


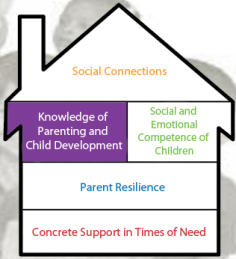
Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development




Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development




Children don't come with instruction booklets. Parents and caregivers need information and strategies to support physical, cognitive, language, and social/emotional development.



Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development



- Knowledge of Child Development
 - ▣ Safe opportunities for independence
 - ▣ Appropriate expectations
 - ▣ Encouraging curiosity
- Knowledge of Parenting Skills
 - ▣ Respectful communication
 - ▣ Consistent rules and expectations
 - ▣ Authoritative parenting (balance of warmth with guidance)



Knowledge of Child Development



Risk factors for child abuse and neglect:

- Unrealistic expectations for a child's capabilities
- Lack of knowledge about typical child development
- Children's different temperaments
- Children's circumstances
- Children's special needs



Knowledge of Parenting

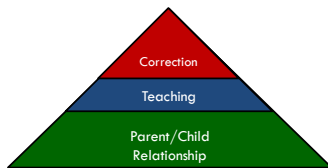


Fundamentals of healthy parenting and caregiving:

- Supportive, nurturing component that includes warmth, positivity, affection, and involvement.
- Guiding component that includes structure, discipline, supervision, and setting limits.



Parenting Pyramid



The better parents and/or caregivers teach their children, the less correction is needed, and when it is needed, it will be a natural extension of their teaching.

Adapted from Parenting Pyramid, Arbinger Institute.

Using the Parenting Pyramid with Parents



- What is the quality of my relationship with my children?
- Am I correcting my children without teaching them?
- Do I spend more time and energy correcting or teaching my children than strengthening my relationship with them?
- How can I do a better job of teaching my children so I can spend less time correcting them?
- What can I do to strengthen my relationship with my children so they are more open to teaching and correction?

Key question!

Regrets and Advice from Empty-Nest Parents (more than 500)

Regret – More Patience, Less Harshness

"I would not take my stress out on them. I would have been more encouraging..."

"Need to be more patient and listen better."

"Not lose temper as easily. Be more sensitive to their feelings."

"I wouldn't have been so harsh."

"Don't be negative to them. Don't dwell on failures or mistakes."

"I would not yell at them. You can get angry without screaming."

"Less yelling - more hugging."

Live with NO regrets...

Regrets and Advice from Empty-Nest Parents (more than 500)

Advice – More Time, More Love

"Spend quality time with them. No matter how insignificant the activity...time is what is important."

"Don't be afraid to get down on their level and play."

"Read to them. Play with them. Love them and tell them often how much you do."

"Read to them every day."

"We should not have taken everything so seriously, and had a little more fun."

"Learn about how children think, feel, and behave at all stages of young childhood."

"Snuggle them often."

ADVICE

Make Time for 9!

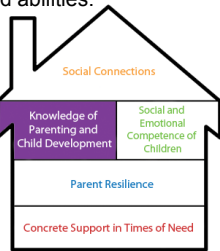
- Nine *meaningful* touches
- Nine minutes that matter
 - ▣ First 3 minutes after children wake up and see you
 - ▣ First 3 minutes after coming home for the day
 - ▣ Last 3 minutes of the day before they go to bed
- Nine minutes of conversation

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development



Key Principles:

- Parents need to adjust their expectations and rules to fit children's skills and abilities.
- Learn children's strengths and build on those.
- Effective discipline depends on the quality of parents' teaching; the quality of their teaching depends on the parent-child relationship.
- Make time for 9!



Strong Parents, Stable Children: Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families



Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Learn More about Children and Parenting

Who knows a child best—their likes and dislikes, the things that interest them and the things they can do really well? Their parents do! But no parent is an expert in everything about their child's development. Research shows a clear link between effective parenting and healthy child development. Children do best when parents provide safe boundaries, affection, good listening skills, and consistent rules and expectations. Successful parenting helps children succeed in school, feel loved, get along with others, and have a sense of belonging. Parents must learn to be flexible. They have to change how they parent as children grow and mature. Parents also need to understand that every child is unique, so a parenting style that worked well with one child might need to be adjusted to meet another child's individual needs and unique circumstances.

Public knowledge of parenting and child development changes over time. For example, it used to be standard practice to put babies to sleep on their bellies, but more recent research has shown that contributes to SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). Parents need the latest information on health and safety practices. All parents have questions about raising their children and they need timely, accurate answers and support from someone they trust. Parents need help identifying and building on their strengths and efforts. Striking a balance between reducing a child's stress while protecting the child from harm will promote their coping skills and resilience.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Offer or help locate parent education classes or workshops.
- Talk about the importance of proper nutrition, regular sleep, physical activity, and a variety of stimulating experiences to promote healthy child development.
- Help parents find opportunities to observe same-age children to help them learn more about their children's skills and abilities.
- Offer a lending library of information about parenting and child development.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- What does your child do best? What are some of your favorite things your child does?
- What do you like most about being the parent of a _____ (infant, toddler, etc.)?
- What are some of your biggest challenges being a parent?
- What works best for your child when he/she is sad, angry, or frustrated?
- How have you seen other parents handle the same kinds of behaviors?
- Tell me about the things that worry you about your child.
- How do you think your child compares to other children his/her age?
- How do you encourage your child to explore his/her surroundings, try new things, and do things on his/her own?

Strong Parents, Stable Children: *Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families*



Make Time for 9!

9 Meaningful (Safe) Touches

Children need physical contact every day to feel connected to their parent or caregiver. Touch helps boost children's development. Physical contact between parents and children helps with attachment, trust, healing, and health.

- Hugs and kisses
- Pats on the back
- Playful wrestling
- Adjusting a shirt collar
- Back rub
- Shoulder massage

9 Minutes that Matter

Children need quality time, not just quantity time. Parents and children are often rushed, so make the minutes you have together count. Some important times of day for parent-child connection are:

- First 3 minutes after children wake up and see you
- First 3 minutes after coming home from child care or school
- Last 3 minutes of the day before they go to bed (read, sing, snuggle, talk)

These moments can be easily rushed by parents who are busy, running late, tired, or distracted. But they are important moments for children and they often reach out for connection during these 9 minutes. Children of all ages need parents to slow down, look them in the eyes, and talk with them or ask questions. If parents work during these times, make the first and last minutes with the child count.

9 Minutes of Conversation

Depending on age, children need at least 9 total minutes of eye-to-eye "face time." It may be 9 minutes straight, or a minute here and there. Babies need a lot of contact with their parents—look at them and talk with them often (it doesn't matter what you say). Teenagers also need a good 9 minutes of interaction with parents and caregivers every day to keep the lines of communication open.

Strong Parents, Stable Children: Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families



Parenting Pyramid

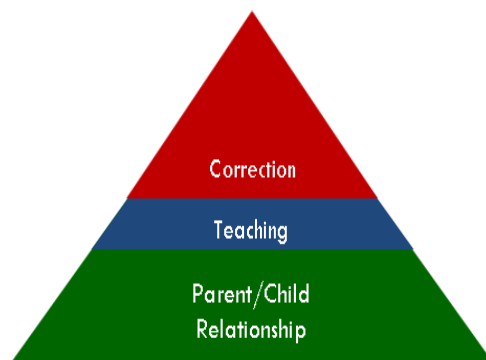
Do you feel like you spend most of your time disciplining and arguing with your children when things go wrong? Many parents get caught in this trap.

The Parenting Pyramid (developed by the Arbinger Institute, www.Arbinger.com) is a model that can help.

The *Parent-Child Relationship* is the foundation. Build a strong, loving relationship with your children. Without a good relationship, there is less openness and trust. Engage with your children in positive ways that help build your relationship.

The next layer is *Teaching*. Spend time teaching right from wrong. Talk to them about rules and what you expect. Show them by modeling good behaviors.

Finally comes *Correction*. The more you teach, the less you will need to correct. Disciplining and correcting children are important, but sometimes it helps to focus on helping things go *right* instead of always stepping in when things go wrong.



Think about the following questions:

- What is the quality of my relationship with my child?
- Am I correcting my child or am I teaching them?
- Do I spend more time and energy correcting and teaching or do I spend more time strengthening my relationship with my child?
- How can I do a better job of teaching my child so I can spend less time correcting?
- What can I do to strengthen my relationship with my child so they are more open to teaching and correction?

A Child's Developing Brain

People talk a lot these days about infant brain development. There are good reasons to know about it. A child's experiences in the first three years of life are very important in the development of the brain. In fact, a baby grows and learns more rapidly in the first three years of life than any other time in life. This makes some parents worry whether they are doing the right things. The good news is that you can provide just what your child needs.

Every child needs to be loved. It is important that a baby feels safe and cared for. Of course there are times when every child will feel unhappy, but when caregivers are doing their best to care for a child, the message of love gets through. When a child is sad or lonely or afraid, we can comfort her or him.

There will be times when a child does not calm down. A parent may become very frustrated with the child. Even when a parent cannot soothe a child, that parent can choose to never hurt the child. The parent may have to let the child cry for a few minutes while relaxing and preparing to try again to calm the child. Or the parent may need to get a neighbor to watch the baby while she or he takes a walk.

Every child needs to know that there is someone who cares about him or her. The child needs to know that the caregiver will always try to love and help. Touching, holding, and stroking your baby are important parts of showing your love. Making time to be with and play with your child is also very important in helping the child's brain develop.

Every child needs interaction with an adult. When we talk, sing, and play with a child, it stimulates her brain. Even when she is very young this interaction prepares the child to learn language and to feel connected to you and others. That is why it is a good idea to read to children and tell him stories even before he understands the words.

Every child needs to explore. Children learn through exploration and play. A baby learns through playing with a rattle. Within a few months the baby is ready to crawl, touch, and taste things. Sometime around the child's first birthday he will start to walk. As he touches, shakes, examines, and tastes his world, his brain will develop.

For that reason it is better to childproof our homes than to punish children for touching everything within their reach. Children need to explore as part of their development. We should be sure that their world is a safe place for that exploration.

It is popular to say that children do not come with instructions, but if we pay careful attention to our children, they provide most of the instructions we need. They let us know when they are bored; we can provide them something to do. They let us know when they are upset; we can soothe them. They let us know when they are uncomfortable; we can feed or change or comfort

them. We can learn the most important things we need to know about what our children need if we pay attention to their signals.

Sometimes adults try to rush a child's development. They may try to get a child to do something before he or she is ready. While it is good to provide children many opportunities to learn and explore, it is not helpful to try to get them to do things before they are ready.

A child requires a lot of time and energy. Yet there is nothing as enjoyable as watching a child grow, learn, and love. You can give to your child exactly what he or she needs in order to grow and be happy by providing a loving and interesting environment

Applications:

Do your children feel safe? Do they know and feel that you love them? Is there anything you should do to help them to feel more safe and loved?

Is a caring adult involved with your infant most of his or her waking hours? An adult does not have to be playing with and talking to the child every minute but should be available during the baby's waking hours.

Have you child proofed your house? Child proofing includes changing the environment so that your child is free from any unnecessary risks. For example, it is a good idea to put medicines, soaps, cleaners, and chemicals out of reach of the children. Poisons should be put in locked cabinets. It may be necessary to provide gates by stairways so that your child does not fall down the stairs. Store knives and matches out of children's reach. Cover electrical outlets. Each home has its own hazards. Look around your home for anything that may be dangerous for your children.

Do your children have toys to play with? The toys do not need to be expensive; they can be as simple as homemade blocks or boxes.

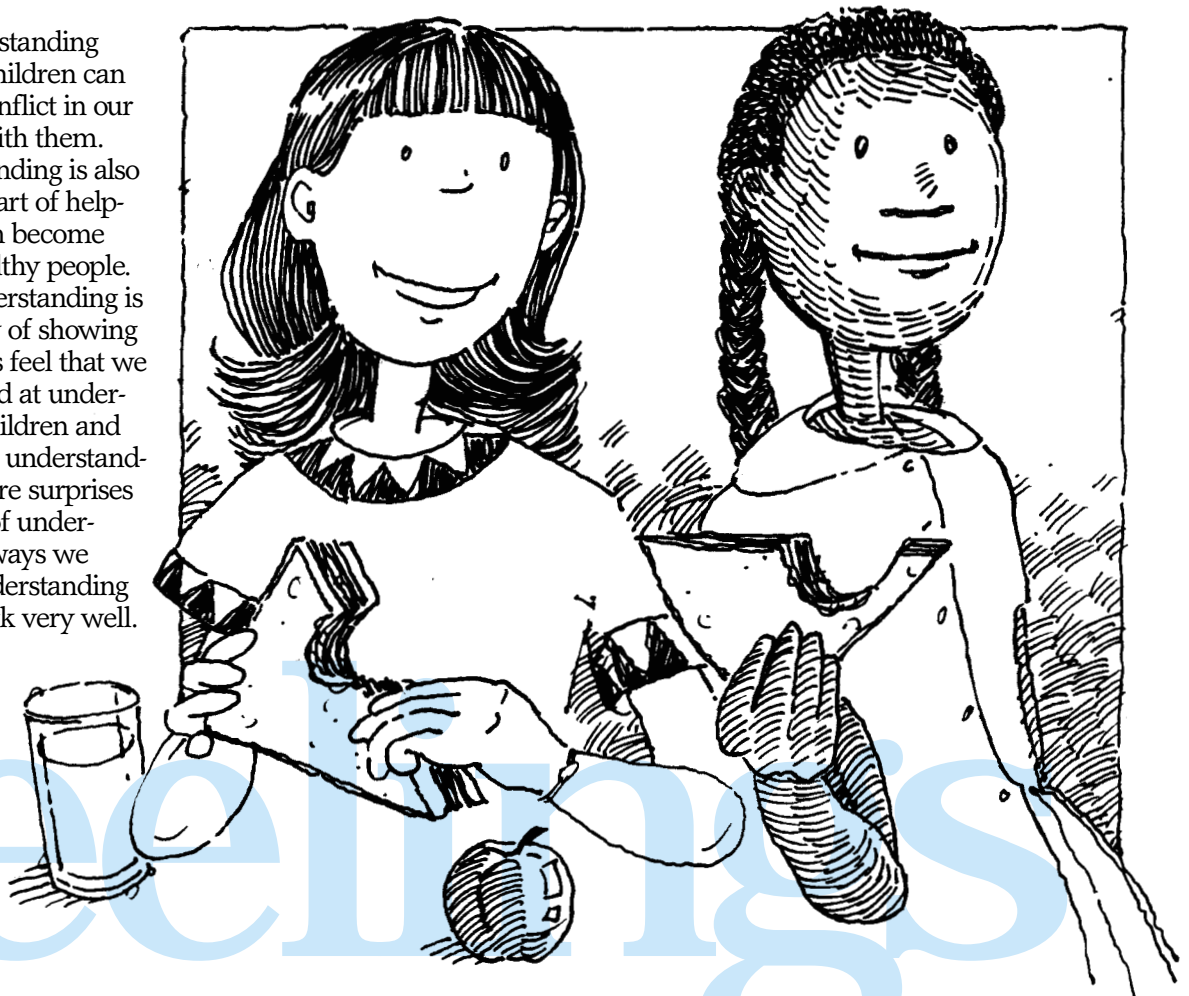
Do you have regular outings with your children where they get an opportunity to go outdoors to play and explore?

Do you call on other caring adults to help you with your children when you need a break?

PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Being Understanding: A Key To Developing Healthy Children

Being understanding with our children can result in less conflict in our relationships with them. Being understanding is also an important part of helping our children become secure and healthy people. And being understanding is a powerful way of showing love. Most of us feel that we are already good at understanding our children and at showing that understanding. But there are surprises in the process of understanding. The ways we try to show understanding often don't work very well.



Ways NOT to show understanding

Many things we think show understanding actually have the opposite effect. They make a person feel mad or misunderstood. Following are some examples of things that we should avoid:

- **Don't give advice.**

"What you need to do is . . ."

"If you would stop being such a baby you wouldn't have that trouble."

- **Don't talk about your own feelings and experiences instead of theirs.**

"I understand."

"That same thing happened to me."

"That's nothing. You should hear what happened to me."

"I know just how you feel."

- **Don't make the child's pain seem unimportant.**

"Everybody suffers. What makes you so special?"

"Why don't you grow up?"

"Stop that. You're driving me crazy."

When people feel bad, they feel that their pain is so bad that no one can really understand it. That's why a person who is hurting would probably rather have you say, "Your pain must be awful. I wish I could understand just how sad (or hurt or lonely) you feel." Sometimes the best way to show understanding is to admit that you can't understand just how bad a person feels.

How can I show understanding?

The key to understanding what the other person feels is identifying her feeling. After we have listened carefully (and watched carefully) to learn how a child is feeling and acting, we might do one of the following:

- **Acknowledge or identify the child's feeling.**

"You feel strongly about this!"

"You seem to feel very concerned (hurt, upset, confused)."

- **Invite more discussion.**

"I would like to understand how you are feeling. Will you tell me more?"

"Uh huh."

- **Understand that the person's pain is special for that person.**

"I wish I could understand better how you feel."

"Ouch. I don't know if I can even guess how terrible you feel."

- **Use active listening.**

"Let me see if I understand. You feel like . . . ?"

"It sounds like you feel lonely (confused, sad, etc.)."

How do I show understanding to a very young child?

When a child is very young, she doesn't understand a lot of talking. It is still possible (and very important) to be understanding with her. For example, when a baby cries, an understanding parent looks for a cause rather than blaming the child. The parent might check for hunger, a dirty diaper, discomfort, or loneliness. The understanding parent recognizes that a child cries because of a need. Parents can learn to be sensitive to those needs. Understanding starts long before children understand our words.

What is the message a child gets when we are understanding?

Think about how it feels to be understood. What are the messages we get when someone shows us understanding?

When someone takes the time to understand our feelings, it may cause us to feel loved and safe. A child who feels understood by us is more likely to trust us and feel close to us.

Feeling understood helps a child understand his own feelings, respect them, and deal with them. It may actually help the child find solutions to the problems.

Showing understanding to a child may be especially difficult for parents. We tend to think it's our job to correct and change our children. Consider the example of spilled milk.

When a child spills milk at the table, it's common for parents to become angry. Sometimes we give them lectures about being more careful. Sometimes we even call our children names like "clumsy" or "stupid." Lectures and name-calling are likely to make the child angry or hurt.

How can we show understanding when a child makes a mistake like spilling milk? One

way is to simply say, "Oops. Will you get a towel and wipe up the spill, please?" By avoiding lectures and insults, we are showing respect for the child's feelings.

Insulting lectures don't help children do better next time they have milk. They may even make the child more nervous and more likely to spill it.

Another message of understanding is: "It's easy to spill a glass of milk. All of us do it some time. Please get a towel and wipe up the spill." Children need to know they can make mistakes and still be loved and accepted.

Sometimes it's hard to show understanding because we feel angry when the child makes a mistake. When we're afraid we might say something mean, we are wise to be quiet until we feel less anger.

How can I show understanding and still discipline my child?

Sometimes it's hard to deal with our children because we're angry or tired or lonely. We don't have any love to give our children. If that is true, we need to find ways to strengthen ourselves. We may need to have time with our friends or time for our hobbies. It's hard to give love when we feel empty. (See Extension Circular HE-674 in this series, "Taking Care Of The Parent: Replacing Stress With Peace.")

Take time to listen to children's feelings. Understand. Remember that what the child is experiencing is very real to the child. Don't try to discuss problems with the child when you are angry.

Regularly ask the child about her experiences. "What was school like today?" "How did the test go?" "What was the happiest thing that happened today?" Ask questions. Listen.

Remember that each person is different. You may have one child

who cries over every experience. You may have another who keeps all feelings inside. Each child may need understanding in a different way. But each child needs understanding.

Help the child understand other people's feelings. "How do you think Mary felt about her dog being lost?" As you discuss feelings, try to understand what the other person feels.

Once a child feels understood, she is more likely to accept correction. She is more likely to want to obey.

How would you show understanding?

Susie has had her cousin Carol with her all summer. Now Carol has gone home. Susie comes in whining about how she will miss Carol.

How do we usually react in such a situation? Many parents would say something like: "You'll get over it." "You'll make more friends." "Stop whining." "Don't be a baby."

Do these statements show understanding? How will they make the child feel?

Can you think of some things to say that will show more understanding for Susie? What do you think of the following statements:



"I can see that you will be lonely without Carol."

"The house must seem empty now that Carol is gone."

"When you spent so much time together, it is hard to be apart."

"Carol has just left, but already you miss her."

Do the above statements show Susie that you understand her feelings? Would you feel comfortable using one of them?

Sometimes we think it's our job to help our children "get better" or get over their hurt feelings. But if we correct them ("Stop being a baby. You'll make new friends"), they may feel that we don't understand and don't care about how they feel. When we take time to understand ("I can see you'll be lonely without Carol"), they're more likely to feel that we care about them. Understanding and caring help them to feel better and help them to think of solutions for their problems.

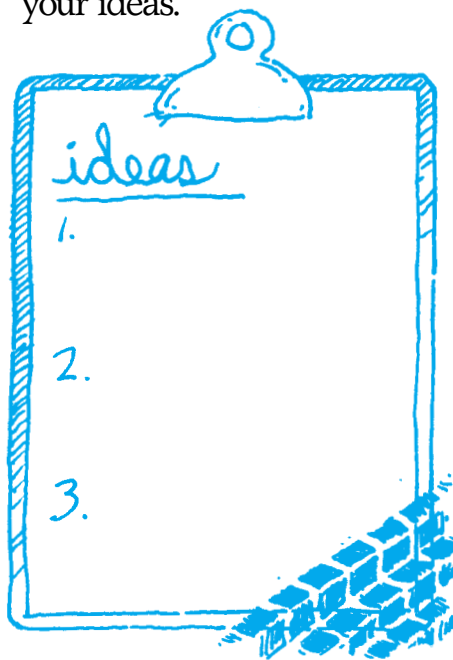
What about these situations?

What would you say if your 6-year-old Tommy said, "You're a rotten mother. I hate you!" A first reaction might be to become angry and punish the child. Or you might argue with the child: "You don't know what you're talking about. I'm the only mother who would put up with you." Or a parent might feel sad and cry.

What could you say to show that you understand the child's feelings?

You might say: "You seem to be very angry right now. I can understand that. I would like us to talk more about your feelings when you don't feel so angry."

Here's another situation: Your son comes home with a note that he's in trouble with the bus driver. What are you likely to say? What could you say that would show understanding? Try to think of some ways before you read further. Jot down your ideas.



If you take time to understand that he might feel embarrassed or angry, then you are very understanding! Of course, after he feels understood, it's a good idea to ask him what he can do to be sure he won't get in trouble with the bus driver in the future. It's not useful to blame either the boy or the bus driver. First, understand. Then, after he feels understood, discuss ways to prevent further trouble.

When parents use active listening, they help their children feel understood.

What is active listening?

Active listening is a way of showing understanding. It involves listening carefully and then, from time to time, describing how you think the person is feeling, or summing up what you think she has said. Let her correct or add to what you have said. Keep listening until you can tell she feels understood. Here are some ideas to help you be an active listener with your child:

- Take time to listen carefully to what the child is saying.
- See if you can identify what the child is feeling.
- Ask the child: "I wonder if you feel _____ (sad, alone, frustrated, confused)."
- After you describe the feeling, the child may want to correct or add to what you have said. Listen carefully.
- Maybe you will want to try again to describe what the child is feeling.

Active listening lets the child know you care about what she feels.

Taking time to understand what children feel sends a powerful message to them. It says to them, "You're important to me. I care about your feelings. I want to understand how you see things." Understanding is a powerful way to show love.

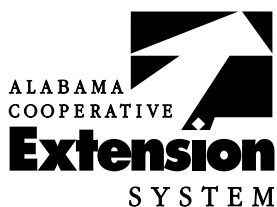
If we take time to listen to and understand our children, they are more likely to become confident and caring people. It takes many years to learn how to be as understanding as we would like to be. But it's well worth the effort.

If you want to learn more . . .

Faber, Adele, and Mazlish, Elaine (1980). *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York: Avon.

Ginott, Haim (1956). *Between Parent And Child*. New York: MacMillan.

White, James D. (1976). *Talking With A Child*. New York: MacMillan.



HE-682

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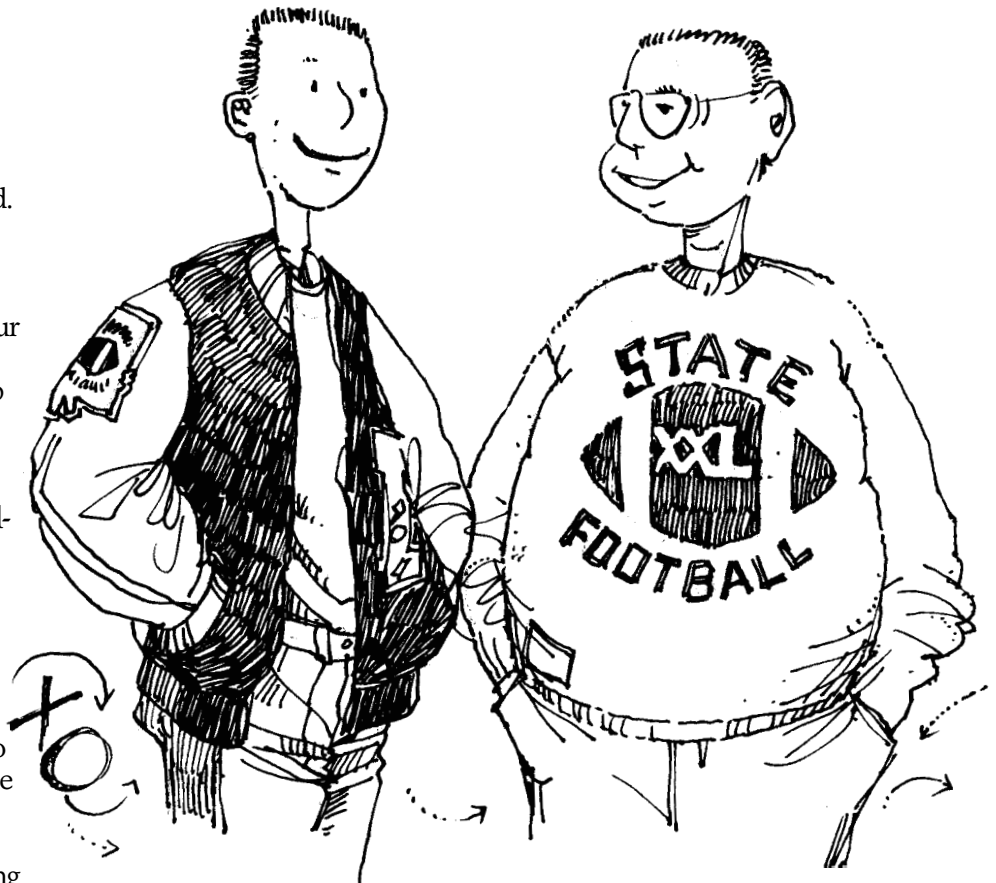
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The things we say and do with our children determine the kind of relationship we have with them. For instance, when you think about your relationship with your parents as you were growing up, there are probably certain words that come to mind. Maybe *fear* or *happiness* or *closeness* or *anger* or *confusion*. How you feel about your childhood probably tells you a lot about your relationship with your parents. Some kinds of relationships help children develop. We call those positive relationships.

Relationships with our children may need to change.

Often our relationships with our children center on control and correction. When parents control their children, they are trying to get the children to do things the children don't want to do. Or they are trying to keep the children from doing things they want to do. For example, have you ever tried to force a struggling child into a car seat? Have you ever tried to keep children from eating candy before dinner? Have you tried to get your children to do their homework, eat their vegetables, or stop fighting with each other?



Parents generally have more power than children. We are bigger and stronger. But it's hard to force people to do something they don't want to do. We can spend all of our time yelling at children and trying to bribe, convince, or force them to do what we want them to do. That's the trouble with control. It takes over the relationship. It can be the only thing that parents and their children seem to talk about. And it's not a very good basis for a relationship.

Sometimes our relationships with our children are based on correction. As parents, we spend a lot of time telling our children what they do wrong. Sometimes our correction even becomes insulting. "How can you be so dumb?" "Why can't you do anything right?" "Can't you think?"

Insults are damaging. They do not give children useful information. They only make them feel bad. Even when we avoid insults, too much correction can be bad. Correction should not be the main part of our relationship with our children. There are better things to talk about.

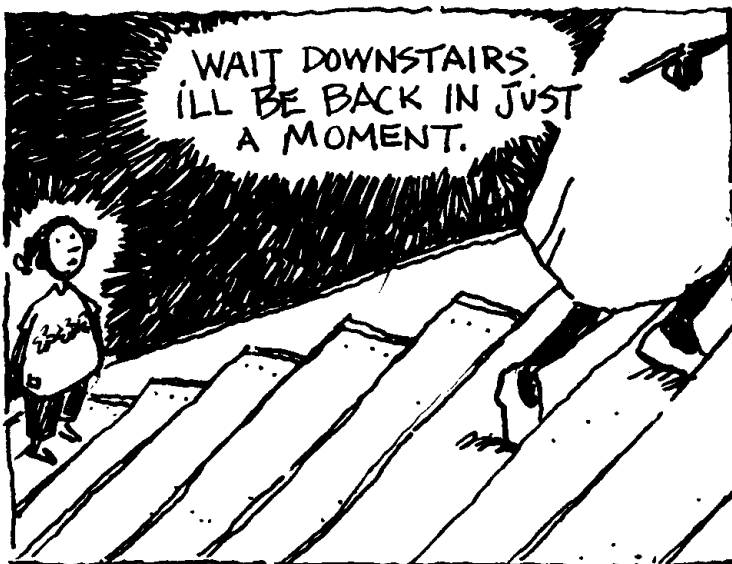
Are control and correction always bad?

No. It is necessary for parents to control and correct their children. But when control and correction are all that a child gets from parents, the child may become discouraged or rebellious. Control and correction should not take over the relationship.

What can work better than control and correction?

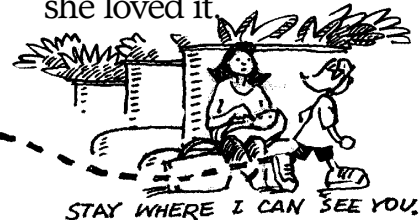
Recently I asked a friend what she wanted her relationship with her strong-willed daughter to be like. She said that she was trying to make the relationship center on "opportunity." She gave some examples.

Normally when Melissa has wanted to follow me up to the attic I have told her, "No. You're too little. Go do something else." Melissa would get mad and complain. I would yell at her. One particular day when I went up in the attic I decided to change how I acted. I invited Melissa to go up with me. I helped her climb the stairs, and I showed her the things we had stored. We looked in some of the boxes. We had fun together, and it only took a few extra minutes.



Opportunity is an excellent theme for a relationship. When children want to try something, we may be tempted to tell them "no." But maybe we should find an acceptable way for them to try it.

I went to the mall with my baby and my 4-year-old. The 4-year-old wanted to explore the sitting area in the center of the mall. My natural answer was to tell her "later" and hurry on. Instead, I decided to sit with the baby for a few minutes and let the older girl explore. It only took a few minutes, and she loved it.



This wise mother took a few minutes to build a positive relationship with her child.

Affection is another excellent theme for a relationship. One good way you can build affection into relationships with your children is by taking time to do things that the children like to do. For example, little Andy loves to hike. Periodically his mother takes him for a hike. Once in a while his dad takes him for a campout. Andy gets the feeling that his parents really care about him. He feels their affection.

Another good way to show affection is to take time to read to and talk with children when you tuck them in at night. (Additional ideas for building a positive relationship can be found in Extension Circular HE-683 in this series, "Sending Messages Of Love.")

But how do I control my child?

It is still necessary to keep children from doing damaging things. How can that be done and still keep opportunity and affection at the center of the relationship?

With small children, distraction is an extremely important tool. If a child starts to grab a forbidden object, the parent might try to distract the child with some other interesting object.

Amy was trying to grab the game pieces for the game we were playing. Usually we would yell at her or slap her hands. But we tried something different. I said, "Amy, would you be in charge of rolling the dice for us?" Each time one of us had a turn, we would have Amy roll the dice and then we would count out our moves and tell her what we were doing. She felt very involved.



Even as children get older it's good to redirect them toward acceptable choices. For instance, I might not feel good about my early-teen daughter going to a high school dance, but we can consider having a party for her and her friends at our house. We can look for an opportunity that we both feel good about.

There are other tools that can help parents have appropriate control in their relationships with their children. If you don't seem to be able to control your children, you may want to read Extension Circular HE-687 in this series, "Something Better Than Punishment."

How can I have positive relationships with my children?

In order to make your relationships with your children more positive, think about what you want your relationships to be like. Would you like to have more fun time with each child? Would you like to nag less often? Think about the way you would like your relationship to be. Then notice when you say "no" without thinking. Is there some other way you can think to react? Can you distract or redirect the child? Can you get her busy doing something she likes to do? Can you take time to do something with him? How can you build more opportunity and affection into your relationships and remove some of the control and correction?

Go back to the list you made at the beginning of this publication. Notice whether the things you talked about with your children showed control and correction or opportunity and affection. Think about how you can make your relationship with each child more positive.

As you change your relationships with your children, be patient with yourself. It takes time to make changes. Keep working at it. When you make a mistake, learn from it. Discover better ways to have a healthy, joyous, positive relationship with your children.



HE-684

This publication was written by H. Wallace Goddard, *Extension Family and Child Development Specialist*, Associate Professor, Family and Child Development, Auburn University

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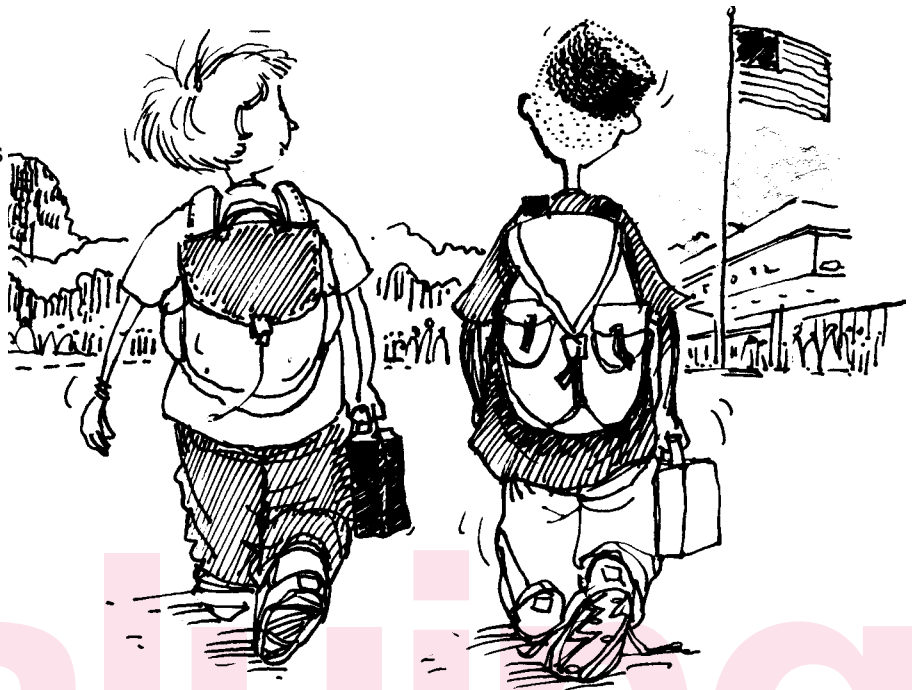
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PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Enjoying Each Child As An Individual

We expect adults to be individuals, to have likes and dislikes, to be good at some things and not at others. But it often surprises us that children are unique individuals with their own tastes, styles, and abilities.

All children have different rates of development and different personalities. Knowing this can help us be patient. We can show our children that we really care about them by accepting each child as an individual.



valuing

Remember that some children are easy to care for and not very demanding. Others are fussy and difficult to care for. You may have children who are very different from one another even though you've tried to treat them the same. One child may cry a lot when he is sleepy or off his schedule. Rather than seeing your child as "bad," accept the fact that your child's body requires that he stay on a schedule. Some children are more difficult to care for, and it doesn't mean that the child is bad or that you are a bad parent.

Accept children as individuals.

Don't try to make a child something she is not. It's like trying to change a rose into a daisy: it takes a lot of work, and the results are disappointing.

I remember a mother telling me that when she heard her teenage daughter walking up the sidewalk after school she became mad before she even saw her. The mother and daughter had fought so often that the mother would get mad even thinking about seeing her daughter.

Although most parents may think they accept their children, what they do or say may tell children something else. For example, if parents compare, constantly correct, or ignore a child, the child may not feel loved or valued. The child may feel that his parents reject him.



Sometimes parents compare one child to another. For example, have you ever commented to a child how poorly she does in school compared to an older brother or sister? The parent who does this probably hopes to motivate the child. But it is more likely to make her discouraged or angry.

Sometimes we talk too much about a child's mistakes rather than his good qualities. Sometimes we use labels like "dumb," "bad," or "stupid." Sometimes we are critical of things in our children that we don't like in ourselves. Sometimes we ignore one child and give lots of love and attention to another. Such treatment can make a child feel worthless and unloved.

What can you do to show your children that you value them for who they are? There are three ideas that are important to teach your children:

- You have talents.
- No one has every talent.
- You can use your talents to help others.

It's very important to send these messages to your children. Here are some ideas that may help.

You have talents.

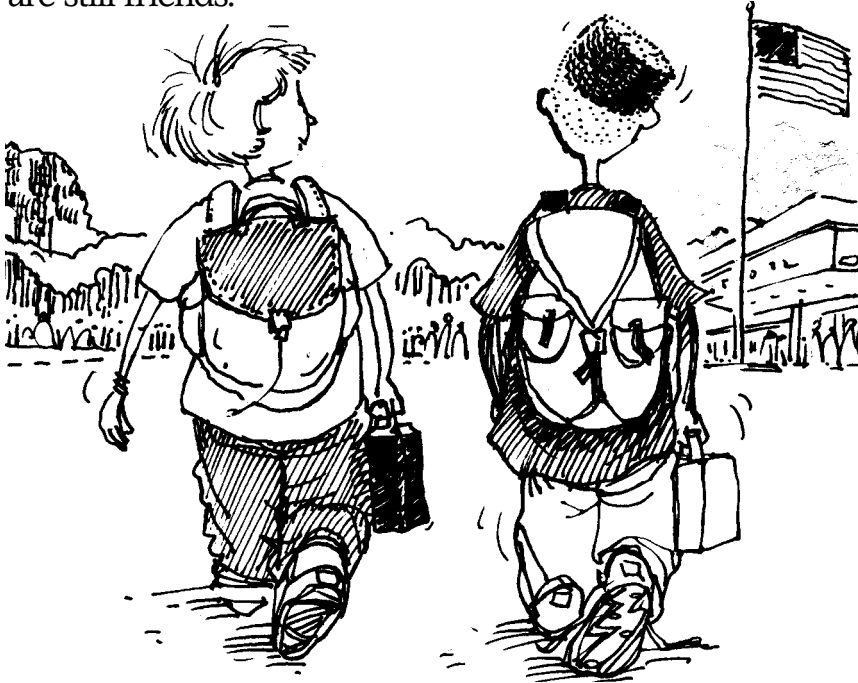
Every child is good at something. Maybe your child is athletic or creative or dramatic or smart or good at caring for younger children. There are many different talents. Even some things that we see as faults can also be seen as talents. For example, the child who cries easily may be very sensitive or dramatic. The child who is stubborn may also be intelligent and able to see things a different way. The child who is "into everything" can also be seen as energetic and curious.



Watch for the things that each child loves to do. Appreciate their strengths. Tell them about the good you see. Be patient with their weaknesses. Teach them skills to help them deal with their weaknesses.



Tom is a very sensitive boy. One day he came home very upset because a classmate had been teasing him about his hairstyle. We talked to him about how frustrating it is to have someone make fun of you. And we talked about how to deal with the teasing. We decided that when the boy teased him again Tom would laugh about the teasing and then ask the classmate about his classes or hobbies. We hoped Tom could use his sensitivity to build a friendship. It worked. Tom and the boy are still friends.



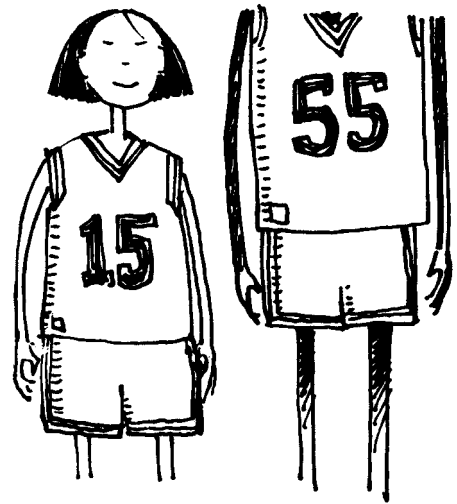
No one has every talent.

Children often become discouraged because of talents or qualities they don't have. A child may want to be athletic, scholarly, and handsome but may be gentle and caring. We may encourage the child to further develop the qualities and talents he does have: "Thank you for helping Mrs. Jones with her leaves. I enjoy the kind way you help people." We can remind him that the talent he does have is important to us.

Often children compare themselves to someone they want to be like. They may become very unhappy that they are not more like their hero. We can help by understanding their disappointment but reassuring them that we are glad for what they are. "I like you just the way you are!"

Sometimes children think they'll never be able to draw, swim, or play ball as well as another child. One helpful mother reminded her daughter that children learn to swim at different ages. Another wise mother showed her young son some of his earlier drawings so he could see how much his drawing had improved.

Each child can learn to enjoy and use the talents he or she has, rather than be miserable wishing for other talents.



You can use your talents to help others.

Teach each child how to use her talents to help others. For instance, you may have a child who would rather study than play with other children. Since it's important for children to have friends, you might encourage your child to invite another child over to study. Or encourage her to help someone who has a hard time in class. This would allow the child to use her talent with other children while doing what she enjoys. She will see her ability as a strength and not a weakness. Though she might



not grow up to be a great tennis player, she might become a great teacher or college professor.
Use the form below to decide how you can help each of your children develop his or her talents.

talents

Name of child

What does the child like to do?

What are some outstanding things this child does?

What are some personal shortcomings this child worries about?

How can you help him or her use personal strengths to balance the shortcomings?

What can you say or do to help the child be aware of his or her talents?

What can you do to help the child use his or her talents to help others?

Each child has different talents and different weaknesses. When we learn to enjoy all of our children as individuals, appreciate their individual talents, and help them use their talents, we help them grow into capable, loving people.

If you want to learn more . . .

Faber, Adele, and Mazlish, Elaine (1980). *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York: Avon.

Ginott, Haim (1956). *Between Parent And Child*. New York: Avon.

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Giving Children Choices

Adults don't like to be forced to do things. Neither do children. We all like to have choices. Give children real choices. Asking a child whether he wants to clean up his room or get a whipping is not a real choice - it is a threat. We might instead ask a child if he wants to play music on the radio while cleaning his room or would rather have it quiet. We might even ask the child if they would rather get their room cleaned up right now or would rather wait until after dinner. (If the child decides to clean the room after dinner, we need to remember to enforce the commitment!)

Even young children should be given choices. For example, at bedtime a parent might ask a child, "As soon as you are ready for bed I can read you a story or sing you a song. What do you prefer?" Of course an infant can only make limited choices - but even young children might have preferences. If that child (past 6 months of age) favors carrots over potatoes, let her eat the carrots.

Wise parents set some limits on choices. We allow young children to decide which shirt they want to wear to school but we set limits on bedtimes. We allow teens to go out with their friends but we ask them to be home by a certain time.

As children get older, we allow them more freedom in their choices. For example, a teenager who hates to clean his room might be allowed to clean it only once a week. "Would you be willing to clean your room every Saturday and I won't bother you the rest of the week?" Teens are also given more freedom about choosing their friends and how they spend their time. That does not mean that teens are allowed to hang out whenever they want. The normal place for teens to be when they are not in school or at work is at home. (See the unit on Setting Limits.)

Some things should be decided by the child. In matters of style it is better not to start a battle. You may think your child's hair is too long or too short or that baggy pants look ridiculous. (Probably our parents had some of the same concerns about our style.) Allow the child freedom to express herself or himself in areas that are not unsafe or immoral. Do not panic when some of those choices are very different from ones we make.

We can prepare children to make good choices by providing information. For example, when a child is thinking about buying expensive shoes, we might ask them if they are willing to consider some factors in their decision. We can encourage them to think how the cost of the shoes equates with weeks of allowance or hours of work. We might ask them what alternatives they have considered. We can ask them how important those shoes are relative to other purchases that could be made with the same money. It is not helpful to pester children but we can help them learn a sensible way of making choices. If we want our children to be good decision-makers when they become adults, we should give them many appropriate opportunities to make decisions along their journey to adulthood.

Applications:

What choices do you currently allow your children to make?

Does each of your children have the opportunity to make choices appropriate for his or her development?

Are there choices your children make that you consider foolish?

Is it an area of personal style where you should allow more freedom?

Or is it an area where you should have a discussion?

How can you initiate a discussion that will be productive? Can you invite your child to share his or her perspective? Can you share your ideas in a non-accusing way at a time when you are both in good spirits?

Sometimes we allow children to make bigger choices after they have shown that they are wise in making small choices. For example, a teen who wants to be trusted to go with friends to a concert needs to have demonstrated responsibility about making good choices. A parent may need to say occasionally, "I think I will be ready to trust you with going to the concert when you have shown that I can trust you to come home on time and to make good choices." Because trust is earned over time, a 14-year-old will probably not be allowed the same freedom as a 17-year-old.

Good Ways and Bad Ways to Use Timeouts

Timeouts can solve some problems with children - but they can make some other problems worse. Appropriate use of timeouts is one important tool to help parents help their children. Don't use timeouts to punish children. When a timeout is used to make children suffer for their mistakes, it just makes them mad. Especially when we make them do things that are humiliating (such as standing in a corner or putting their nose in the corner), they are likely to feel hurt and confused. It doesn't teach them anything and it doesn't prepare them to be taught. In fact when we use timeouts to punish children, they may use the time to plan revenge. That is not the objective of timeouts.

Timeouts are for soothing, calming and comforting. When children are upset, they are not ready to be taught. The ideal use of timeouts is to help everyone get calm and start feeling safe so that the parent and child can have a productive discussion. For that reason, effective timeouts may include lovingly holding a child, rocking together in a rocking chair, or taking a walk. They may also include having both parent and child go to their separate rooms while they settle down.

When parents get mad at their children and choose to take timeouts for themselves, they have two choices. They can think about what the child did wrong, how much it bothers them, and all the things the child has done wrong in the past. However, this does not prepare parents to be helpful teachers and guides for their children. It only makes them madder. Their second choice is to calm themselves by thinking about how much they love their children, how hard their children try, and how much they as parents want to help their children learn and grow.

The best use for timeout may be to help the parents calm down so they can be helpful to their children. When parents feel mad with their children, they may choose to say something like: "Right now I feel so frustrated I don't know what to do. I need some time to think. Let's both go to our separate rooms until we feel like we can talk about this." This allows both child and parent time to calm down.

Learning can happen after soothing. Children have limited experience and knowledge so it is important for parents to teach them. But there are also important things that the parent can learn. As the parent listens to the child, the parent can learn about the child's fears, confusion, needs, and difficulties. When a parent takes time to listen to a child, that parent is better able to be helpful to the child.

When a parent and child are both feeling peaceful, one of the most helpful things the parent can do is help the child understand how his or her behavior affects other people. There is a unit in this series that addresses that issue. It is titled "Helping Children Learn to Respect Other People."

Timeout can be a very useful tool when it is used to help the parent and child calm down and work together to solve problems.

Applications:

What are some situations where timeouts may be helpful for your children?

For example, when a normally sensible child is upset. Or when a child is tired and hungry and needs some peace and loving.

What are some situations where timeouts may be helpful for you?

For example, when you have had a bad day and a child does something that makes you angry. You may choose to go to a quiet place while you relax.

What are some ways you might make timeouts more effective in your family?

For example, showing affection to help a child calm down.

What are some situations where timeouts would not be helpful for your children?

For example, when a child is very young, afraid, or lonely, it would be cruel to isolate him or her.



Helping Children Learn Responsibility

As children grow, they seek increasing independence. They want to make their own choices and control their own world. Children's drive for independence begins in infancy and the process grows and continues until they are well into adulthood.

As parents, we often find it difficult to let go of our children's hands and allow them to explore and learn for themselves. Parents should always provide reasonable safety for their children. But when we praise and encourage our children to explore and make choices we are supporting the development of their independence. Wise parents know how important it is for their children to make decisions.

Allow opportunities for your child to make choices. Begin with simple decisions, such as choosing a book to read before bedtime, and, over time, provide more opportunities for more complex choices and decisions. (See the unit on Giving Children Choices.) When your child begins to express a desire to do certain things on her own (such as dressing herself, filling her own plate, etc.), allow her to do these things. Help her out when she requests your help or she is obviously struggling with something. But give her the chance to make as many decisions for her own life as she is able to make.

We can give our children opportunities to be responsible for household chores. Choose chores that are appropriate for your child. Begin small with tasks like putting away their toys. As they follow through with what you expect them to do, give them opportunities to take on more responsibilities. The age of the child is an important factor. You cannot expect a five-year-old to be responsible for the same things as his twelve-year-old sister. Match the chores to the maturity and interests of the child.

Model responsibility. Children learn from what their parents do. Show your children that you are responsible through your decision making and your daily tasks. Keep the commitments you make to family members.

Let your child experience the consequences of his choices and actions. If your child promises to clean his room before dinner, make sure his room is clean before he sits down to eat. If he did not follow through with his commitment, he should expect a logical consequence, perhaps not being able to eat dinner until his room is clean. Your child should be aware that consequences are tied to their behavior. (See the unit Using Consequences to Help Children Learn.) When your child makes good choices, even in small things, notice and encourage him.

Give your child support. Let your child know that you are going to be there for her when she needs you. Even as adults we need some help to get us through our responsibilities. When a

child knows she has the support of her parents, she is more willing to take on responsibilities and explore the world.

Applications:

What kind of opportunities do you give your children to explore their independence? (Ex: encourage exploration, decision making, responsibilities, etc.)

Does your child have responsibilities at home (such as cleaning-up her room, setting the dinner table, taking out the trash, etc.)? If your child is not doing well with those responsibilities, does he or she need additional training or support? If your child is doing well, are you noticing and supporting the efforts?

How do you model responsibility for your children?

Do you try to protect your children from consequences or do you allow them to experience an appropriate discomfort from mistakes?

How have you given your children support this past week in their efforts to become responsible and independent?



Helping Your Child with ADHD

Having a family member with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be a very frustrating challenge. It can leave family members feeling exhausted, helpless, and confused.

ADHD is not caused by bad parenting or bad children. Some scientists believe that it is caused by an area of the brain that is not active enough in regulating the child's planning and focusing. As a result, it is difficult for a child with ADHD to manage his or her behavior.

Unfortunately there is no simple test for determining if a child has ADHD. A child gets bored easily, quickly loses interest in work, and seems drawn to fun, might have ADHD. If your child has had the following symptoms for at least six months, consider getting a professional evaluation by a doctor or psychologist who has experience dealing with ADHD.

- Impulsiveness, inattentiveness and activity far greater than children the same age.
- Other adults who have contact with your child report that the child has poor self-control or is more active than normal.
- Adults who work with your child report behavior problems.
- More of your time and energy is required to manage the child than other parents invest in children the same age.
- Other children avoid your child because of excessive activity, emotion, or aggression.
- You are worn out from caring for this child.

Of course all people have some of these characteristics but when a child consistently shows more of this behavior than classmates and shows the behavior over a period of time, there is reason to wonder if the child may have ADHD.

The most effective treatment for ADHD has been medication. Stimulants have been effective in helping 50% to 95% of children with ADHD. Any use of medication should be carefully considered with a physician. Of course, in addition to medication, there are important things that parents and teachers can do to help a child with ADHD.

It is easy for people dealing with an child who has ADHD to become frustrated and demand better behavior from the child. But because of the way the brain of the child with ADHD operates, some tasks are unusually difficult for that child. He or she does not anticipate the future very well. However, rather than withdraw expectations from the child, parents and teachers can make consequences for behavior more immediate, more frequent, and more noticeable.

There are many things you can do to help a child with ADHD function better. Provide positive attention for their efforts and accomplishments. Since they thrive on variety, you can provide new tasks and surroundings. It may also be helpful to have bright, cheerful, stimulating educational materials. Since children with ADHD find it difficult to wait for future rewards, offering prompt rewards at the completion of a task may be helpful. They also work best with close supervision and personal attention. Working side by side with your child can not only provide that extra supervision, but can also provide time to be together in positive ways. Instructions may need to be broken into small parts and repeated many times as they accomplish each part. Tasks that require the most attention should generally be done when the child is not tired.

Because of the demands of caring for a child with ADHD, other parts of your life can suffer. Be sure to get emotional support from someone who is understanding. Also make arrangements for vacations. Perhaps your child has grandparents who can watch the child while you take time to recover your energy.

With the extra stresses of ADHD, it is possible for families to become negative and reactive. Yet, with the use of sensible principles, family life can be maintained and you can raise a happy, healthy child.

Applications

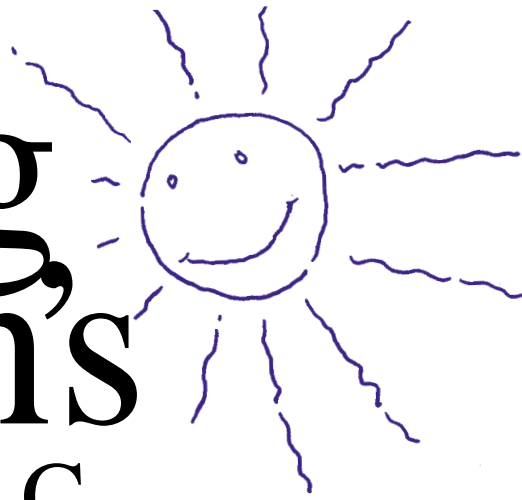
Russell Barkley has recommended 14 guides for raising children with ADHD. Review the list below (adapted from his book) and see where you can make improvements in the way your family deals with the child who has ADHD. (More information about his book is listed at the end of this unit.)

1. Give your child more immediate feedback and consequences
2. Give your child more frequent feedback.
3. Use larger and more powerful consequences.
4. Use incentives before punishment.
5. Break assignments into small steps.
6. Provide reminders.
7. Provide a reward closely connected with the task.
8. Make thinking and problem solving more physical - use pictures or symbols.
9. Strive for consistency.
10. Act, don't yak!
11. Plan ahead for problem situations.
12. Remember that your child has a disability. Keep your head.
13. Don't take your child's problems personally.
14. Practice forgiveness.

Dr. Barkley also provides eight steps for better managing the behavior of a child with ADHD. If you have a child with ADHD, you may benefit from studying his suggestions. You may want to buy the book or have your local library purchase it.

PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Meeting Children's Needs



Children make many demands on their parents. The way parents respond to the children's demands teaches children about the kind of world they live in. Children learn to trust or mistrust, to feel safe or afraid, to feel loved or unloved based on the way people, especially their parents, respond to them.

When a baby cries because of a dirty diaper and Mom or Dad gently changes the diaper while talking to the baby, the child learns that the world is safe and caring. If a baby cries because of a dirty diaper and parents ignore or yell at the child, the child comes to feel that the world is frightening and unsafe.

A school-age child gets the feeling of safety when people listen to what she says and when they take an interest in what she does. Teenagers feel loved when parents discuss decisions with them and listen to their opinions.



When we as parents show caring and love in meeting our children's needs, we help our children grow up to be strong and caring people.

Understanding and meeting children's needs sometimes seems impossible.

Understanding children's needs and taking care of those needs can be very difficult for parents. One reason is that as parents we are more aware of our own needs than of our children's. For instance, we may get upset when a child gets sick (or has to go to the bathroom) just as we are going to work or to a meeting. It is natural to feel upset at the untimely demand. We may ask, "Why does this child always do this to me?" But children don't plan their sicknesses to bother us. They are just trying to take care of their needs. And sometimes their needs come into conflict with our needs.

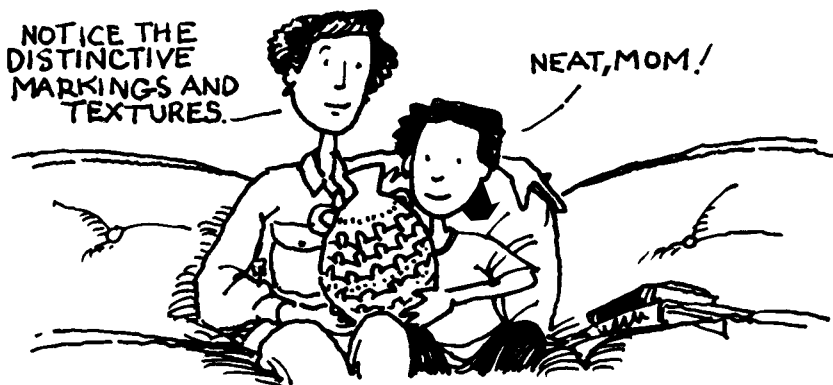
For example, think of a child with colic who seems to cry no matter what you do. A parent may feel angry and helpless. Getting angry at the child for having colic does not help. What can the parent do? First, check with the doctor to find out if the child has a serious problem. If the doctor does not find a medical problem, the parent can simply provide comforting activity such as rocking the child or carrying the child close in a pouch. After trying everything else, the parent can let the baby cry himself to sleep when he is tired. The parent who gets awakened in the night should be sure to get a nap during the day to catch up on sleep. If you become very angry and fear that you will hurt the child, you should call a friend, family member, or nurse. For most babies colic ends by three months of age.

Can you list other demands that children make on us that may make us angry? What are effective ways to deal with them?

As parents we find it very challenging to adjust to the needs of children. But if we learn to expect some difficulties, care about our children's needs, and plan ahead to meet those needs, we can make a very big difference in helping our children.

Another reason that meeting children's needs is difficult is that children are dependent and untrained. Sometimes it is very inconvenient to have to feed, protect, carry, comfort, and teach children. Sometimes children do silly things. Sometimes they break things. If we learn to be patient and teach them rather than get angry, we will be more helpful.

Sara wanted to look at a vase. But the vase was very breakable. Nancy could have told Sara to leave it alone until she was older. Instead, she asked Sara to sit on the couch and she would bring her the vase. Sara sat on the couch. Nancy brought her the vase. They talked about it together. When Sara was tired of looking at the vase, Nancy said, "Anytime you want to look at the vase, come and get me. We'll look at it together."



Nancy is a wise mother who knew that a small child might break a vase but that if she were sitting on the sofa with her mother she could probably enjoy the vase safely.

Another reason that meeting children's needs is difficult is that children are so different. They are different at different ages. They are different from each other. And they are different in different circumstances. And they may be different from what we expect. We may wonder why Susie is so mean these days when she used to be such a nice child. We may wonder why Tommy is so messy when Marcus is so tidy. We may wonder why Sara is so happy at home but so bashful at school. Most of this publication will talk about these differences.

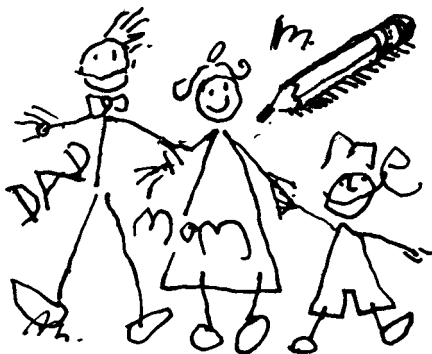
Children are different at different ages.

A new baby is very dependent. We must feed her, clothe her, and protect her. But as a child becomes older she becomes more independent. You have probably heard of the "terrible twos." About the time a child turns two she starts to become more independent. She is more likely to want to do things for herself. This may bother us because she is not very good at doing things. But it is very important to help her learn to do things by herself.

A wise parent of a child who is learning independence will give the child many opportunities to make decisions. "Would you like me to tuck you into bed or would you like to climb in by yourself?" "Would you rather have me read you a bed-time story or sing you a song?" "Would you like your peanut butter on bread or on celery?" "Would you like to play with the pans or with clay?"

If a child starts an activity that is not safe, it usually works better to distract the child than to yell at him or jerk something away from him.

Karl was about to write in a library book. His dad held his hand and asked him, "Would you like to draw? We don't draw in books but I can get you some paper. Or would you like to finish looking at the book?" Dad found a kind way to give Karl a choice.



We should let a child do many things for herself. But we should give her tasks where she is likely to be successful. Maybe she can help set plastic cups on the table for dinner but should not be trusted with glass plates. The wise parent will distract a child from a task where she is likely to have trouble and direct her to a task where she is likely to be successful.

When Jessie wanted to help her mother set the table, Mother was tempted to say, "You're not old enough. You'll break everything." But instead she said, "Why don't I put on the plates while you place the napkins." Then Mom showed her how to place the napkin next to the plate. They talked together while they set the table. When they were finished, Mom said, "Look how nice the table looks. Thank you for your help."

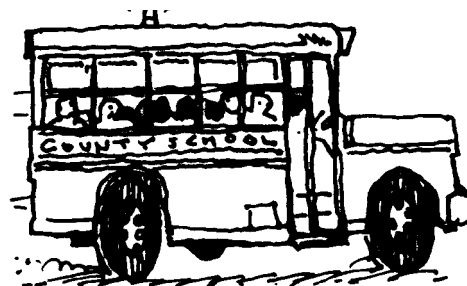
When we allow children to try things they want to do (while directing them toward jobs where they are likely to be safe and successful), they develop their skills and confidence. Often we expect children to do things that they are not yet able to do.

When Emily was four or five, she asked me to help her draw a circle. Because Emily is smart I was sure she could do it on her own. I told her just to draw the shape of a cookie. She whimpered that she couldn't. It was just a few days later that I read that children usually can't draw a full circle until they are five or six.

It's good to be patient with our children as they learn.

Children often face challenges that they don't know how to handle. We can help them by being patient and, when they are ready, by teaching them skills.

Mary came home angry. She told her mother that the children at the bus stop picked on her. She also admitted that she got mad at them and called them names. Mother felt angry at the mean children. But she decided that the best way to help her daughter was to teach her how to deal with the children. After Mary had talked about her bad experience, Mom said: "It's very painful when people are mean to us. I wonder if we can think of ways to make them into friends." They talked about different ideas and decided to invite one of the children over to play with Mary on Saturday. Mary could develop a friendship and maybe walk to the bus stop with her new friend.



When parents reason with their children, they can help them think of good solutions. Parents can also teach their children skills to deal with difficult situations. (See also Extension Circular HE-682 in this series, "Being Understanding: A Key To Developing Healthy Children," for ideas on how to help children deal with their feelings.)

There are a few things that all children need. All children need to feel safe and protected. All children need encouragement.

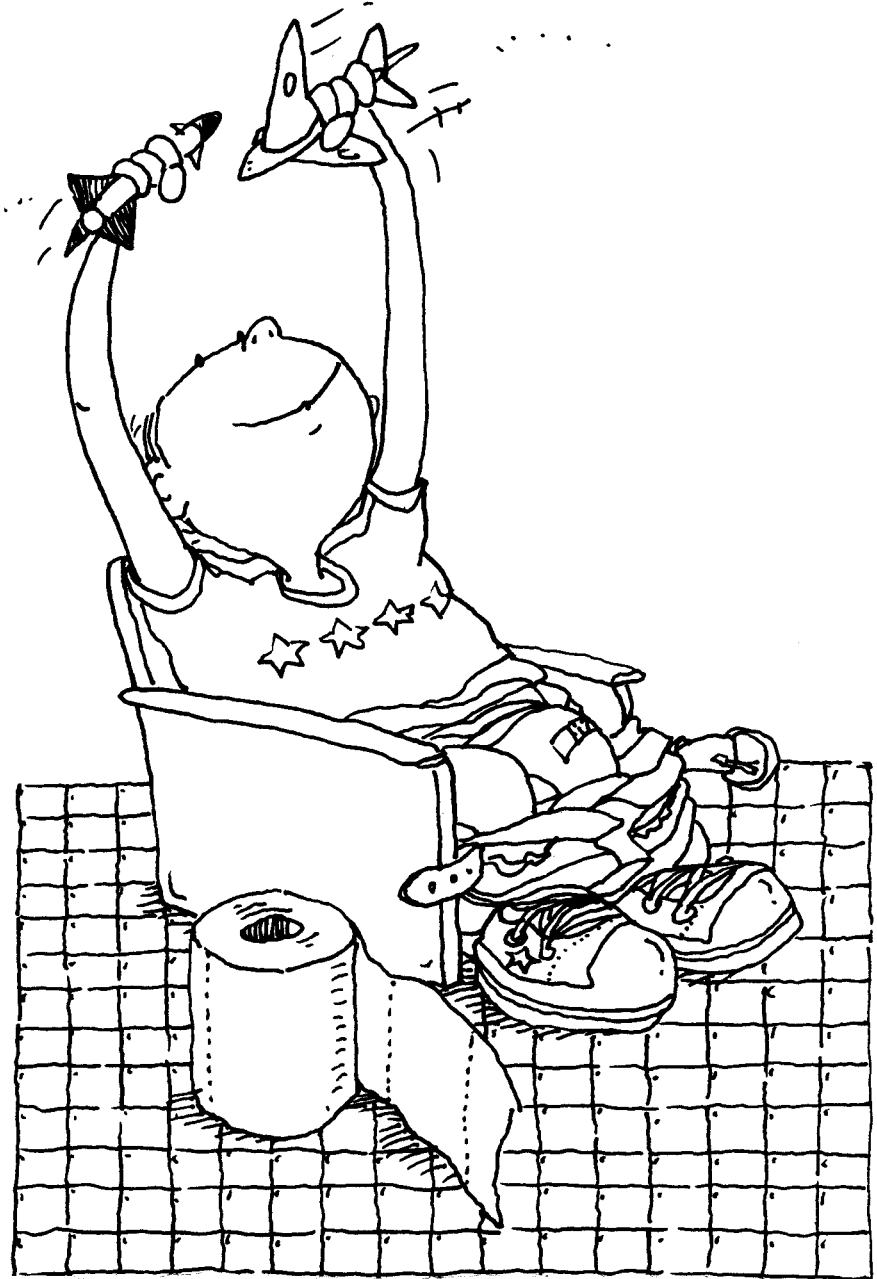
Sometimes we think that our children know that we are proud of them. Often they do not. We should tell them often about the things they do that we enjoy. They need to know that we appreciate them and care about them.

Each child is different.

You have probably heard a parent brag that his child began to walk early. Some parents may believe that a child who begins to walk at 8 months is more talented and smarter than a child who begins to walk at 12 months. The fact is that children are just different. The child who begins walking later may grow up to be a better athlete than the child who starts to walk at a younger age.

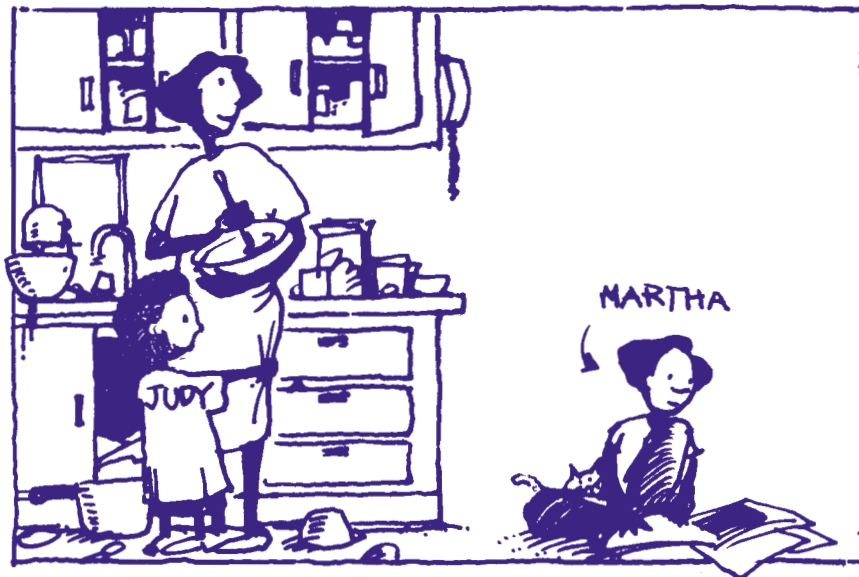
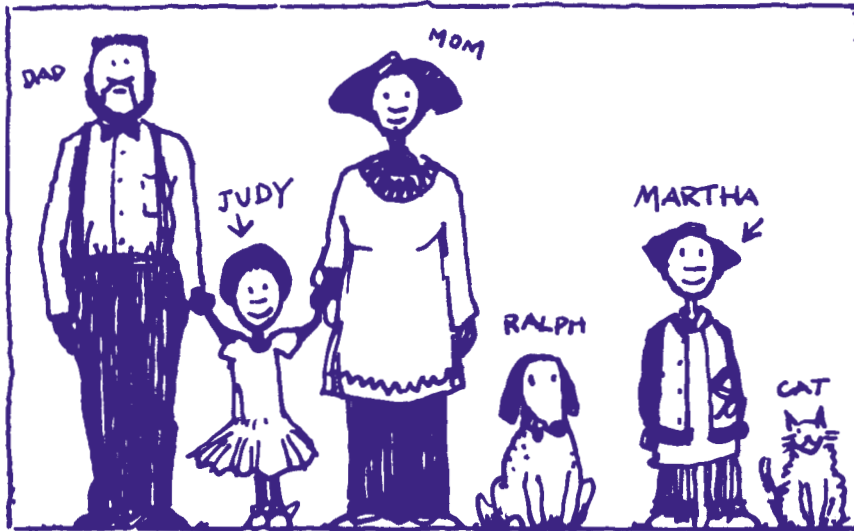
No two children are the same. It is unwise to rush children in their development or to try to get them to be like some other child. The helpful parent will help children develop as they are ready.

We expected our son to be toilet trained as young as his sister had been. But the more we pressured him the worse he did. We finally relaxed and allowed him to decide when he was ready. It wasn't long before he was ready, and he learned very quickly.



Someone once said that every child wears a banner. On that banner she tells you how much love she needs, how much discipline she needs, how much hugging she needs, how much attention she needs. Unfortunately, children do not have a banner that is easily read. We have to "read" their behavior.

Judy has always wanted more of our attention than her sister Martha. We assumed that she would outgrow it. She has not. We finally realized that she is just different from her sister. Martha is very independent. Judy likes attention from her parents. So we allow Martha her independence. And we take extra time with Judy.



No two children are the same. We should treat each as an individual, observe and respect her differences, and help her grow. With a child who is very sensitive we may need to give messages in a gentle way. A child who is easily distracted may need us to give undivided attention when we talk to him. If we notice each child's individual differences, we can be more helpful.

Children are different at different times.

Emily normally has a pleasant, cheerful disposition. But many days at dinner time she becomes cross and cranky. We finally realized that by dinner time little Emily was tired and hungry. We have learned to get her a snack in the afternoon and, at dinnertime, not to fuss with her. We get her started on dinner right away so that her blood sugar will pick up.



When our child acts cross, we may not realize that she has had a bad day. Maybe a friend was mean to her. Maybe she felt like a failure at school. If we get mad about her bad mood, we may make it worse.

What can we do? We can take time to understand what our child is feeling. We can also look for a sensible solution, as in the story above about Emily.

Get more information when you need it.

There will probably be times when your child does things that you do not understand. At such times it may be a good idea to talk to a friend who is an experienced (and caring) parent, a doctor, or a counselor. It is also a good idea for every parent to take a class or read a good book on child development. Your community college may offer a class.

Dr. Spock's Baby And Child Care is a good book to help you learn how to deal with children's physical needs. Additional books on parenting are listed below. Also the other publications in this series can give you many ideas about how to show understanding with your children. See especially the one mentioned earlier, HE-682, "Being Understanding: A Key To Developing Healthy Children."

There are a few things to remember about meetings children's needs:

- All children need certain things: safety, encouragement, and love.
- Each child is different from any other. We should pay attention to his or her behavior so that we know how much attention, discipline, and guidance each child needs.
- We should be careful not to expect our children to be able to

do things that they are not old enough to be able to do.

- As we deal with our children we should make allowances for the challenges they face.
- Responding promptly and helpfully to children helps them develop into healthy adults.
- Being patient with our children shows them that we care.
- Our children need us to teach them how to handle difficult situations.

If you want to learn more . . .

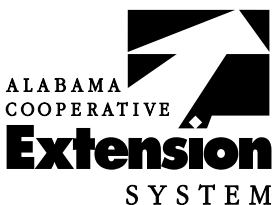
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HE-685

This publication was written by H. Wallace Goddard, *Extension Family and Child Development Specialist*, Associate Professor, Family and Child Development, Auburn University

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Nothing Matters Like Love

A parent's love gives a child the hope and energy to grow. Nothing is as important for human development as love. This is true not only in the first months of life but also into childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Sometimes parents focus most of their parenting energy on correcting and disciplining their children. These activities can take over the relationship between parent and child. Unfortunately, when a child does not feel loved, he or she is more likely to misbehave. A child who is loved is more likely to develop into a healthy, caring adult.

Make time for love. If we don't plan to take time for our children we may be bothered by the demands they make on us. Effective parents set aside some things in their lives to make time for their children. They use some of the time to do fun things with their children such as playing, talking, cooking, and telling stories. They also expect to be interrupted in their daily activities to help and be with their children.

A parent who is effective at loving, tries to **prevent problems**. For example, a wise parent childproofs the house in order to minimize the need for scolding. A loving parent notices when a child is hungry or tired and helps them adapt - maybe by providing a snack or some peaceful time together. Rather than wait until a child is doing something wrong and then getting mad, the effective parent helps a child have many fun and safe experiences. **The effective parent notices the good things the child does and communicates affection to the child.**

Loving involves listening and understanding. While it is true that parents often know much more about many things than their children, it is only when we listen patiently and with compassion that children discover that their feelings and ideas matter to others. Understanding is so important (and so difficult for most of us) that we offer a special unit on it, "Empathy and Understanding Help Children."

Effective loving also involves **customizing messages of love** for each child. Children like to be loved in different ways. Some like to be shown love; some like to be told; some like to be hugged. Each of these different languages of love is discussed in a separate unit.

Sometimes one child may be especially difficult. It may be because of a sensitive temperament or it may be that the child is merely different from the parent. The effective parent tries to find ways to help each child individually even if the child is difficult.

Love is more than a feeling; there are times when we don't feel very loving toward our children. Love is a commitment to be with, understand and support the development of another human being. Love makes all the difference.

Applications:

Make time for love.

What are some of the things that each of your children likes to do with you? Read? Play games? Sports? Shop? Talk? Art? Crafts? Biking? Find something that you and each of your children enjoy doing together and make regular "dates" for this time together.

Prevent problems.

Be sure there are places in your home where the children can have fun. You may provide a playroom or allow them to use the kitchen or your yard. Children should have times when they can play and make messes.

Are there certain times of day that you have lots of challenges with your children? How can you prevent such problems? For a child who is slow getting ready for school it may be helpful to pick out clothes the night before. If your children tease each other in the after-school hours you may want to help them get busy with separate activities. If your children get cranky before dinner you may want to provide a healthy snack right after school. If you cannot think of solutions for the problems you commonly face, you might ask for ideas from parents you know who are both kind and wise.

Loving involves listening and understanding.

When your child tells you about a problem, especially when the child has strong feelings, what is your usual reaction? Try noticing the child's feelings at such times and see if you can help the child identify what he or she is feeling. "You seem to feel (embarrassed, hurt, lonely, angry, frustrated, sad, afraid, etc.)." Let the child talk about those feelings. Often a child can work out problems without our help if we merely help them clarify what they are feeling.

Customize your messages of love.

Think about each of your children and the way he or she likes you to show love and affection for him or her. Find ways to show love to each child in a way that child prefers. [See the units on languages of love for more information on customizing messages of love.]

Help each child individually.

Do you have a child who is especially difficult for you? Maybe the child is very cranky or very stubborn. Can you think of a way of describing those qualities that emphasize the strengths? For instance a "cranky" child can be thought of as sensitive. A "stubborn" child might be thought of as strong, resilient, or determined. Find positive ways to think about your children's difficulties. Think of ways of responding that work with rather than against the child's nature.

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Setting Limits

The most important thing that parents do for children is to love them. The second most important thing parents do for children's long-term well-being is probably to set and enforce reasonable limits. (See the unit on spoiling.) When parents are effective in setting limits they teach children to respect the rules and laws that govern well-being.

Sometimes parents annoy their children with lots of pesky commands: "Don't touch that." "Leave that alone." "Don't do that." "Come here." "I told you not to do that!" There are two problems with this approach: The talk is all negative - about things NOT to be done. The second problem is that lots of little rules are hard to enforce; when we do not consistently enforce the rules we make with our children, they conclude that they do not have to take any of our commands seriously. That can have dangerous consequences.

Be careful about the rules you make. Don't make a rule unless you think it is worth your time and effort to enforce it. You may decide to let less important things slide. For example, you may decide that you don't care if your child wears striped pants with a plaid shirt, has a crazy hairdo, or listens to rap. But you may decide that rules about TV watching and joining the family for dinner are important enough to you that you will enforce them consistently

Make rules that are sensitive to children's needs. Children like to feel safe, be busy, and be involved. They may be able to sit still on a car trip or in a meeting if we provide a quiet book or activities for them. They may be able to help in the grocery store if we talk with them, let them handle safe things and even involve them in making some choices. Sometimes children "misbehave" simply because we are asking them to do things that are difficult or impossible for them.

When you have made a rule, enforce it. For example, if a child is picking at a cake before a birthday party begins, a parent may decide, "I want her to leave that cake alone until we sing 'Happy Birthday' and cut it for everyone." If you think that rule is important, act in ways that win cooperation. If you merely ignore a child's misbehavior, you send the message that you do not really care about the rule.

If you leave the child staring at the cake, you are fighting an uphill battle. The child is likely to go for the cake and we are likely to get angry. It is better to prevent problems than to treat them. There are many positive ways to help a child obey. **Win cooperation through positive approaches.** Move the cake. Get the child busy. Provide an alternative treat to hold her over. If the child is very persistent, we may have to guide her to her room until she is ready to work within the rule.

Every child will break some rules some time. When children make mistakes, **we can help them learn better ways.** Use timeouts and consequences to teach them. Teaching is different from punishing. Punishing just makes children sorry. Teaching works with the child to help them learn better ways of living and acting.

Applications:

What are some rules you often make and rarely enforce?

Which of them do you not really care about? You can always say to your children, "I have been thinking about our rules and have decided that some of them are less important. I am not going to worry so much about (your socks being put in the hamper every night or . . .)."

Which rules do you think are important? Let your children know that you are renewing your commitment to enforce the rules.

Are there some important rules that your children have a hard time obeying? What can you do to set your children up for success - to help them obey those rules?

Sometimes the rule is really the parent's problem. For example, if I don't like things left on the sofa, rather than demand that they put things away, I can simply take anything that is left on the sofa and put it on the child's bed. I don't have to be angry or demanding. I can solve my own problem without irritating the children.

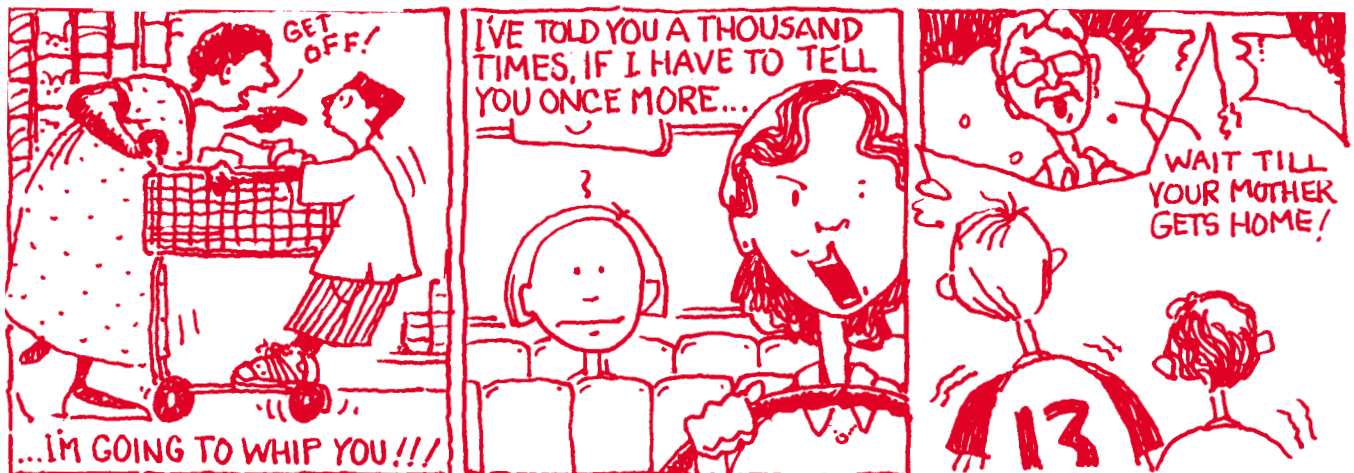
What is a reasonable consequence if your child does not obey the rule? Plan ahead how you will respond so that you are prepared.

PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Something Better Than Punishment

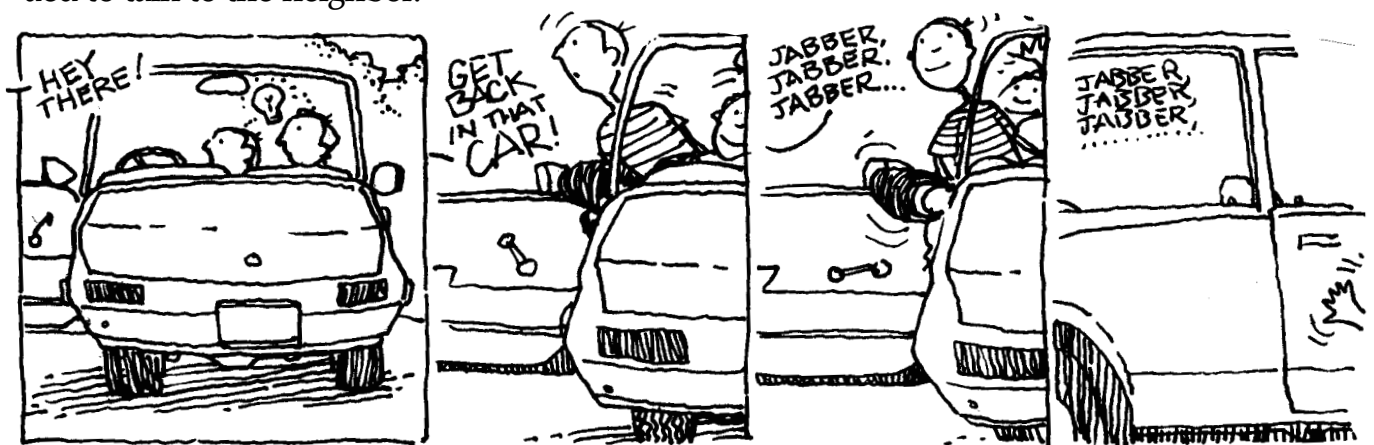
When we think of discipline, we may think of threats and punishment. They may be the most common ways that parents deal with their children's misbehavior.

What is wrong with threats and punishment? One thing that is wrong with them is that they teach children bad things. Can you think of some bad things that are taught to children by the use of threats and punishment?



Consider threats. It is common for parents to get frustrated with their children and yell at them. "If you do that one more time I'm going to whip you, young man!" "I've told you a thousand times. If I have to tell you once more. . . ." Threats are bad because they insult children. They are likely to make the child feel dumb and put-down. The child may feel angry with the parent for treating him that way. Threats are also bad because they may tell the children that we yell a lot but we never do anything. Consider the following story.

A mother was loading her children in the car to go to the store. Just as she got them all in the car, the neighbor came over to talk to her. As the two ladies talked, the children became restless. One of the boys began to climb out the car window. The mother yelled for him to get back in the car. Then she returned to talking with the neighbor. The boy sat in the window and played. The mother yelled at him to get in the car and threatened to spank him. He sat still while his mother yelled at him, but as soon as she returned to talking, he climbed out the window onto the hood of the car. The mother continued to talk to the neighbor.



This boy did not think his mother was very serious. She yelled a lot. But she never did anything—unless she became really angry. It's common for parents to be yelling, "Don't touch that!" "Leave her alone." "Go away." Using threats may teach children that parents are unkind and that they don't mean what they say.

There are also problems with punishment. Sometimes parents punish because they are angry. They may spank their children in anger. What does spanking teach a child? For many children it teaches that the world is a cruel place. It may also teach them that parents are mean. It may teach them that it is all right for big people to hurt little people. Those are not the things we want to teach our children. The most effective parents rarely or never use spanking.

When a parent spanks a child for bad behavior, the parent may think that making the child suffer teaches him or her not to do bad things. What it usually teaches

the child is to feel angry or unsafe. Or it may teach the child not to do bad things when the parent is around. But it does not teach the child to be helpful or to have self-control or to feel safe.

There is something better than making children suffer. It is teaching. We want to teach our children that rules are important, that people can work together and solve problems without using physical means.

Teaching is more than talking. It includes how we act. In this publication are some ideas to help you more effectively teach children respect for rules. You can use these suggestions to find better ways to discipline your children—ways to be sure you are helping, never harming your children. You can help your children develop into strong, caring people you will be proud of.

Be careful about the rules you make.

Sometimes parents make too many rules. For instance, the lady who yelled at her children to stay in the car while she talked to the neighbor might have been wiser to talk to the neighbor later, or to give the children something to do while she talked, or to let the children play for a few minutes on the lawn until she was really ready to go. Those would have been better rules than just asking the children to sit still while she talked.

Another place where parents have trouble is the grocery store. Sometimes parents (and children) are tired and frustrated as they enter the store. Mom may ask her one-year-old to sit in the grocery cart, be quiet, and not touch anything while she shops. Is that reasonable? Or would it be more reasonable to give the child a toy to play with, or to talk with the child, or let the child hold purchases that will not get broken as she sits in the cart? The child may enjoy holding the broccoli and talking about it as mother selects other purchases. An older child may be sent to get the vitamin pills or corn flakes for the family.

Another example: Parents sometimes ask their children to sit quietly with nothing to do in long meetings. That may not be reasonable for a child. Maybe a child could play with a doll or look at a book or draw. Can you think of other things we ask children to do that may not be reasonable?

If we make rules that are sensitive to the children's needs, it will teach them to respect rules and to see their family's world as a safe place.

Sometimes the best rules are a result of a discussion between the parent and the child. A parent might say to the child: "I am very frustrated that you don't take care of the dishes right after dinner.

What do you suggest?" The parent and child might work on the rule together until they agree. It might be that the child should be allowed to do some chore other than dishes. It may be that their favorite television show comes on right after dinner and they should be allowed to watch television for 30 minutes before doing the dishes. If you cannot agree on a rule, the parent may have to say, "Let's go by my rule until we can think of a better one."

Emily wanted to go to a high school dance. We felt that she was too young. We proposed that she have a party with her friends at our house instead of going to the dance. She thought it was a dumb idea. But she couldn't suggest anything that she and we both felt good about. She had the party at our house. She and her friends had a great time.



Enforce rules consistently.

I remember seeing a mother tell her boy to stop picking at the cake that was on the table. But he kept picking. She kept shouting. He kept picking. She kept shouting. . . .

Maybe the mother should give the boy a piece of cake right away. Or, if the rule is important, it should be enforced.

When parents make rules they don't enforce, children get the idea that we are not serious about rules. The mother might not be wise to leave the cake on the table in view of a hungry child. But if she asks the child to leave the cake alone and he does not, she might move the cake to the cupboard and distract the child with a different activity: "Son, will you help me get out the plates, please?" If the child insists on trying to climb to the cake, then the parent either needs to get him some dinner or take him to his room.

Being consistent in enforcing rules does not mean that the parent cannot adapt to circumstances. We make allowances for tiredness, age, influence of other children, and so on. Consistency means that when we make a rule that we think is reasonable and when a child violates that rule, the child will normally experience the promised result.

One mother found that when she went to the grocery store her children would whine and cry for candy. Sometimes she would give them candy. Sometimes she would get mad. She decided to be more consistent. She made the rule that when she took a child to the grocery store she would get the child a small box of animal cookies to eat while they were in the store but she would not buy them any candy. She consistently held to the rule. The kids stopped begging for candy.

Use consequences.

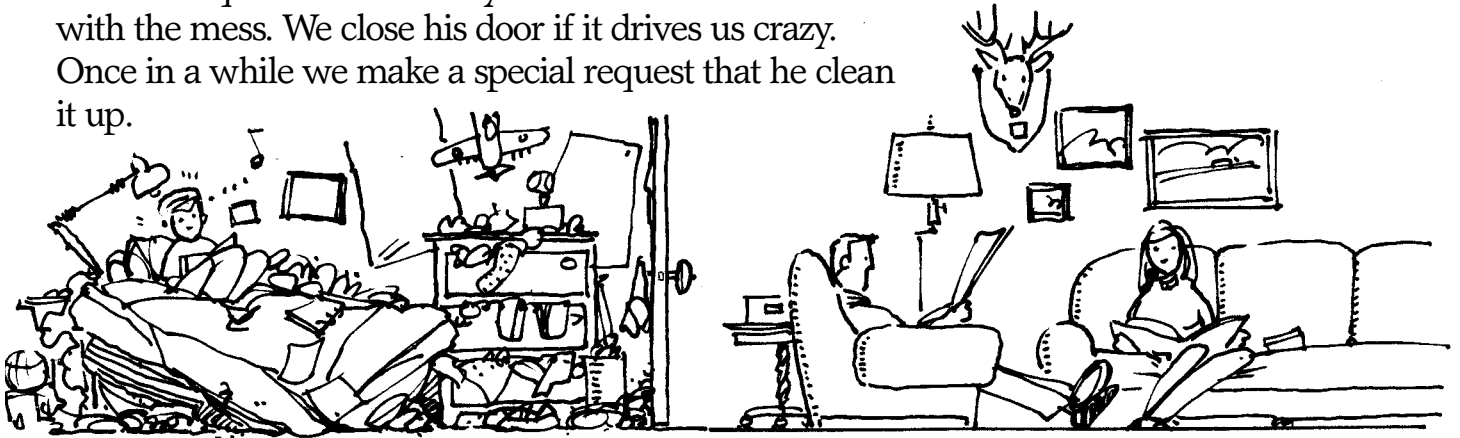
Consequences are different from punishment. Punishment hurts children. It makes them angry. Consequences teach children. They show the child that when she does certain things, certain things will happen.

Each of the children has assigned chores. If the children have not finished their chores by the time we sit down for dinner, they may not join us until the chores are finished. If they start to whine, we ask them to go to their rooms until they can get along with the family.

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WED.	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
RANDY	SUN • DISHES	• DISHES	• TUTOR JENNY MATH	• TAKE OUT TRASH	• DISHES	• LAUNDRY PICK-UP	• RAKE YARD
JENNIFER	REST	• FEED PETS	• DISHES	• SWEEP PORCH • DUST	• COOK DINNER	• DISHES	
SARA	• BATHE PETS		• CLEAN ROOM	• CLEAN CLOSET	• PICK-UP CLOTHES/TOYS		PLAY

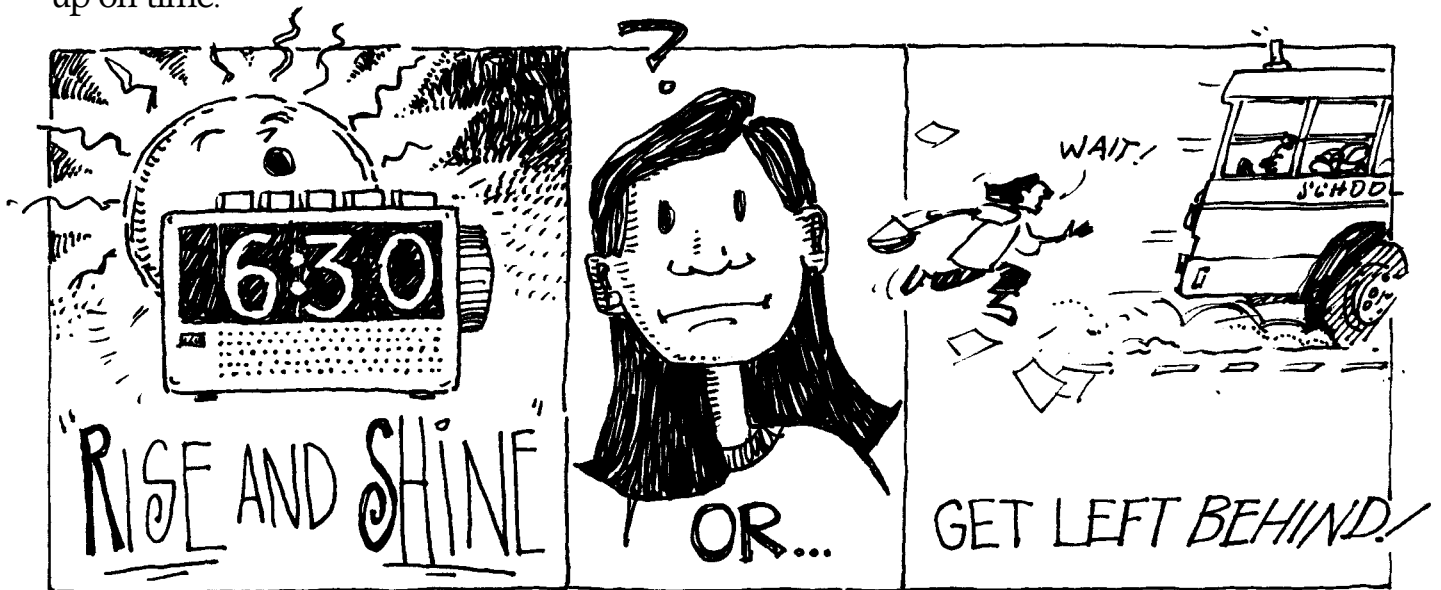
Consequences must not be used when a child is in danger. It is not appropriate to teach children the dangers of a hot stove or of busy traffic by allowing them to touch the stove or wander into traffic. But in many things we allow our children choices.

We like our children to have clean rooms. Our son likes a messy room. We finally decided that the reasonable consequence for a messy room is for him to live with the mess. We close his door if it drives us crazy. Once in a while we make a special request that he clean it up.



Using consequences can take a lot of wisdom. The objective is to allow children to see how their choices affect their lives. "Consequences" should not be used to punish.

Beth had a hard time getting up on time for school. We were always shouting at her and threatening her. Finally we bought her an alarm clock and told her that if she missed the bus she would be walking to school. She almost immediately became very good at getting herself up on time.



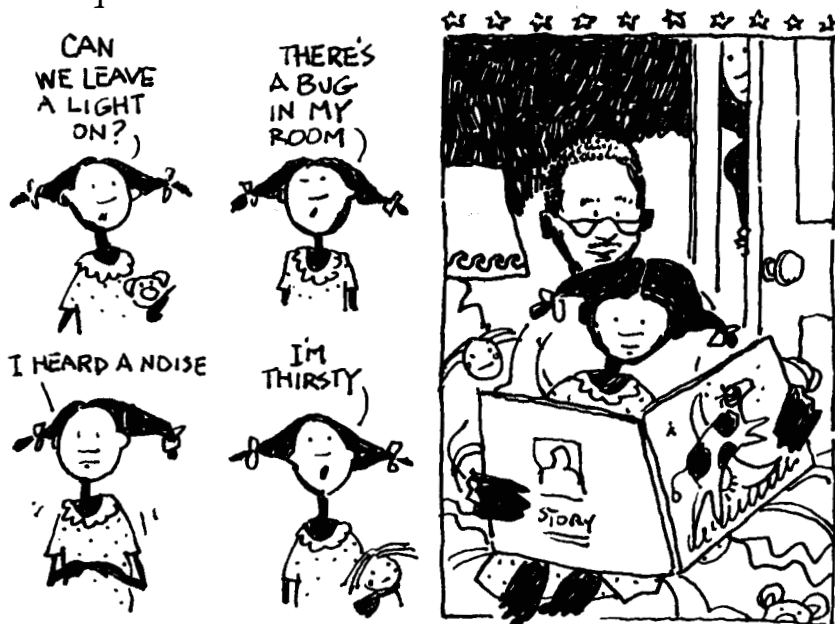
Learning to use consequences effectively is very difficult. Think of problems you often have with your children. Can you think of appropriate consequences for them that teach them the importance of following the rule? Are the consequences that you have chosen a natural and reasonable result of their choices? Do the consequences allow you to avoid nagging and punishing? Learning how to use natural consequences may be one of the most important skills that parents can learn.

Give children real choices.

If a child kicks the puppy, we can offer the child a choice: "We don't kick dogs. Would you like to kick a ball or play with the puppy? Either choice is fine."

Sometimes children resist us because we try to force them to do things. When we do not give them choices they are more likely to rebel.

We used to have trouble getting Sara to go to bed. It helped to give her a choice. We asked, "Would you like Daddy to tuck you in or would you like Mommy to tuck you in?" or "Would you like to pick a storybook for me to read to you, or would you like me to pick one?" If she said that she did not want to go to bed, we repeated the same question.



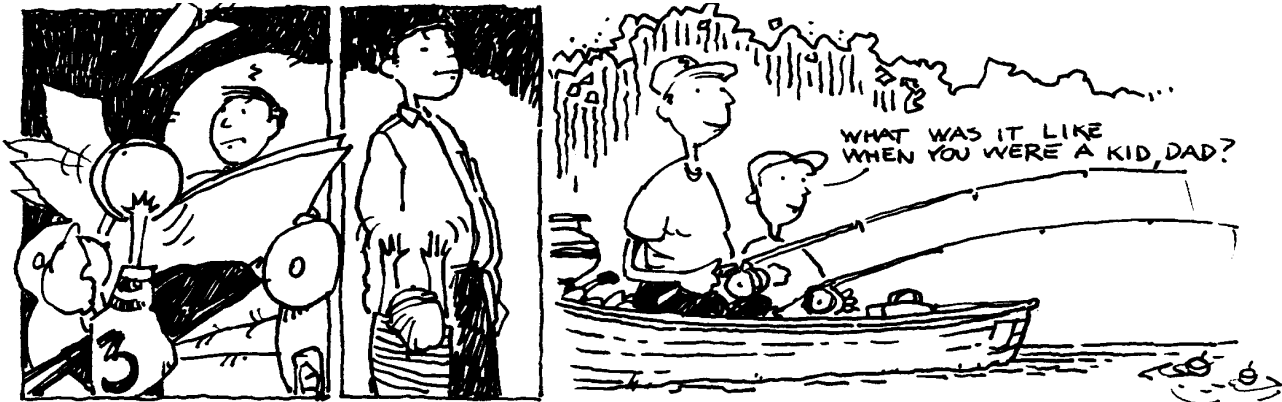
We should give children choices only when we feel that either choice is acceptable. We do not let a small child decide to play with knives or do something dangerous.

Keep it positive.

Sometimes children act up because they want us to notice them. They are especially likely to act up for attention if it seems that acting up is the only way they can get attention.

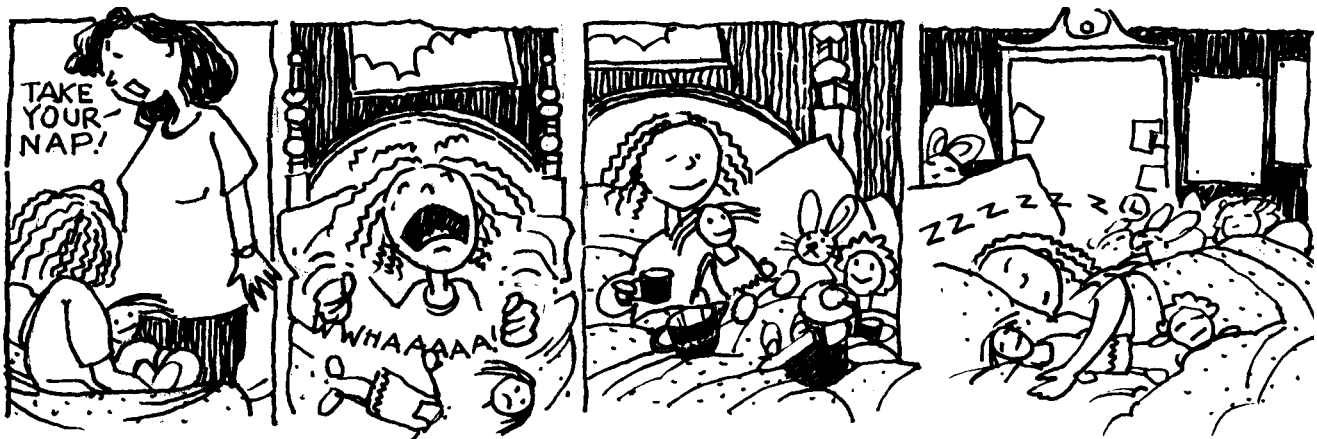


Tommy was always whining and pulling on his dad's pantleg. The dad would get angry because it seemed that his little boy always wanted his attention. One day he decided to take more time for his son. When his son would pull on his pantleg he would pick him up and talk to him, take a walk with him, or play a game with him. He found that his son whined far less.



Sometimes we get so caught up in enforcing our rules that we start to use force.

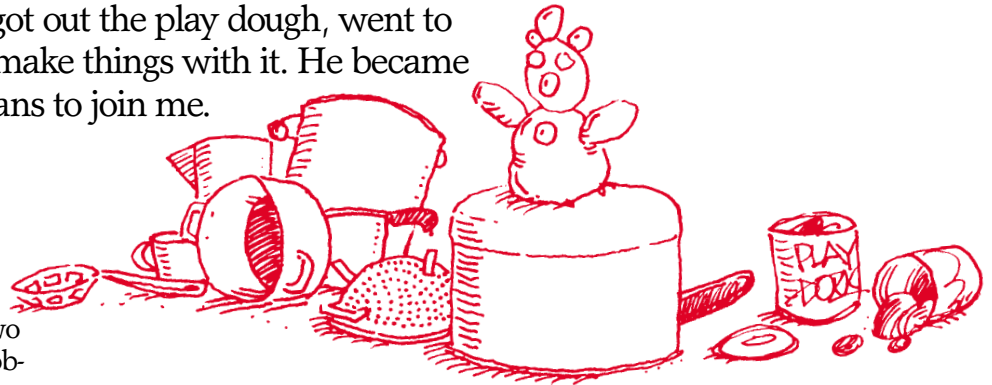
Gwen could not get Melissa to take her nap. Sometimes she would yell at her or lock her in her room to get her to take a nap. But that only made Melissa angry. Gwen felt bad about the conflict she and her daughter were having about naps. Gwen found that she could read Melissa a story or start her watching a movie on television. Melissa would fall asleep without any battle. Or Gwen could ask her to play quietly on her bed during rest time.



This wise mother learned how to get her daughter to get a rest without fighting with her. A mother should also be sensitive to the age at which a child no longer needs to take a nap.

Distracting a child can also be a very useful way to redirect the child.

Tommy was playing on the floor with the pans, making a lot of noise. Normally I can stand the noise. But one day it was driving me crazy. Rather than jerk the pans away from him, I got out the play dough, went to the table and started to make things with it. He became interested and left the pans to join me.



Behavior problems with children can be divided into two groups: the once-in-a-while problem and the frequent problem. Once-in-a-while problems can be dealt with by using the five suggestions in this publication. If your child has a frequent behavior problem that you cannot control with these ideas and seems to get worse in spite of all your efforts, you should talk to a counselor. It is wise to get help before a problem becomes a relationship problem.

To teach our children to behave well we must work at it. We can learn to make reasonable rules, enforce them consistently, use consequences appropriately, teach children to make good choices, and keep the relationship positive. Because parenting is so challenging we should continue looking for better ideas for handling our children by talking to effective parents and reading about parenting. It is worth all the effort to develop loving relationships with our children while teaching them to become strong, caring adults.

If you want to learn more . . .

- Faber, Adele, and Mazlish, Elaine (1980). *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York: Avon.
- Ginott, Haim (1956). *Between Parent And Child*. New York: Avon.
- Ginott, Haim (1969). *Between Parent And Teen*. New York: Avon.



HE-687

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The Emotional Ties between Parents and Children

The feeling that binds us to the significant people in our lives is called "attachment." The term "attach" means to tie, to fasten, or to connect one thing to another. If one car was being towed by another, we might hope the connecting rope or the "attachment" is strong enough to meet the challenge. Each thread adds to the overall strength of the rope. Though individually insignificant, hundreds of threads woven together can create a rope that is nearly unbreakable.

The attachment relationship between parent and child is much like a rope. Each positive interaction between parent and child adds a new thread and strengthens the overall emotional connection.

Attachment is a two-way process. It is important to think of parents being connected to children as well as children being connected to parents.

When children are emotionally attached to individuals who care for them, they receive valuable support that helps them grow and develop. Children with healthy attachments are more likely to explore and take healthy risks. Through their relationships they learn about right and wrong. They learn how to interpret their experiences. They learn social skills that help them maintain existing relationships and develop new ones. And they learn to be both self-reliant and to work well with others. In short, they develop a variety of skills that are not easily learned through direct instruction. Social and emotional lessons are best learned through relationships.

Infancy is the ideal time to develop a healthy attachment. Because infants depend on others to fulfill their needs, there are many opportunities for adults to emotionally invest themselves in the relationship as they care for them. Changing diapers, feeding, bathing, rocking, and soothing all help infants develop trust and commitment. Babies' cute looks, subtle smiles, and baby fat seem almost designed to keep adults close and involved. It is in the act of caring that attachment is born.

Children have the capacity to develop healthy attachments with adults other than the parents without interfering with the parent-child attachment. In fact, a healthy attachment with a child care provider can enhance the attachment between parent and child. Just as the skills we learn at work may help us at home, so to may the social-emotional competencies learned with caring child-care providers benefit the parent-child relationship at home.

Although attachment begins in early childhood, the relationships with those closest to us remain important throughout our lives. One of the early researchers of attachment, John Bowlby, made the observation that, "All of us, from cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from a secure base provided by our attachment figure(s)."

Applications:

Parents and caring adults can do many things to strengthen attachment with children. Here are a few:

1. Take care of yourself. It is difficult to reach out and nurture the relationship with our child if we're overwhelmed with personal problems. At times, our focus on personal problems may cause us to turn inward. Parents who are depressed, isolated, or having marital problems are more likely to have problems forming a healthy attachment. If you have a case of the blues that does not go away, get help.

2. Follow your child's lead. Every relationship is a dance. When one moves, the other follows. The best dancers learn to identify and respond to subtle cues from their partner. The same applies in relationships. When a child smiles with excitement, smile back with the same enthusiasm. When your child expresses feelings of hurt, respond to the emotional pain with sympathy and care. As you respond attentively to your child's behaviors, your child will also learn to respond appropriately to others.

3. Be sensitive to your child's needs. In infancy, children often express their needs by crying. They may cry when they are hungry, tired, need a diaper change, or simply need to be comforted. It is difficult to be too attentive to children in infancy. As children grow older, identifying needs may be more challenging. Understanding child development in general, and your child's development in particular, will help you be sensitive without spoiling (see unit on spoiling in this series).

4. Spend time playing with your child. Nothing says love like the time shared with your child. Make time to play together, read together, work together, learn together, and snuggle together. Simply spend lots of time together. Planned quality time is important, but it is often during walks, car trips, or other unplanned moments that children open up and reveal their innermost needs and concerns. The importance of quantity time should not be dismissed. As one person put it, "The key to being an effective parent is to be a good person and then hang around your kids long enough that you rub off on them."

Recommended Reading

"*Love, Your Forever*" by Robert Munsch. A story of a mother's continuing love for her son as he grows from infancy to adulthood.

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The Power of Distraction

Distraction can be a very useful tool. When I am already full and find myself tempted to eat a large quantity of additional chocolate, I try to get myself busy with something else. I also put the chocolate away. We can use the same principle with children.

Distraction is generally better than confrontation. Rather than yell at a child for playing with forbidden objects, we can provide them with safe and interesting alternative toys. And we can put the forbidden objects where they are not a temptation to children. Making their world safe and interesting for them is the heart of child proofing.

For distraction to work well, the child must be drawn toward something interesting. For example, if a child reaches for a sharp knife, dad might offer the child a spoon or rubber scraper or wire whip. As children get older they will be less easily distracted. There are times when a parent must say, "Not for touching." Such limits will be most effective when offered with firmness but also with an invitation to other activities.

Effective distraction often requires an investment of time. It does not take much time to grab a rubber scraper and offer it to a child. But sometimes a child needs a new place to explore. Sometimes it may be necessary to take a walk or go to the park in order to give your child something new to do. Creativity can also help. If you are tired of your child banging the pans, you might get out some brightly colored play dough and cookie cutters. Your child is likely to be drawn to the new opportunity.

Distraction works somewhat differently as children get older. We hope that children will increasingly learn how to distract themselves, but they may need our help right into adulthood. For example, a school-age child may feel that a certain scooter (or shoes or CD) is essential to her happiness. She is not likely to be easily distracted. You might encourage the child to find a picture of the desired scooter in a catalogue. You might also encourage the child to consider other things that might be bought with the same amount of money. Pictures of those alternatives can be taped alongside a picture of the scooter. Encourage the child to set aside a final decision for a few days - or a week - or a month. Put the pictures in a drawer and wait a while. See if she feels the same after some time has passed. It may help the child to know that the choice is still there for her to make. (Older children and teens do not like their choices taken away from them!) When she returns to the decision, encourage her to think about whether the scooter will still be important to her in a year. The objective of this process is not to make the child crazy with delays but to help the child learn to make decisions with a bigger picture in mind. If at some point she determines that she must have the scooter and if she has the money, then she may make the purchase.

It can also be helpful to teach teens (and adults) to distract themselves from negative thinking. Some psychologists say that dwelling on bad experiences can make us sick. Especially at times when we are lonely or tired, we may need to know how to point ourselves toward better days and higher purposes in our lives. It may help us to recite favorite poems or sing favorite songs. We do well to know how to set troubles aside and to frame good experiences and hang them in the gallery of our minds.

Applications:

Are there things that you are always having to take away from your child? Is there some way to childproof your house so that you do not have to be at odds as often?

It is not the number of toys that determines a child's enjoyment. In fact some parents may find that having a few toys available and keeping others in storage is better for their child as they rotate through the toys. The toys do not have to be expensive. Boxes or wood blocks may be a child's favorite toys. Many good toys can be found at thrift stores.

What are some things your children love to do? Do they have opportunities to regularly do things that are enjoyable for them? Help them find ways to learn and grow.

Martin E. P. Seligman is a psychologist who has studied the way people think about their experiences. He found that people who dwell on the pessimistic view are more likely to be depressed. Those who emphasize the positive tend to be healthier. His book, "Learned Optimism," is a very insightful book. He has also written "The Optimistic Child" which may be useful for you if you are interested in psychology.



Understanding Circumstances and Children

There are times when things are going well, we feel happy and energetic, and we gladly do the things we need to do. There are also times when we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders; we may feel tired, lonely, and unhappy. At such times it is hard to get anything done or get along with others. This is true for children as well as for adults. As parents, we may expect children to be cheerful and obedient under all circumstances. If we want to be helpful to children, we should try to be aware of what is happening in their lives. Knowing their circumstances may or may not change the expectation, but it can make sure that we are being appropriately sensitive and helpful with them. For example, when a child has had a bad day at school, we may make extra efforts to be supportive. We may hold the child or take a walk or read a story. If we have paid attention to the preferences of each child, we probably know what will be helpful for that child under those circumstances.

It is not easy to be in touch with what is happening with each child. But there are ways that help. We can notice the things they do. We can listen carefully when they tell about their days. We can notice their moods. **Over time we can develop a sense of what is normal for each of our children.** What is most important to that child? What is most painful? How can I soothe or comfort that child? How can I most effectively show support and love?

When a child is in a bad mood, it usually does not help to ask "What is wrong?" Most children will respond, "Nothing." But it can be helpful to respond to the message that their body has already given us: "It looks like you had a bad day." At that point the child feels invited but not pressured to share about his or her day. As long as the child shows signs of unhappiness, we can listen and respond without sermons. We can say supportive things like, "That is so hard."

Do we still expect children to follow the rules when they have had a bad day? Generally, yes. However, **we can make some adjustments to accommodate their challenges.** A child might still be expected to clean his room before dinner but some quiet time might be provided before the cleaning begins. Or we can help the child with the cleaning, making it a team effort.

Often we do not notice the ways that stress in our lives effects the children in our families. When we are stressed, tired, or unhappy, we send signals to our children. They are very sensitive to the moods of people around them. When we have difficulties, they may feel less safe and less loved. As a result they may be distant and anxious or they may cling to us. That is why it is important to notice our moods and their effect on our children. We can reassure them, "I'm having a hard time right now but I'll get through it. I'm glad you're my child and I'll always love you!"

When parents are sensitive to their children, it helps the children to feel safe. It also helps children develop into caring people.

Applications:

Think about each of your children. What is most important and enjoyable for each child? What is most painful? How can I best soothe or comfort each child? How can I most effectively show support and love for each?

In the last few weeks, how are things going for each of your children? What stresses might each be feeling? What special joys has each had? What stresses are you experiencing? How are they affecting your children? Are there ways you can reassure them? When a child is feeling pain, understanding from you can be especially healing.



Understanding Your Child's Uniqueness

We are not surprised when every adult has different likes and dislikes, different strengths and weaknesses, and a style all their own. But sometimes we don't think about the fact that the same is true of children. Each child has individual tastes, abilities, preferences, and style. One child may be very tender and get her feelings hurt easily. Another may take scoldings in stride. One child may be good with numbers while another prefers drawing. One child may be very gentle while another is full of energy. One child may value quiet time while another craves excitement. There are many ways in which children are different from each other! Notice your child's strengths and unique personality. Every child is good at something. Observing the things that your child loves to do gives you important clues about his or her talents. Watch for the things that each child loves to do. Appreciate their strengths. Tell them about the good you see.

Find the good in mistakes and weaknesses. No one is good at everything. Be patient with your children's individual limitations. In fact, you can think of their limitation in a positive way: The child who is stubborn has strong character. The child who cries easily may be very sensitive. The child who is "into everything" can be seen as energetic and curious. Emphasize the good in each child.

Help your child develop strengths. We can help each child find opportunities to develop. Howard Gardner says that we all have different abilities with seven different intelligences: The intelligences deal with language (good with writing or reading), logic (mathematics), music, movement (and athletics), visual (making pictures), interpersonal (understanding people), and intrapersonal (self-aware, coping). Whatever a child's interests and abilities, we can help them develop by talking about their ideas, going to libraries or museums of interest, and supporting their projects. Your child's interests are a foundation for building lifelong strengths.

We do not have talents so that we can be famous; we have talents so we can help each other. **Help your child find satisfying ways to use his or her talents.** One child might enjoy reading to a neighbor. Another child might enjoy building things. One child might enjoy tutoring other children. When we use our gifts to help others we both develop our gifts and make life better for people.

One of the most important things you will ever do as a parent will be to help your children discover their talents and find joy in developing and using them.

Applications:

There are fun ways of discovering your children's interests and talents. Notice what they collect. Notice what they like to do or study. Notice what they like to talk about. It can take a whole lifetime to determine a person's gifts, but it is a satisfying investigation.

What are some ways you can let your child know about the strengths you see in him or her?

Do you find yourself comparing your children? It is more useful to enjoy each child's individual strengths than to compare them.

Do you have one child who is especially difficult or annoying? Try to notice the positive side of that child's abilities. For example, an "argumentative" child may be very logical. A "lazy" child may be very methodical or patient. If it helps you discover each of your child's strengths, talk with other people who see your child's strengths.

Be sure that each of your children spends time with people who love him or her. You may have a daughter who is encouraged by her 4-H leader. You may have a son who is challenged and supported by an uncle. Teachers and ministers can also help. In addition to providing your own support, help your children develop a network of caring adults.

Help your children use their talents in service. Service is a very important way of helping people learn to feel connected to other people. What can each of your children do that uses their talents and makes life better for people? Of course it does no good to force children to work for others. But most children will gladly help others when they can see ways to be helpful.



Using Consequences to Help Children Learn

The trouble with punishing children is that its main purpose is to make them suffer. Suffering by itself is not a very good teacher. In fact, suffering is useless unless we learn from it. The object of discipline for children should be to teach. We want our children to become wiser and better. One of the best ways to teach children about the importance of obedience is the use of consequences. Consequences are intended to teach children rather than to punish them.

The best consequences are those that are a natural or logical result of a child's choices. For example, if a child fails to put away clothes, the natural result may be for the clothes to become wrinkled and not get laundered. If the clothes are left in a place that bothers others, the logical consequence may be for the offending clothes to be placed on the child's bed. If a child does not come home at the agreed-upon time for dinner, a natural consequence would be for the child to get a cold dinner. If a child has not completed chores or homework, a logical consequence would be that those things must be completed before the child can go play or watch television.

Consequences, to be effective, must be administered in a helpful way. If harsh consequences are delivered in an angry way, they really are punishment. The real test of consequences is whether they express the natural, reasonable result of the child's choices.

We can set children up for success. When, for example, a child is expected to pick up toys before going outside to play, we can help the child get started. If we do the job without the child's help, the child is not being responsible. If we coldly demand the behavior without support and encouragement, we are launching a power struggle. The best way to work with children is to use a combination of charm and encouragement that helps them get started.

There are times when consequences are not appropriate. Good sense must set limits on consequences. For example, we do not allow a child to wander out into traffic in order to learn about safety. Compassion also sets bounds for consequences. On those rare occasions when a child is overwhelmed by many demands, a parent might volunteer to wash the dishes in the child's place. If a child has had an unusually bad day, that child may need comfort more than consequences for failing to do a household chore.

Proper use of consequences is a vital skill for parents. Each parent probably has a tendency to shield and protect children too much or to demand and punish children too much. Some parents go back and forth. You may benefit from noticing your tendency. If you tend to overprotect your children, you may need to sharpen your skills at consequences. Be prepared to be friendly but firm. If your tendency is to be tough with children, you may benefit from using consequences as an expression of the lawfulness of the world without getting angry or giving unhelpful lectures. Learn to use consequences in a supportive way as a useful tool for teaching your children about the advantages of acting in the desired ways.

Applications:

It is not easy to use consequences effectively. Prepare to be more effective by thinking about problems you often have with your children.

Can you think of appropriate consequences for them that teach them the importance of behaving in the desired way?

Are the consequences you have chosen a natural and reasonable result of their choices?

Are the consequences likely to help the child understand the rule and want to obey it?

Do the consequences allow you to avoid nagging and punishing?

It is common to want to find the right consequence for a child's behavior. But there are many consequences that might work. The choice of a best consequence depends on many factors in the family. For example, if there is a child who always gets up late for school, what are some possible consequences?

One possibility is to have the child go to bed earlier. This is probably the best consequence if the child is not getting enough sleep.

One possibility is to have the child plan out the morning so that getting ready for school and eating breakfast can happen more efficiently. For example, a child might lay out clothes the night before.

One possibility is to have the child be able to do something fun if he or she gets ready on time. Maybe he could play with a favorite toy. This is the best action if the child needs something to look forward to in order to get going.

One possibility is to have the child who is slow getting ready for school have to walk to school rather than take the bus. (This is only a good idea if it is safe for the child to walk to school.)

One possibility is to buy the child an alarm clock and make the child responsible for getting ready.

The best choice is the one that helps your child get ready on time while preserving the child's dignity. As a parent you know pretty well what works for your child. Start with the choice that makes sense to you. Be willing to experiment. Ask the child for ideas. Be patient. Some things simply get better with time.



What to Do When Your Child Lies

Parents naturally get angry when their children lie. Lies undermine trust and they make us worry about defects in the child's character. What's a parent to do when a child lies?

Do not encourage lying. There are several ways parents encourage lying. One is to ask questions to which we already know the answer. For example, we might ask a child with cookie crumbs around his mouth, "Did you eat a cookie when I told you not to?" We already know the answer to our question. We would do better to say, "I am disappointed that you ate a cookie before dinner."

We also encourage lying when we are not willing to accept the truth. If your daughter blurts out, "I hate my brother!" it does not encourage emotional honesty to shout back, "You don't hate your brother! You love him!" It is both more honest and more understanding to respond: "Sometimes you feel very upset with your brother. Sometimes you wish he would leave you alone when you are playing."

There are many reasons children lie. A preschool child may find the distinction between wish and reality to be fuzzy. Even school-age children may say things that stretch the truth. For example, a child may say, "I am the fastest person in my class." We may be bothered by the exaggeration and the bragging, but it helps to understand what the statement means to the child. "It sounds like you love to run!" "You like to be fast."

Sometimes our children lie to us because they are afraid of consequences. For example, a child who does poorly on a test at school may be afraid of being in trouble at home. When the parent discovers the lie, he or she may be tempted to rage, "You not only failed a test but you lied to me about it!" Such a child then feels doubly bad. He feels dumb for failing the test and bad for lying. Those negative feelings are not likely to motivate better behavior. In contrast, a parent might say, "You must have felt very bad about that grade." "You were embarrassed." "You were afraid you would be in trouble." When a parent accepts the child's fears, it helps the child solve the problem. Rather than have to deal with a bad grade and parental anger, the child feels parent support to deal with the grade.

There is a sensible way of dealing with lies and other dishonesty: **We can combine kindness with directness.** If a child says she has returned her book to the library and we later find it in her room, it is not helpful to cross-examine the child: "Why did you lie to me? Why can't I trust you to do what you say?" There are no good answers to accusatory questions. Such questions only lead to arguing and bad feelings. We can simply say, "The book on your desk is overdue."

Children can learn over time to deal with unpleasant truths. They can learn to work with other people. They can learn to solve problems. They can learn from our example to combine honesty with kindness and respect.

Applications:

Be prepared to deal with unpleasant truths. Plan ahead what you can say. For example, if one of your children says that he hates his sister, you can be prepared to help him understand his feelings:

"You feel very upset right now!"

"You wish your sister did not get in your way when you are doing things."

"Sometimes you wish you didn't have a sister."

Being understood is very soothing for children. It helps them get past their angry feelings and on to solutions.

At some point almost every child will hide or misrepresent an unpleasant truth. If you have a child who has lied about a grade or hidden a report card, you might ask yourself how the child was feeling. What can you do to help the child feel safe and ready to solve the problem that has worried him or her?

Sometimes we may be so upset when we discover a child's lie that we need to take some time out in order to sort out our feelings. We can say to the child, "Right now I am so upset that I am not sure what to do. I need some time to sort through my feelings." It can help if we find a quiet place, breathe deeply, and try to see the situation from the child's perspective.

Example is the best teacher. Think carefully about the example of honesty that you set. Do you sometimes tell lies in order to get yourself out of a fix? Make sure that your example is a positive one. Of course there are many times when honesty must be balanced with kindness, but we avoid deliberate deception.