

# positive parenting

birth to 6  
months



## In a Nutshell

- Begin by thinking about what you want for your child in the future.
- Discipline is teaching.
- Positive discipline is teaching with kindness and firmness.

## About Positive Parenting

Congratulations! You have become a new family! Even if this is not your first child, every new addition creates changes in the way your family works. One of the most important things you can do is begin by thinking about what you want for your child in the future. Almost all parents want their children to be happy, successful and good people. You can make decisions about the way you parent your child that will help your desires come true and create a loving family environment. Now is the time to begin.

Disciplining your child may be the furthest thing from your mind at this point in your baby's life. Discipline is teaching. You are your baby's teacher from the minute he is born. You are teaching your baby to trust you and

love you by what you do to meet his needs. By your actions, you will teach your child that he is loved and respected, that his choices have consequences, and that he can trust you to keep him safe and take care of him.

Positive discipline is teaching with kindness and firmness. It means showing your love for your child by having rules and providing structure. These nurture your child's sense of accountability and self-esteem. You have many decisions to make as a parent. Make a decision to parent in a positive way. As your child grows, you can teach her to accept responsibility for her actions and to develop self-control and independence. Children who experience positive parenting grow up to be people who have respect for themselves and for others.





## Positive Parenting How-to's

### Birth to 6 Months

- Most of what your baby does is because of needs that he has. Small babies can't misbehave, because they don't have the memory or understanding. Meet your baby's needs quickly and he will learn to trust that the world is a safe and secure place. He will cry less and be more satisfied.
- Get into your child's world. Learn about each developmental stage. When you understand your child's development, you will have realistic expectations for what your child may do.
- Get to know your baby. Spend time just hanging out and observing her. Appreciate her unique temperament and personality. She will help you learn about her very early in life. Accept her personal style and work with her to help her grow to her potential.
- Learn all you can about positive ways to parent. Seek out resources in your community. Talk to friends and relatives whose opinions you trust. Use more than one source of information, then evaluate the advice you've heard, and choose what fits your family best.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes. You will make them, and they will be opportunities for learning. When you act with respect for your child, you can correct anything that didn't work out the way you expected or wanted.
- Taking care of a baby is very stressful. There are many times you may feel overwhelmed. Get as much rest as you can and eat healthy meals. Talk to a friend or take your baby for a walk outside to relieve stress. Get help if you feel like you are losing control.

# positive parenting

6-12  
months



## In a Nutshell

- A baby's developmental need to explore and experiment may seem like misbehavior.
- Parents shape a baby's environment and experiences.
- Healthy brain development is nurtured by experiences parents provide.

## About Positive Discipline

Young children learn by hands-on exploration. Sometimes, a baby's developmental need to explore and experiment may seem like misbehavior. When your baby throws a toy on the floor for the umpteenth time, you may think she is doing it just to annoy you. When your baby crawls toward the T.V. after you have moved her away from it all evening, it certainly seems she is intentionally disobeying you. In both these examples, and countless similar ones, babies are just following what development is telling them to do—learn by exploring. When your baby repeats something over and over, pathways in her brain are built and strengthened. It takes many repetitions for a baby's brain to be equipped to know how the world works.

You shape your baby's environment and experiences. You are the designer of his environment, and you provide experiences that facilitate his learning. A young child must

have many experiences before he is ready for school. The good news is that your child doesn't need fancy electronic toys or expensive trips to build his base of experiences. He needs a positive, loving relationship with you and the everyday experiences gained by being with you. Positive parenting involves being your baby's play partner as he actively explores his world. Patiently show him your home, community, family and friends.

Positive parenting supports healthy brain development for your child. In the first three years of life, a child's brain is under construction. Parents structure their baby's experiences, and those experiences in turn help the brain form pathways for efficient brain function. Brain development is optimal when babies experience a warm, loving relationship with their caregivers. Negative experiences, such as abuse and neglect, also have an impact on the developing brain. When babies experience abuse or stress, their brains are changed for life.





## Positive Parenting How-to's

### 6 to 12 Months

- Provide safe ways for your baby to explore her world. If you give her things you want her to have, you can steer her away from things that are dangerous or off limits.
- Baby proof the place your baby plays. Moving around a large space like a room is important for your child's motor and intellectual development. You can parent positively by removing things you don't want your baby to touch, rather than saying "no" all the time.
- Stop and try to take your baby's perspective if you think he is misbehaving. Is he really pushing a limit or just trying to satisfy his curiosity? If the situation is safe, let him explore as much as possible.
- Distract and redirect your baby's attention away from exploring things that you have decided are off limits. Babies don't understand physical punishment. Their natural curiosity makes it easy to redirect them to activities you approve of without yelling or hitting.
- To nurture healthy brain development, provide opportunities for your child to play and be her play partner. Follow your child's lead in play and build a positive, loving relationship with her. Encourage her curiosity and safe exploration.
- Give your child quiet time to play alone, also. She needs a calm setting without a loud T.V. or a lot of activity to help her take in the experiences she is having. Getting enough sleep and good nutrition is essential to building healthy brains.

# positive parenting

12-24  
months



## In a Nutshell

- Gain confidence as a parent by learning new parenting skills and learning about typical child development.
- In the second and third year of life your toddler is learning autonomy.
- Children must learn skills for controlling behavior.

## About Positive Parenting

No one is born knowing how to be a great parent. You can gain confidence by learning new parenting skills and learning about typical child development. As your child grows, you will realize that you must adjust the way you parent to meet his changing needs and foster his emerging capabilities. When you know about child development at different ages, you will be equipped to know what to expect. You can anticipate each new stage and plan how you want to parent. Thinking ahead and intentionally deciding to parent positively will give you confidence and help reduce stress.

In the second and third year of life, your toddler is gaining autonomy. Autonomy is a developmental drive which builds throughout early childhood, particularly during 12 to 36 months of age. In this growth process, a child begins to recognize her identity as a person separate from her parents. At the same time, she

realizes that her behavior has consequences, some of which are not pleasant. Emotionally, children begin to experience self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt. Positive parenting supports the development of autonomy, and uses parenting techniques which avoid shame and guilt.

In their enthusiastic exploration of the big wide world, toddlers seem to have boundless curiosity and a complete unawareness of danger or limits. Children must learn skills for controlling their behavior. While this is a long process, it begins now when your child is a toddler. Your child will make many mistakes as she understands the behavior you expect of her, but mistakes are an opportunity to learn. When you teach your child with patience and persistence, you will avoid instilling feelings of shame and guilt. Children who develop a sense of autonomy, as opposed to feelings of shame and guilt, are more likely to make healthier decisions throughout life.





## Positive Parenting How-to's 12 to 24 Months

- Plan ahead and think about what will make it easier for your toddler to meet your expectations. Understand child development at different stages so that you will have realistic expectations for your child's behavior.
- Expect some resistance as you teach your child new behaviors. Autonomy is a strong drive for him right now. He may say, "No!" to many things you suggest. Stay calm and firm. His "no" doesn't always mean he won't do something. It may mean he just wants to be heard.
- Involve your child at a young age in gaining skills to control his behavior. Give him something to do to help him focus on the behavior you desire. For example if she resists going out to the car, let her carry her diaper bag and put it on the seat beside her.
- Offer your child limited choices to help him comply with your requests. For example, if he doesn't want to leave the playground, ask if he wants to stop at Grandma's house or go to the store first. He will feel involved in the decision and move on. Be careful to only offer choices you are able and willing to honor.
- Follow through with your plans or expectations with dignity and respect for your child. Be firm but kind. It may be quicker to force your child to do something, but it does not teach her to control her behavior if you can't control yours.
- When parents are controlling or punishing, they are likely to receive resistance because of the child's growing sense of autonomy.
- Actions speak louder than words to toddlers. Take your toddler gently by the hand to lead him away from undesired behavior. Be firm but kind. Don't do a lot of talking, just act in a way that is respectful but purposeful.
- Be intentional about having fun with your child. In the stressful toddler years, parents sometimes have to remember "This too shall pass," and take pleasure in their young child's development.

# positive parenting

24-36  
months



## In a Nutshell

- Focus more on the process of an activity and less on the product.
- Give your child time and a quiet place to handle her emotions.
- Encourage desired behavior by recognizing and acknowledging your child's efforts and accomplishments.

## About Positive Parenting

As adults we are interested in the end-product of our efforts. But young children are usually more interested in participating in an activity than in any outcome. You can help your child do what you have in mind when you focus more on the process of an activity and less on the product. Remember that your child isn't misbehaving when he stops to pick up stones in the parking lot. He's enjoying the experience of being out with you, and doesn't realize your goal is to get the shopping done. Whenever possible, enjoy life at your child's pace.

Two-year-olds can be quite emotional. Sometimes your child can feel overwhelmed by what she wants. A temper tantrum may result. Give your child time and a quiet place to handle her emotions. Effective time out is not a punishment; it provides the opportunity for your child to get back in control of her behavior.

When you help your child feel good about what he does, you encourage him. You can also encourage the behavior you desire by recognizing and acknowledging your child's efforts and accomplishments. Often we are so focused on what we define as misbehavior, we take our child's good behavior for granted. Your child will find it easier to comply with the behavior you desire if he feels encouraged by you.





## Positive Parenting How-to's 24 to 36 Months

- Follow your child's lead and focus on the process of doing something, not only the product. When possible, respect her need to savor the moment and take some time to explore what she sees.
- Before the age of two-and-a-half, use close supervision and distraction to head off misbehavior.
- Time outs begin to work for children around the age of two-and-a-half years. Time out is not a punishment or a removal from a desired activity. Rather it is a time when your child can cool off and regain control of his emotions.
- Reasonable time out for an older two-year-old is one to two minutes.
- As you teach your child how to use time out to get back in control, you will need to stay with her or stay close by. Choose a quiet, comfortable spot and use it consistently.
- Help your child to understand why he is in time out. If he is too emotional when time out begins, talk to him briefly when he is calm. Time out should be used to calm a child down, not as a punishment for something the child has done. A lengthy lecture is not necessary. You and your child can celebrate together when he feels better.
- Encourage your child by being respectful to her when you provide discipline. Shame and humiliation are not respectful to your child and they don't contribute to your own peace of mind. Using kindness and firmness encourage your child's desirable behavior; she understands what is expected, knows you'll help her meet expectations, and understands that you will follow through with the limits you have established.
- When you discipline your child, think about how you would say the same thing to a coworker or another adult you respect. Use the same tone of voice and words to show your respect for your child.



# positive parenting

young  
preschooler



## In a Nutshell

- Help your child understand his behavior as he becomes more aware of its consequences.
- Self-esteem gives your child the courage to take risks and welcome new experiences.
- When you take time to teach your child, you help her build skills and feel successful.

## About Positive Parenting

As children develop autonomy, they become more aware of their own behavior and its consequences. You will need to help your child understand her behavior before she can control it. As your child gains more language abilities, use “how” or “what” questions to help her think about her behavior. For example, ask

- “What happened?”
- “What were you trying to do?”
- “How do you feel about it?”
- “How could you fix it?”
- “What else could you do if you don’t want it to happen again?”

The purpose of asking questions is not to put your child on the spot and require answers, but to help her think about a situation and plan for the next time. You may need to give your young preschooler hints or alternative courses of action to choose from. For example, if sharing has been hard for your child that day, you could say, “Tomorrow, will you choose to give Jamie a turn playing with your

doll, or will you choose to put it away when she comes over?”

Self-esteem gives your child the courage to take risks and welcome new experiences. Having self-esteem means having faith in your own abilities. Encouraging your child will build his self-esteem, which forms a foundation for success in life.

One of the first steps in developing positive self-esteem in learning new skills. When you take time to teach your child, you help her build skills and feel successful. Some of the things you will teach your child will be very concrete, such as how to make her bed. You will also teach your child social skills that are less easy to define, but are essential. Teaching with patience, kindness and firmness will encourage your child’s cooperation and learning.





## Positive Parenting How-to's Young Preschoolers

- Ask questions to help your child understand her behavior. Ask open ended questions, ones that can't be answered by yes or no.
- Use questions as a way to start a conversation with your child. Avoid quizzing him, and express your interest and support through the tone of your voice.
- Say what you see when you talk to your child. Honest reflection builds self-esteem; excess praise and pep talks can be discouraging if your child doesn't feel what you say is honest.
- Find a balance between keeping your child safe and over-protecting him. Let your child take some reasonable risks and give him more freedom when he demonstrates his abilities. It's okay for your child to experience some frustration to gain the skill of working through problems.
- Accept your child's personal style and interests and encourage them. It's good to share your interests with your child, but avoid pushing your child into activities just because you enjoy them.
- Children are natural imitators. They learn by watching their parents. Involve your child in daily tasks. Take time to teach your child skills, and be sure to appreciate her efforts and not just the result.
- When your child watches you, explain what you are doing in ways he can understand. Give him a part of the job to do while you do most of the task. Next, let your child be the one who takes the lead, and you be his helper. Finally, you can watch him do the task and appreciate the skill he's learned.

# positive parenting

older  
preschooler



## In a Nutshell

- Helping your preschooler deal with emotions is a first step in effective communication.
- Some of the most powerful communication with our children is non-verbal.
- Active listening encourages your child to explore her own emotions and come up with solutions to problems.
- Showing feelings and talking about emotions is viewed differently in different cultures.

## About Positive Parenting

Preschoolers can be very emotional about life. As toddlers, they began to recognize that they had feelings and ideas separate from their parents. In the preschool years, your child's emotions play a big role in determining his behavior. Emotions are important because they keep us tuned in to how we are doing. Some emotions keep us safe and alert us to danger. Others create well-being and happiness. Helping your preschooler deal with emotions is a first step in effective communication with your child. Feelings are never right or wrong—they just are! Actions prompted by feelings, however, can be helpful or hurtful to the child or to others. Your goal is to acknowledge your child's feelings, and guide him to behaviors that are positive and helpful.

Communication is key to providing positive guidance for your child. Some of the most powerful communication with our children is non-verbal. Be aware that your tone of voice, body posture, and eye contact can send a different message than your words. Preschoolers, also, communicate through words and through actions. Your child's body language and behavior may communicate something different than his words.

Active (or reflective) listening is an effective way to help your child explore her own emotions and come up with solutions to problems. Using active listening, you observe your child's feelings and reflect them back to her. Preschoolers can be so strong in acting out what they feel that they aren't able to sort out their emotions or decide what to do about them. You don't have to agree with how your child is feeling, but reflecting her emotions can help her feel understood. Many times your child will choose acceptable behavior once she feels encouraged by your understanding and is able to get in control of her emotions.

Showing feelings and talking about emotions is viewed differently in different cultures. Your background and cultural traditions may lead you to express emotion freely, or they may teach that emotions are private. You have an important job in sharing your beliefs and practices with your child. Help him to develop a cultural identity that is a part of defining who he is. Diversity makes the world an interesting place for children and adults.



## Positive Parenting How-to's Older Preschoolers

- Your child may choose inappropriate ways to express the strong emotions he feels because he is learning how to express his emotions in productive ways. Think carefully before you punish your child for misbehavior, when what is really needed is teaching her positive ways to show emotions.
- Give your child your full attention when he shares his feelings, either verbally or behaviorally. When you pay attention to what your child is feeling you are parenting positively and respectfully.
- Be aware of non-verbal communication, both yours and your child's. What does your body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and touch say about your reaction to your child? What emotions might be behind the behavior your child is showing you?
- Reflect what you see to your child, but don't assume you are correctly stating his feelings. We really can't know how other people, including our children, feel. Check in with her and let her affirm or change what you have reflected. For example, if your child storms into the house you might say, "You seem pretty angry. Is that how you're feeling?"
- Keep reflecting what you see and hear. Your child will eventually begin coming up with solutions to the problem he faces or he will make himself feel better.
- Keep the limits you set for positive behavior. Be kind but firm. For example, your child may tell a friend she is angry, but she can't hit or kick.