

## **Parenthood** (D: Ron Howard, 1989) – Plot Summary

This feel-good ensemble comedy tracks a quartet of suburban siblings and their families over the course of a single summer. Hardworking Gil Buckman (Steve Martin) and his stay-at-home wife, Karen (Mary Steenburgen), have just a few months to help their oldest son, Kevin (Jasen Fisher), overcome his high-strung behavior problems before he'll be relegated to special-education classes. Gil's difficult relationship with his own father, Frank (Jason Robards), has led him to become a would-be super-dad for his three kids, so he takes his son's difficulties more than a little personally. Gil's sister, Helen (Dianne Wiest), is trying to raise a moody, adolescent son (Leaf Phoenix) and an independent-minded daughter (Martha Plimpton) with no help from her well-off ex-husband, who's more interested in his new wife and family. Gil and Helen's sister, Susan (Harley Jane Kozak), meanwhile, must participate in the too-scripted Big Life Plans of her anal-retentive husband, Nathan (Rick Moranis), whose overachiever zeal infects even their toddler daughter. When long-lost brother Larry (Tom Hulce) shows up with yet another get-rich-quick scheme, he brings with him a surprise addition to the family. Screenwriters Babaloo Mandel, Lowell Ganz, and Ron Howard negotiate their varied subplots with a deftness and comedic touch that transforms this conflicted clan into a suburban everyfamily.

~ Brian J. Dillard, All Movie Guide (<http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll>)

### **Some discussion questions after viewing the film\*:**

1. After meeting the four children of Frank and Marilyn Buckman, what do we learn about differences in family types and parenting styles that might be present in our own extended families?
2. What do we learn about intergenerational influences on our parenting? Specifically, how does Gil's relationship with his own father influence his parenting?
3. Helen is a single mother of two adolescents. How would you characterize Helen's life? Do you agree with the way that she handles Julie's relationship with Tod? Her son's possession of porn tapes? How would you contrast the lives and parenting practices of Helen and Karen (Gil's wife)?
4. The director of the film, Ron Howard, has said that he likes to tell stories about people who believe that they are in control then find themselves in situations that prove that they are not. How does this relate to parenting? Specifically, how is this shown in the film, "Parenthood?"
5. The film uses the metaphor of "roller coaster" to describe parenting. Do you agree? Is there another metaphor that you would use, and why?

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