberty to argue with Mommy, OK?’”



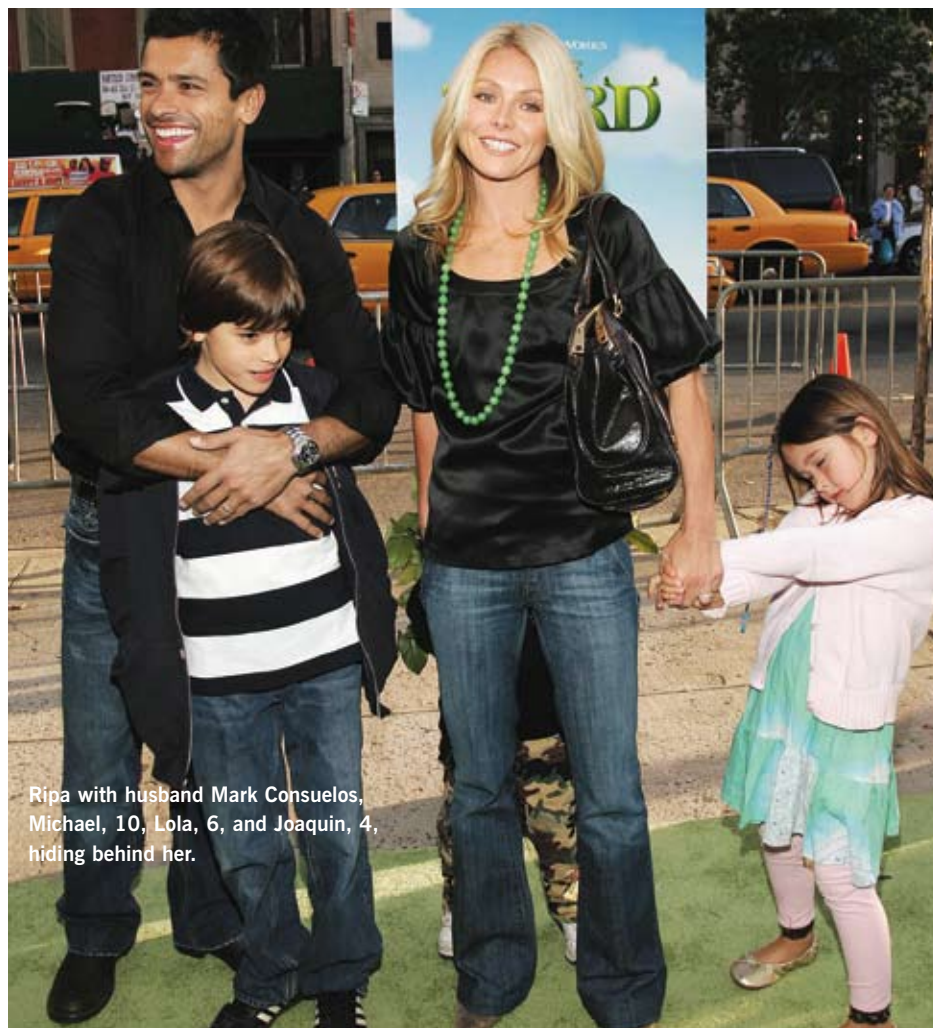
Ripa, left, with mom Esther Ripa and sister Linda.

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there obvious differences between parenting her sons and daughter? “Oh, definitely,” she answers. “My sons are forever happy to see me”—toy stores notwithstanding—“and they’re snuggly and cuddly. With Lola, everything is up for debate. Everything is a conversation. First thing in the morning, it’s a major discussion about what she’s going to wear. I’ve learned to give her limited options: ‘You can wear this or this.’ That’s what works best.”

Parker praises this approach. “Setting limits without being overly deterministic is a great strategy for kids. Allow children to choose, but give them specific boundaries in which to do so.”

In terms of the gender question, psychologist, sociologist, and five-time Scholastic books author Adele M. Brodtkin, PhD, who penned *Raising Happy and Successful Kids*, says it’s generally true that “girls like to talk and conduct what’s been described as ‘face-to-face’ relationships, and boys like to do and conduct ‘side-by-side’ relationships. But the research shows that differences are greater from child to child, rather than from gender to gender. In other words,



Ripa with husband Mark Consuelos, Michael, 10, Lola, 6, and Joaquin, 4, hiding behind her.

FROM TOP: COURTESY ESTHER RIPA; EVAN AGOSTINIGETTY IMAGES

Parenting Challenges

Ripa, who famously juggles family life with a high-profile career—and for years acted on a soap (*All My Children*) or a sitcom (*Hope & Faith*) in addition to her morning show duties—loves being a mom, even if by her own admission she’s a much stricter and more structured parent than her mother was.

“I grew up in the suburbs. ... There was so much less stimulation then, more freedom. And we were content with less. Kids today are so much savvier. ... I remember getting one of those huge boom boxes at 16 and thinking I was cool. Even Lola wants a cell phone and an iPod; all the kids do. It’s much tougher on parents now.”

In this era of tech excess, Brodtkin advises that Ripa and all parents maintain “the courage of their own convictions.” In other words, “Make sure you’re not succumbing to peer pressure from other parents who are giving their kids these things. ... And remember: What feels right generally is right. Trust yourself if you want to say ‘no.’”

So what, according to Ripa, makes for a “good mom”? “I wish I had the answer. ... I get advice from both my mother and mother-in-law all the time. But I think the most important thing is to remember to be a parent and not a friend. My kids know I’m not their BFF.

“Basically, it’s my philosophy that doing the easy thing in the short term makes it harder for parents in the long run. Giving in when you want to say ‘no’ quiets things down momentarily, but you’ll just have more of the same—and then some—down the road,” says Ripa. “I’m big on letting my kids know exactly what to expect. I think children are consistency junkies; they need schedules and parameters, and it’s up to us to provide them. My kids understand that we love them no matter what—and they also know that ‘no’ means no.”

Parker’s views are right in league with Ripa’s: “Kids need to know you’re there to direct them. It’s a mistake to indulge their every whim,” the child expert says. “And now kids are exposed at a younger age to

more sophisticated issues. It’s so important to monitor what they are doing and to discuss the pressures they’re up against. Take the Internet. Parents should never allow kids to surf the Net without supervision. Guide them and set limits. They won’t like it. But you wouldn’t allow a young child to walk down the street alone. We need to be equally critical when it comes to online safety.”

Which is just one concern among many, now that Michael is in double digits and this close to pushing for more independence and privacy. Is Ripa ready for what’s also right around the corner—adolescent angst? “Michael’s only 10, so all that murky teen stuff hasn’t happened yet. ... But we’ll just keep doing what we’re doing when it does.”

Maybe she’ll get lucky and have three teenagers like she once was. Esther Ripa reports that while her “bubbly, outgoing” daughter showed a normal degree of rebellion during those years back in the ‘burbs of New Jersey, she remained dutiful even when she was misbehaving. “Once, Kelly

Kelly’s causes

Many celebrities champion a health cause, but Kelly Ripa happens to have two, and both are personal. She works with the Ovarian Cancer Research Fund, a national organization focused on the disease. “I have lost close friends to ovarian cancer,” Ripa explains, “and I have been involved in Super Saturday for five years, which has raised millions of dollars for OCRF. I am very dedicated to not only the research of ovarian cancer, but also to raising awareness.”

Her sister Linda is the inspiration for her work with Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). In 1999 Linda, then eight months pregnant, was involved in a collision with another car driven by an intoxicated teenager—who earlier that day had been released from rehab for a previous offense. “As soon as he got out, he stole a car, got drunk, and then hit my sister,” Ripa tells WebMD. He walked away virtually unscathed; Linda and her unborn baby were nearly killed. Both are lucky to be alive: Linda’s pelvis, back, sternum, and ankle were broken. The baby—now a “normal, happy” little boy, reports Ripa—remained in a coma for nearly a month before Linda gave birth to her healthy son. Linda’s own road to recovery hasn’t been as smooth. She had numerous surgeries, took years to recuperate, still struggles with chronic pain, and walks with a limp.

Soon after the accident Ripa became involved with MADD, serving as a national chairwoman for its annual Tie One On for Safety event and filming public service announcements about the dangers of driving drunk.

What can parents do to prevent future tragedies? Plan on having “the talk”—about drinking, that is—beginning in the 4th grade, says MADD national president Glynn R. Birch. Birch offers the following tips to help parents guide their kids away from the temptation of drinking—and driving:

Know the power of parents. Teenagers still listen to their parents more than anybody else.

Connect with your kids. Research shows that parents who create a loving home environment, take time each day to positively interact with their children, and notice their emotional well-being are more likely to have kids who shun alcohol.

Monitor their activities. Know where your kids are and with whom they associate. Ensure an alcohol-free environment for them. Tell them that if they are at a party at a friend’s house where alcohol is being served, they are to call you immediately and you will pick them up, no questions asked.—LPK



Working mom Ripa on the *Live With Regis and Kelly* set.

called me up," her mother recounts, laughing at the memory, "and said, 'Mom, all my friends are cutting class. May I, too?'"

Mothering in the Media

Ripa may have "the dream job for a working mom" because her schedule allows for flexibility and afternoons off with her kids. But she must also endure the tabloids' announcing her marriage to Consuelos "is over every other week."

She adopts the tone of a hysterical entertainment reporter: "Kelly too thin! Marriage in trouble! Kelly's gained weight! Marriage over! Kelly won't have another baby! Mark wants a divorce!" She pauses and seems to take it all in stride. "None of it's true; we know that, and that's what counts. So you take the good with the bad and move on."

Does she care to comment on another famous mother who's dominated the headlines for the last year or so? "Poor Britney [Spears]. I feel for all parents, because we're all learning as we go. I'm just grateful I didn't have to learn under a magnifying glass."

Still, two of her three pregnancies were chronicled, inch for inch and pound for pound, on *Live With Regis and Kelly*. (For the record, she gained 69 pounds with her first, 55 with her second, and 50 with her

third.) To learn how Ripa has returned to form after giving birth—with results so impressive she made *Maxim* magazine's "Hot 100" last year—plus for expert advice on how to do it safely, see "Body after baby," right.

Ripa says she had the "best pregnancies, followed by the worst deliveries." All three of them ended in C-sections, despite her desire to deliver without surgery. But what really surprised her, especially with her first one, "is that they actually let you take this little person home. With Michael, we knew nothing. ... Around the time he was born we'd just bought one of those widescreen TVs, which were new and all the rage then. And we walked out of the store with, like, a 6,000-page manual on how to work the thing. The hospital, on the other hand, gave us a one-page leaflet that said stuff like, 'When the baby is hungry, feed him. When he's tired, put him to bed.' Incredible, right?"

But Parker wants parents to know it's OK not to have instructions. "All parents learn on the job. And all kids are different. The important thing is to discover your child, not invent them. They will reveal who they are with time, guidance, and love. And by the way, if you think you have control over your kids, you're in for a big surprise!"

Body after baby

Sure, Ripa is "ripped"—now. But she lost the extra pounds after each of her three pregnancies slowly and safely. "It took me a year and a half after every baby to get back to 'normal,'" she tells WebMD. "I didn't stress about it. Weight is just a number, and I knew that if I ate well and exercised, eventually it would come off." Geralyn Coopersmith, an exercise physiologist and certified personal trainer in New York City, offers these postpartum tips for getting back in shape, *after* your doctor has given you the green light:

Start low-impact. Postpartum and breastfeeding women need to protect their joints, which show increased laxity from pregnancy hormones and are susceptible to injury. "Try walking, swimming, biking, or low-impact aerobics for at least 30 minutes, three to five days a week," Coopersmith advises. "Maintain an intensity level that leaves you breathy, but not panting."

Weight it out. Strengthening muscles protects joints and supports the alignment of the spine, so lifting free weights or doing circuit training is a good idea for postpartum and breastfeeding women. Coopersmith says to "go for the highest weight you can handle where 12 reps is a challenge and form is not compromised. Do two to three sets of each weight exercise."

Work the abs. Add planks, "bird dogs," crunches with a twist, and pelvic tilts to stabilize the spine and tone the tummy. "You may never have the abs you once did," says Coopersmith, "but, remember, skin elasticity improves over time, and if you're willing to do the work, you can tone and tighten your midsection—and it can look great."—LPK

DISNEY-ABC DOMESTIC TELEVISION

Healthy Approach

Balancing it all without burning out requires skill—and planning: "Listen, I run my family like a cruise ship. 'Shuffleboard at 5!'" Ripa jokes. "Everybody knows exactly what's happening, all the time. And my house is like the CDC. I'm all about containment. We keep things really clean, really neat. The rooms are hydrated with humidifiers. When Michael was first in school, I had pinkeye six times that year. Now, it's prevention, prevention, prevention: We do supplements, probiotics, you name it."

A probiotic, for those not in the know, is a food or drink that contains healthy bacteria. *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, found in yogurt, is the best known; yeast is also a probiotic substance. "Parents may want to 'consider the benefits of probiotics in the diet when it comes to their children, who may experience GI [gastrointestinal] ailments such as diarrhea that are tied to common childhood illnesses,'" says Kimberly Cover, RS, CSSD, LDN, a nutritionist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. For example, says Cover, a daily cup of yogurt goes a long way in maintaining a healthy GI tract for your child—and it has many nutrients, including protein, calcium, and vitamin D, if the yogurt is fortified.

"Foods that provide the body with multiple nutrients pack a powerful punch in our convenient, contemporary lifestyle—one that often doesn't allow the luxury of time and optimum nutrition quality," she adds.

Some people prefer taking supplements, which come in powder form and can be bought over-the-counter. "If you are considering taking a probiotic supplement, always check with your physician, especially if you are also taking [other] medications," advises Cover, who adds, "Some research shows that taking probiotic supplements every day can actually have a harmful effect ... so, as with any medication, follow your doctor's suggested regimen carefully."

Prevention, in all its forms, is a mantra among family physicians. "To avoid

common infectious diseases, good hand-washing is key," says Parker.

"To prevent behavioral problems such as constant limit-testing and oppositional behaviors, consistent and firm limit setting will usually do the trick," he adds.

"And to raise a physically fit child, healthy nutrition—including low animal fat in the diet, not a lot of junk food, plenty of whole grains, fruits and veggies, plus plenty of exercise—sets the stage for becoming a healthy adult."

Does Ripa have any health concerns of her own? None worth mentioning, although there is that pesky little sweating problem, which she played for laughs on her morning show. It seems even size 2 über-moms get a little too damp under the arms, and Ripa sought a proven treatment for her hyperhidrosis: Botox.

And while studies show the popular beauty fix is effective in almost all patients with this condition, she was the one—out of 100,000—who received no benefits at all.

But she doesn't rule out cosmetic Botox down the road. "People write that I've had it [injected in her face], which I take as a compliment, because I haven't. Maybe for a milestone birthday. I don't know. ... Forty's coming up fast! Because I make no judgments on anyone who decides to use it."

By all appearances, it seems Ripa leads a blessed life, and she'd be the first to agree.

"Sometimes Mark and I see these little faces around the breakfast table and we just look at each other and think, *How did we ever make something so beautiful?* Our kids—well, they're our hearts." ■

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Connect with other moms this Mother's Day and every day at www.WebMD.com.