

Dear Families,

I have two questions to think about this week. When you are faced with tough decisions as parents, who do you go to for guidance and help? Who are the people in your lives that you trust?

Last week after soccer training, our youngest son Monty came home all excited about the Air Force Academy. One of his soccer teammates had joined up and they started talking all about it during their training session. Monty shared his excitement with us and with hope in his eyes, he asked if we would consider letting him join. The way he asked, I knew he thought it was a long shot. I think that Monty knew my feelings on the military and also the commitment of transportation to and from Queenscliff every Monday evening.

Sandi and I did some research and deliberated for some time before having further discussions with Monty. We talked to some friends about their experience with their son who was an Air Force Cadet for five years. They shared their experiences, both the good and the bad. Eventually, Sandi and I thought we'd let Monty try it out and see what would happen. Monty was so happy.

As I was riding home on Monday this week, I started to think again about Monty and the Air Force Academy. It just didn't sit right with me. I phoned my dad and talked with him, as he is always someone who will listen to my concerns without passing judgement. I still didn't know what to do. Sandi arrived home at 5.30 and we were due to get into the car and drive Monty straight to Queenscliff where he would start his first session. We were to meet the person in charge, have a quick discussion and then let Monty go. But we were not allowed to enter. We were not allowed to see what was happening in the base. I understood that this is military procedure, but it didn't feel right. I didn't want Monty to be part of something that I didn't feel comfortable with.

Sandi, Monty and I stood in the kitchen and talked about it. The clock kept ticking towards six. We had to make a decision that we didn't want to make. We told Monty that we had changed our mind. We shared our reasons and let him know that we were his parents and were responsible for him. I did not want to make the decision that we did; I really wanted to say "Yes" to Monty. I wanted to be the father that would make him happy. But, in that moment I wasn't. It was a tough moment, but I knew it was the right thing for Monty at this point in time. We said that we would discuss it again at the end of the year if he was still keen to join. Monty was disappointed but understood and took it really well.

It is these tough decisions that as parents we sometimes need to make. They are not always easy. Sometimes saying "yes" to our kids is easier, but it isn't always the best thing to do. It's at times like this that I often listen to my gut for guidance. Then I need to be strong and be the best parent I can be. And, I often don't get it right. As American rapper Russ said, "Advice number one: listen to your gut - it's never gonna lead you wrong. Number two: trust yourself. The root of everything is self-belief."

Thanks for all your continued support,  
Andy McNeilly  
Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator

