

Rugby star Rodney So'oialo reveals why he's against using force to discipline kids

On the rugby field, All Black hard man Rodney So'oialo is known to take no prisoners. But when he's at home with his wife Marilyn and young daughters Tiana (7) and Peyton (18 months), the 29-year old is quite the opposite.

"He's a real softie," reveals Marilyn (27) as she smiles at her husband. "Our daughters couldn't ask for a better dad."

The Wellington Hurricanes captain says being a tough guy on the rugby field means he has caused and suffered some hard knocks. But when it comes to raising kids, the All Black number eight believes those knocks should be left on the field.

Three years ago, loving parents Rodney and Marilyn lent their faces to the "Kids

made until they had Tiana and Peyton.

"It's not until you have your own kids that your real parenting skills develop," says Rodney. "We're lucky to have had the kind of upbringing we did because the positive things our parents taught us are now coming through."

Marilyn and Rodney say they've been hugely influenced by Marilyn's loving mum Harata, who was just 44 when she lost her battle with cancer earlier this year. "My father nursed my mother through her illness and was her rock," says Marilyn of the experience. "My parents continued to teach us, through my Mum's illness, how to work together as a team."

Harata's love as a mum and a grandmother has left a lasting legacy – Rodney

'Hitting a child doesn't make you tough – it makes you weak'

are Unbeatable" campaign lead by The Body Shop and Jigsaw – a family care service helping children who have suffered domestic violence.

It was the tragic deaths of youngsters like the five-week-old South Auckland Kahui twins that inspired the couple to spread the positive parenting message.

Rodney, who has six siblings, says both he and Marilyn had happy childhoods and that they only need to look at their own parents to find role models.

"I come from a big family and we always did things together," says Rodney. "Growing up, I was never alone because we were more than just a family. We're great mates too – always there to support each other."

He and his teenage sweetheart Marilyn didn't realise what sacrifices their parents

and Marilyn are more determined than ever to be the best parents they can.

And now, with the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act in the spotlight and a postal referendum underway next week, the couple say they are doing whatever they can to spread the positive parenting message far and wide.

"It isn't necessary to physically discipline your children," Rodney says. "Hitting a child doesn't make you tough – it makes you weak."

Rodney and Marilyn believe that parents need to have patience to discipline their kids in a positive way. Marilyn explains, "We treat our children the way we treat



our friends. Parents are a lot bigger and stronger than their kids, so we never look down at them and we are not domineering. We respect our daughters and shower them with love."

But the couple say they couldn't be the parents they are if it wasn't for the support they get from each other. Rodney is full of admiration for his wife. "Marilyn is always there for us," reveals Rodney. "I'm lucky that she is such a good mum, and so strong looking after the girls when I'm away. She holds the fort."

The All Black star says that from time to time, some of the other fathers on the team have approached him for parenting advice. But although he's happy to help, he says they boys do a great job without him. "They're all fantastic dads – so they don't need advice from me!"

Rodney and Marilyn say that as the girls get older, aspects of their individual personalities are starting to shine through. Their eldest daughter, Tiana, has just

RODNEY GAM

All Black hard man Rodney is a real softie at home, reveals his wife Marilyn (right)



CLOTHES: RODNEY'S HOODIE FROM BARKERS. WAISTCOAT AND SCARF FROM MARC'S. MARILYN'S DRESS & NECKLACE FROM MOOCHI. BRACELETS FROM EQUIP. PEYTON'S JEANS FROM COUNTRY ROAD. ALL OTHER KIDS' CLOTHES FROM KIDREPUBLIC





Rodney loves spending time with his little girls Tiana (left) and Peyton

▶ POSITIVE PARENTING

For more information on positive parenting, you can visit the website www.familyservices.govt.nz/skip. Alternatively, phone Barnardos Parenting Helpline 0800 472 7368 or PlunketLine 0800 933 922.

begun playing hockey and seems similar to her famous father. "She's confident and speaks her mind," reveals proud dad Rodney, "and like me, she's a real softie at heart."

"I'm so proud to be part of her development," he continues, "and Peyton's too. I want to be a positive role model for both my daughters and do all I can to help them grow."

As he plays on the floor with Tiana and Peyton, encouraging them to pick out notes on a keyboard, Rodney says he's grateful to have his family to support him, especially as his vigorous rugby commitments increase.

"What I absolutely love is coming home from a big game, whether we have won or lost, and my two girls are running towards me with huge smiles and big cuddles. That's one of the things that keeps me grounded and inspires me to be a good dad."

Aroha Awarau

PHOTOS: NEIL MCKENZIE • STYLIST: MICHELLE SIOU • MAKEUP: EDYTA KOSCIELECKI
• LOCATION: FERN TREE HIDEAWAY, WWW.FERNTREEHIDEAWAY.CO.NZ



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➤ A postal referendum on the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act is to be held from 30 July to 21 August. To have your say, you must be on the electoral roll. All enrolled voters will receive their voting forms by the end of July. The form must be returned by mail before 21 August.