

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



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## **A Collaboration Between:**

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
**M Extension**



**Children's  
Trust Fund**

Missouri's Foundation For Child Abuse Prevention

*helping children soar*



**PROJECT  
LAUNCH**



*Funding provided by Missouri Department of Mental Health Project LAUNCH & Children's Trust Fund/CBCAP. Content is based on the Strengthening Families framework, developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP). The framework is intended to help increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce child abuse and neglect.*

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



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*Funding provided by Missouri Department of Mental Health Project LAUNCH & Children's Trust Fund/  
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# Strong Parents, Stable Children: *Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families*



Strong Parents, Stable Children: Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families is about promoting healthy child development and protecting and nurturing young children.

Every family experiences challenges and stress. However, even when different families face similar struggles, some cope better than others. There are many reasons why families handle stress differently, but one has to do with protective factors. Protective factors are strengths and resources that families draw upon during difficult times. Protective factors help promote optimal development by helping families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risks and challenges.

Children are at greater risk of maltreatment when families are under a lot of stress. Numerous studies have shown that protective factors can reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect. Helping professionals can help parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing their children find resources, supports, and coping strategies to help them parent effectively despite risks.

***Following are five protective factors that, when present, increase the overall well-being of children and families:***

#### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

*Families need support and services that address their needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.*

#### **Parental Resilience**

*Ability of parents to be strong and flexible when encountering difficulties, adversity, and trauma.*

#### **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

*Parents need information and strategies to support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.*

#### **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**

*Sometimes children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.*

#### **Social Connections**

*Families need to build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*

Understand that risk factors do not invariably lead to maltreatment, but rather increase the probability that these problems will arise. Although it is important to identify which risk factors are present, the more important issue is how many are present. As risk factors accumulate, the likelihood of negative outcomes increases. When we focus on building strengths and promoting positive home environments for children, we may help put children on a path to a generational cycle of protective factors instead of a cycle of risks.





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## Concrete Support in Times of Need

*It is critical for families to receive the support they need when they need it.*

Families need access to supports and services that can limit stress during tough times. Recognizing what type of help is needed and knowing where to turn is a challenge for many families, particularly during a crisis. Many families face a pileup of stressors, so a variety of services may be necessary.

Parents' ability to focus on parenting and providing necessary care for their children is directly related to targeted services they receive. When basic needs are met, families have more time and energy to focus on children's safety and well-being.

Helping parents identify and access available resources may help alleviate stress that can lead to maltreatment. Families need to know how to ask for help, they need to know and understand their rights, and many need help navigating complex service systems. Further, certain types of needs, such as treatment for mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence, might be associated with stigma and shame, which may prevent families from seeking the help they need.

Helping families identify and access concrete supports should be done in a way that helps build confidence and skills so they know where to turn in the future. Families need to know they are not alone. After families are back on their feet, they might benefit from giving back to others by volunteering for the same types of services that helped them.

## Parental Resilience

*Resilient parents are better able to cope with everyday stressors and bounce back from occasional crises and adversity.*

The way parents respond to stress is often more important than the stressor itself. No one can *eliminate* parents' stress, but how parents *cope* with stress can be managed.

Resilient parents have skills that can help them reduce their stress, which is a known risk factor for child abuse and neglect. They maintain a positive attitude, build trusting relationships, and seek help when needed. Resilient parents are also less likely to take out frustration and anger on their children.

Children whose parents are resilient can learn important skills to help them be resilient as they grow up. They are better at meeting and making friends and handle stress more appropriately than children whose parents are not as resilient.

For parents who are less resilient, even minor everyday stressors are a challenge. Add to that a pileup of stressors that is common for many families, and the risk of maltreatment increases. Even if parents are knowledgeable about parenting and child development, it is difficult to use that knowledge during tough times. Stress also spills over into other areas, including couple relationships and work productivity.

Less resilient parents need resources, support, and role models to help them be more nurturing to their children. Watch for signs of distress and offer support, and encouragement. When families trust people who are in a position to help, they will feel more comfortable and be more likely to ask for help when needed.



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## Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

*Good parenting requires an understanding of typical child development.*

Parents who know what children can and cannot do at different stages have more realistic expectations, which helps them be more patient and nurturing. We sometimes expect children to behave like little adults, but young children lack the cognitive and emotional skills necessary to know right from wrong. Sometimes observing same-aged children helps parents recognize that their children's behaviors are normal.

When parents do not know about typical development, interpret children's behaviors in a negative way, or do not know how to handle bad behaviors, they are more likely to grow frustrated and may be more likely to take that frustration out on their children.

Many people think punishment and discipline are the same, but they are very different. Punishment refers to unpleasant or painful methods to stop misbehavior. Positive discipline, on the other hand, is about teaching and guiding children so they learn to manage their emotions and make better choices in the future. Parents need to understand that even within the same family, every child is different. A parenting style or discipline technique that works with one child may not work with another. Positive discipline helps keep children safe. The more positive discipline is used, the less punishment will be necessary.

To better understand parenting and child development, parents need information that is readily available and relevant. Mentoring, advice, and practice may also be useful for some parents. Parents who experienced harsh discipline during childhood and those who have a child with behavioral or developmental problems or special needs may require additional support in this area to help them reduce their frustration and provide the help their child needs.



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## Social and Emotional Competence of Children

*Positive relationships support healthy social and emotional development*

Children's social and emotional competence is crucial to developing healthy relationships with family and peers. The quality of early care and nurturing has a long-lasting impact on how children develop. Before children learn to communicate, parents must be observant and use their best guess to respond to children's needs. When cues are misinterpreted, children and parents might become increasingly frustrated.

As children grow, so does their ability to communicate, manage their emotions and behaviors, and solve problems effectively. Parents help promote healthy social and emotional development by helping children learn how to express their feelings, self-regulate, and make friends. Children whose parents model these behaviors are better able to recognize their own and others' emotions, take others' perspectives, and differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate ways of behaving. In contrast, children who have not had these skills modeled may not feel remorse or show empathy and they may have limited language and cognitive skills, all of which might inhibit their ability to interact well with peers. Through appropriate interventions, however, these children can learn appropriate social and emotional skills and have improved outcomes.

Social and emotional development is affected by children's attachments and interaction with their environment. Parents who are attentive and provide consistent nurturing are more likely to have children with healthy social and emotional development. However, some children have developmental delays in their social and emotional development. Children who cannot express their emotions and needs through words may be at greater risk for abuse. When these delays are identified early and appropriate services are provided, children are more likely to sustain positive development.

**Protective factors are important  
for the healthy development  
of *all* families!**

## Social Connections

*Every family needs a strong, supportive network of family, friends, neighbors, and others during both good times and bad.*

All families need people who care about them and who they can turn to for advice, support, and help solving problems. Parents and caregivers who have an emotionally supportive network of family, friends, and others find it easier to care for themselves and their children. Parents who are isolated and have few social connections are at higher risk of maltreating their children.

To feel connected, secure, and confident, parents need access to emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support. These types of support help improve parents' moods, help them be more responsive to their children, improve parental satisfaction and well-being, and buffer against feelings of anxiety, anger, and depression. Children benefit from social connections as they participate in positive activities that allow them to interact with peers and build friendships.

As families build support networks and receive help from others, this encourages them to look for opportunities to give back through mutually beneficial relationships.

Another important way that social connections benefit families is they help reinforce norms about behavior and appropriate parenting, including avoiding harsh discipline and establishing realistic expectations. They also provide an opportunity for parents to see how their children are similar to or different from same-aged children.

Social isolation is a serious risk factor for child maltreatment. Families that are new to a community, new parents, and those who are recently divorced will benefit when others inform them about local programs, services, and supports.

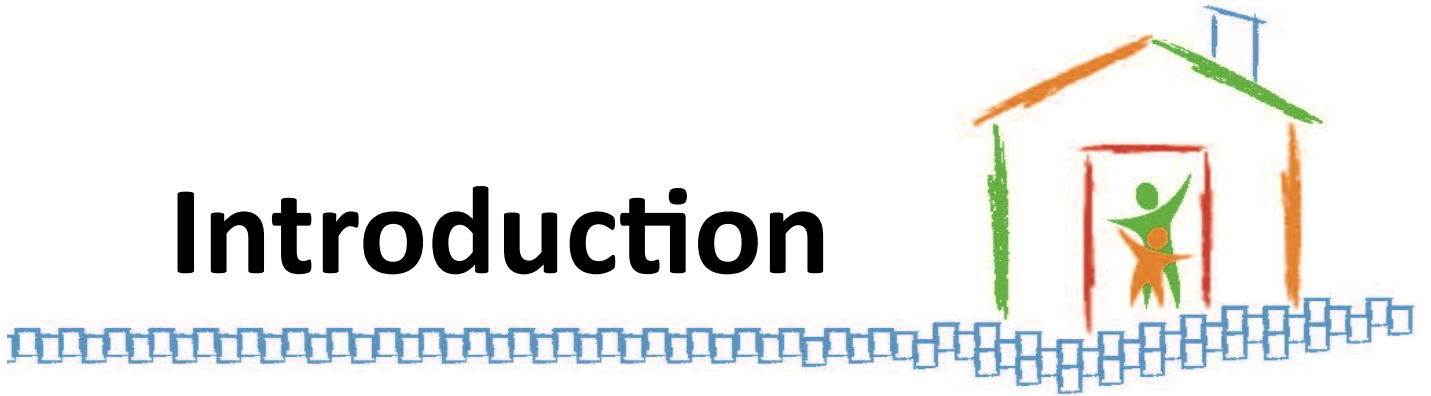
Nurturing families and helping them cope in times of need can help them build and maintain healthy relationships. Although each of your professions might be pretty different, ultimately you all want to help parents do the best for their children, to help parents be the best parents they can be, and help ensure children thrive.

Research has demonstrated that the five protective factors reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect by providing parents with the information and skills they need to parent effectively. When agencies and organizations incorporate these protective factors into programming and services, positive relationships can be established with families. If a relationship and trust have been established, it will be easier to recognize the signs of stress and help build families' protective factors during tough times thus decreasing the likelihood of maltreatment.

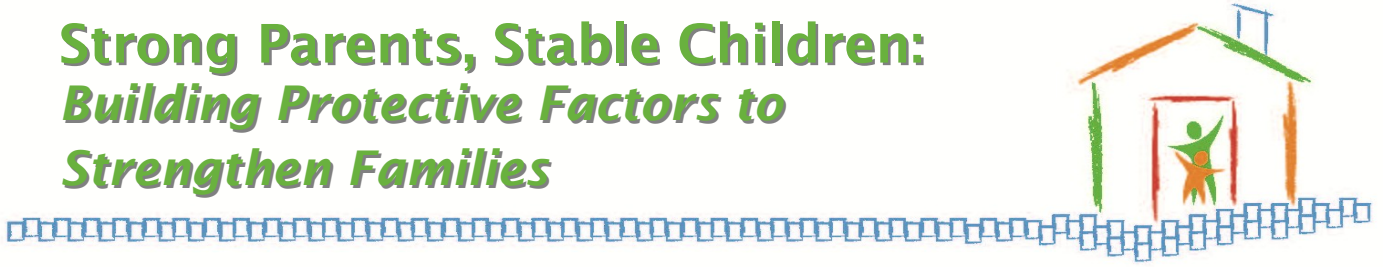


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# Introduction



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



## Ideas and Insights for Improvement – It all begins with “I”

Things **I** am doing well...

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New ideas and things **I** will try doing more of...

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Things **I** will do less of...

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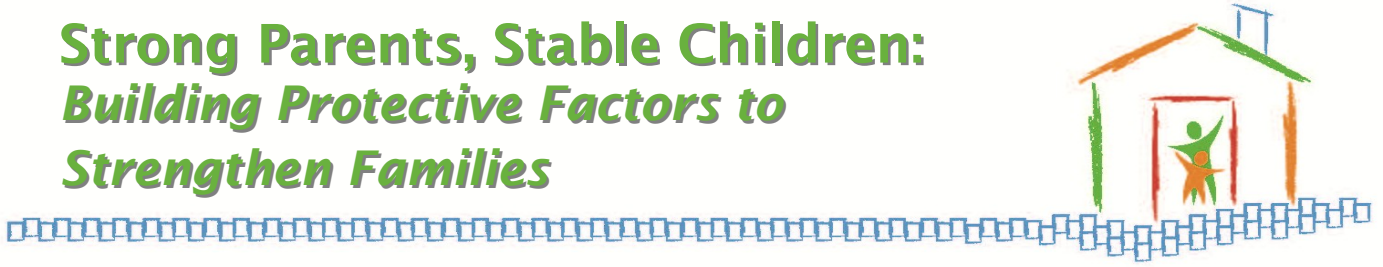
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# Strong Parents, Stable Children: *Building Protective Factors to Strengthen Families*



## Ideas and Insights for Improvement – It all begins with “I”

Things **I** am doing well...

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New ideas and things **I** will try doing more of...

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Things **I** will do less of...

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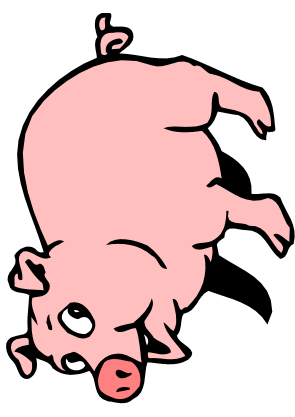
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# P.I.G.S.



## Principles for Effective Teaching

Presenter  <u>P</u> resent content, principles, and information	Learner  <u>G</u> ive learners an opportunity to explain the principle in their own words
Presenter  <u>I</u> nstance – give an example/instance/story that supports and illustrates the principle	Learner  <u>S</u> hare – learners share their own experiences and examples that relate to the principles they learned

(Adapted from David Merrill, 1994, p. 121)





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**To protect and strengthen families!**

~ Children need safe and stable homes ~



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## It Takes a Village...



- Parents and children do best when they are surrounded by caring people who can help.
  - Other parents/friends
  - Educators/child services
  - Clergy/faith-based leaders
  - Business professionals
  - Health care professionals



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## Four Assumptions



1. Most parents love their children and want a strong and healthy relationship with them.

"No parent wakes up in the morning planning to make a child's life miserable. No mother or father says, 'Today I'll yell, nag, and humiliate my child whenever possible.' On the contrary, in the morning many parents resolve, 'This is going to be a peaceful day. No yelling, no arguing, and no fighting.' Yet, in spite of good intentions, the unwanted war breaks out again. Once again we find ourselves saying things we do not mean, in a tone we do not like."

(Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*)

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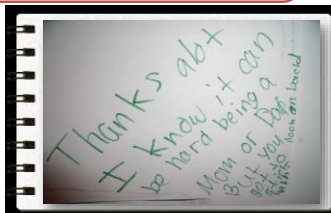
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## Four Assumptions



2. Parenting is not easy. All of us fall short when it comes to being a perfect parent. We all need compassion and forgiveness – and so do children.

We "got" to stick with it!



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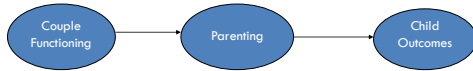
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## Four Assumptions



- Children do best when their parents have healthy relationships with their partner/previous partner – this includes co-parents, stepparents, foster parents, grandparents, etc.

Healthy couple relationships *spill over* into healthy parent-child relationships




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## Four Assumptions



- We are here because we love children and we are parents and caregivers or work with parents and families to promote positive family and child well-being. We make informed decisions that are in families' best interests. We want to be better at what we do.




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## Project Background




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## Project Background



- The purpose of the Strengthening Families framework:

- ▣ Increase family strengths
- ▣ Enhance child development
- ▣ Reduce child abuse and neglect

CENTER FOR THE STUDY  
OF SOCIAL POLICY'S

**strengthening families™**  
A PROTECTIVE FACTORS FRAMEWORK

Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP):

<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/the-basics/protective-factors>

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## Objectives – Is the purpose today to...



*Turn you into Parenting  
Ninjas!?*



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## Objectives – “Prevention by Promotion”



- ☑ Describe the 5 protective factors that help strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect.
- ☑ Understand how the 5 protective factors relate to child and family well-being.
- ☑ Recognize how you already support the development of protective factors.
- ☑ Commit to learning new strategies that may be helpful in your work.

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## P.I.G.S.

- **P**resent – Content, principles, information, tools.
- **I**nstance – Give an instance/example/story that supports the principle (or a non-example when it did not work) to illustrate the principle.
- **G**ive – Give parents an opportunity to explain the principle in their own words.
- **S**hare – Parents share their own experiences and examples that relate to the principle or information that was just learned.



Based on Component Display Theory by David Merrill (2001)

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## Binder Review – What's in this thing?



- Bookmarks and Text-tips cards
- Powerpoint slides
- Summary guidesheets of the 5 protective factors for different audiences
- Tools and guidesheets
- Additional resources
- Ideas and insights for improvement sheet

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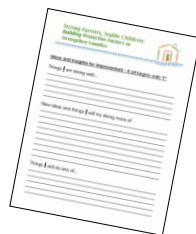
## Ideas and Insights for Improvement



Research shows people are 42% more likely to remember content and do something when they write it down.

Take notes on:

- \*what is said
- \*what you are thinking
- \*what you feel
- \*what you will do
- ...then DO it!




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## What are Protective Factors?



- Conditions and attributes that keep all families strong and help reduce or eliminate risk.
- Protective factors can be improved and strengthened so parents can be at their best!




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## What are Promotive Factors?



- Intentional activities that promote and actively improve well-being.
- Protective and Promotive factors increase the probability of positive, resilient, and healthy outcomes, even in the face of risk and adversity.




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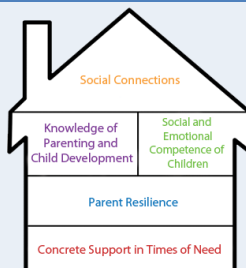
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## The Five Protective Factors



- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Parent Resilience
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children
- Social Connections



**These are important for the healthy development of ALL families!**

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



## Business Sector

### What Are Protective Factors?

When children are raised in loving and caring environments, they are more prepared for the future. Every family experiences challenges and stress from time to time, so all parents need help to raise children to their fullest potential and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment.

Even when different families face similar struggles, some cope better than others. There are many reasons why families handle stress differently, but one has to do with protective factors. Protective factors are characteristics that promote optimal development by helping families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risks and challenges.

Following are five protective factors that, when present, increase the overall well-being of children and families:

#### Concrete Support in Times of Need

*Families need support and services that address their needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.*

#### Parental Resilience

*Ability of parents to be strong and flexible when encountering difficulties, adversity, and trauma.*

#### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

*Parents need information and strategies to support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.*

#### Children's Social and Emotional Competence

*Children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.*

#### Social Connections

*Families need to build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*

Given their visibility and ability to circulate information, businesses are in a prime position to promote family strengths. Why should businesses promote family well-being? Family issues impact businesses every day. Absenteeism is an issue, but so is "presenteeism." This is when workers show up, but they are not mentally and emotionally present. Presenteeism actually contributes much more to lost productivity than absenteeism.

When businesses support families, it sends a strong message to consumers. Businesses can help address families' needs by connecting them with concrete supports that strengthen families. In turn, helping families build protective factors helps businesses develop and retain a workforce.

Is there a community-based partnership between business leaders in your area? This partnership could provide opportunities for businesses to share how they promote protective factors, both in the business and in the community. The key is not just identifying ways to help, but rather a sustained commitment to working to strengthen families.

Changes in the economy, higher workload demands, and work-family balance challenges have led to increased worker stress. Stress tends to be especially high in hospitality, retail, and other lower-wage business sectors. These employees often have high stress due to financial struggles, irregular hours, housing issues, and physical demands, which impacts all family members. Employers need to show that they support families at all times, but it is especially important to send a clear message that they support employees during crises.

On the other side of this factsheet is a list of ways businesses can help strengthen families' protective factors. Although some suggestions may be better suited to larger businesses, all organizations can identify strategies to help them contribute to strengthening families.



## **What Can Business Do to Support and Strengthen Families?**

*Businesses and employers may have an influence on several protective factors, but the biggest influence may be on Social Connections and Concrete Support in Times of Need.*

### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

- Offer employees access to community and Cooperative Extension resources in the workplace ([www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org)):
- Printed materials: Kiosks or bulletin boards with up-to-date information about local programs and activities
- Lunch and learn: Invite local groups to give talks about their programs and services
- Provide on-site or refer employees to learning opportunities on child development, parent education, healthy couple relationships, stress reduction, continuing education, and others that can support families. This information needs to be relevant to diverse family types including single parents, grandparents, foster/adoptive parents, and gay/lesbian couples.
- Be supportive of parenting and family needs (e.g., flexible scheduling or telecommuting, on-site child care, lactation room, family resource area, referral services). Invite trainers and/or consultants to visit the business and identify ways it can be more family-friendly.
- Ensure employees are aware of and know how to access outside resources and supports during emergencies (e.g. respite care, mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse, legal assistance, emergency crisis services).
- Offer on-site or recommend nearby opportunities to help employees relieve stress, such as a gym, exercise or yoga classes, and/or wellness programs.
- Provide printed materials and/or presentations about business, state, and national policies that impact employees and their families.
- Ensure appropriate staff are trained in a broad range of issues that impact families, including mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence (as perpetrator or victim), conflict management, recognizing and responding to signs of distress, and looking for signs of child abuse and neglect. If applicable, make employees aware of their responsibilities as mandated reporters.

### **Social Connections**

- Provide resources and opportunities for families to get together and engage in special activities and events (e.g., picnics, learning opportunities, family movie night).
- Distribute information about local family, educational, social, and volunteer activities and events.
- Create spaces that help promote social connections where employees can meet informally.
- Provide opportunities for employees to socialize and foster a sense of community – those with similar interests or similar life circumstances.
- Create a sense of belonging by recognizing employees for their contributions, years of service, and other achievements.
- Distribute information so employees know which departments/units/staff to turn to for help with various matters.
- Build relationships and sponsor local programs that support children, youth, and families. Encourage employees to become involved through volunteer opportunities.

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



## Educators

### What Are Protective Factors?

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Even when different families face similar struggles, some cope better than others. There are many reasons why families handle stress differently, but one has to do with protective factors. Protective factors are characteristics that promote optimal development by helping families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risks and challenges.

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#### Children's Social and Emotional Competence

*Children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.*

#### Social Connections

*Families need to build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*

Children's well-being is directly tied to family well-being. Stress in the home spills over into children's ability to concentrate and behave well in school. When stress is repeated and severe, it can have long-term negative consequences for children's development. It may impact their physical health, as well as their ability to build protective factors over time. Given their daily interaction with children and families, educators are in a unique position to notice changes in children's behaviors that may suggest unhealthy stress in the home.

Educators should believe that every parent wants the best for their children, but even great parents need help sometimes. If educators convey this message in their interaction and communication with parents, they can help parents feel valued and supported. This helps build rapport and make parents more likely to trust and look to their children's teachers when they need help.

Be proactive when you think family issues might be interfering with children's behavior and success. As mandated reporters, educators are required to intervene when child abuse and neglect are suspected; however, taking a preventive approach and continuously looking for signs of possible struggles may help prevent maltreatment.

For many parents, their interaction with child care providers is very brief, but the fact that it occurs every day means child care providers can build strong relationships with families over time. Elementary school teachers are less likely to have daily interaction with parents, but they can still maintain contact using daily or weekly reports by email or folders.

On the other side of this factsheet is a list of the many ways educators play a role in supporting and strengthening protective factors in children, families, and communities.

## **What Can Educators Do to Support and Strengthen Families?**

*Educators' unique relationship with children and families means they could have some influence on all five protective factors.*

### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

- Ensure parents can talk with staff with whom they feel most comfortable.
- Make space available for parents to meet privately with staff.
- Post up-to-date information about local programs and activities.
- Reduce stigma against needs assistance by focusing on benefits for child and family well-being.
- Create a resource book about local continuing education, job training, financial counseling, health care, housing assistance, utility assistance, and other emergency assistance.

### **Parental Resilience**

- Encourage parents to be active in decision-making concerning their children's education.
- Recognize parents' efforts and honor family contributions.
- Train staff to work with parents who have had adverse experiences and may need extra help to feel confident as parents.
- Talk about the importance of parent involvement in children's education. Discuss specific ways parents can be involved.
- Tell parents how they have a positive influence on behavior or school performance.
- Do not blame parents for children's challenging behaviors.

### **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

- Regularly share information regarding children's progress via notes, e-mails, newsletters, and phone calls. Include simple, concrete ways parents can help their children learn. Personalize contact by including a brief note about the child.
- Look for each child's strengths. Share them with parents.
- Offer learning opportunities on typical child development, parent education, healthy couple relationships, stress reduction, continuing education, and others that can support families. Information about parenting or other family concerns should be relevant to diverse families including single parents, grandparents, foster/adoptive parents, and gay/lesbian couples.

### **Children's Social and Emotional Competence**

- Help parents understand that they are their children's role models. Talk about healthy ways to deal with stress and emotions.
- Share information about teaching children social skills (e.g., sharing and being respectful) and emotional skills (e.g., using words to express feelings and emotions).
- Encourage children to use visual art as a way to express feeling and emotions.
- Set clear and consistent boundaries.
- Provide unconditional support and convey a sense of optimism about every child's future.

### **Social Connections**

- Hold family activities that encourage interaction between families; encourage fathers, grandparents, and extended family to participate.
- Provide a welcoming space where parents can talk.
- Offer classes or discussion time when parents with similar concerns can be together.
- Invite families to share skills, talents, and cultural traditions with children and other parents.
- Identify parents who can help reach out and welcome new families.

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



## Faith Community

### What Are Protective Factors?

When children are raised in loving and caring environments, they are more prepared for the future. Every family experiences challenges and stress from time to time, so all parents need help to raise children to their fullest potential and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment.

Even when different families face similar struggles, some cope better than others. There are many reasons why families handle stress differently, but one has to do with protective factors. Protective factors are characteristics that promote optimal development by helping families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risks and challenges.

Following are five protective factors that, when present, increase the overall well-being of children and families:

#### Concrete Support in Times of Need

*Families need support and services that address their needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.*

#### Parental Resilience

*Ability of parents to be strong and flexible when encountering difficulties, adversity, and trauma.*

#### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

*Parents need information and strategies to support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.*

#### Children's Social and Emotional Competence

*Children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.*

#### Social Connections

*Families need to build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*

Entire communities play a role in the safety and well-being of children. Given that faith-based communities are a source of social support for many families, religious leaders are in a good position to offer support and collaborate with other community agencies and organizations to promote child and family well-being. They can often help families locate appropriate services and supports to get them through tough times.

Faith-based communities can help parents and caregivers develop communication and problem-solving skills that help them cope with crises so they can provide for their children and families. Religious leaders often have established relationships and trust with members of their congregation. They are natural mentors and support systems in the community. As such, when members of the congregation experience trauma or crises, they frequently turn to clergy for guidance. This also helps build resilience to deal with adverse situations in the future.

During discussions with families, look for signs of other potential needs. For example, if one family member expresses concern about another, it may signal a need for couples counseling or substance abuse treatment.

Congregation members are a captive audience. Look for opportunities to integrate information about protecting children, strengthening families, and building protective factors during religious services throughout the year. Develop bulletin or newsletter inserts to highlight the five protective factors. Reach out and find ways to meet the needs of struggling families *and* healthy families.

On the other side of this factsheet is a list of ways the faith community can help support and strengthen protective factors in children, families, and communities.

## **What Can the Faith Community Do to Support and Strengthen Families?**

*The faith community can play an important supportive role for many families. As such, religious leaders could have some influence on all five protective factors.*

### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

- Affirm dedication to supporting families and protecting children. Ensure your place of worship has policies and practices in place to protect children.
- Have staff trained in recognizing and reporting signs of child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, working with victims and their families, and when/how to make referrals.
- Post up-to-date information about local programs and activities.
- Create a resource book about local continuing education, job training, financial counseling, health care, housing assistance, utility assistance, and other emergency assistance.
- Partner in establishing community groups focused on building protective factors, strengthening families, and reaching out to those in need.
- Establish mentoring programs for children and families under stress.

### **Parental Resilience**

- Foster a sense of hope, purpose, and meaning.
- Help parents understand that they are their children's role models. Talk about healthy ways to deal with stress and emotions.
- Offer classes on a variety of general interest topics, including communication, stress management, and conflict resolution.

### **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

- Establish an easily accessible resource library or resource rack that contains information about parenting and child development.
- Sponsor parent education classes and support programs. Information about parenting or other family concerns needs to be relevant to diverse family types including single parents, grandparents, foster/adoptive parents, and gay/lesbian couples.

### **Children's Social and Emotional Competence**

- Develop supportive relationships with young children – provide encouragement, support, and help them feel valued.
- Learn about the relationship between child abuse and neglect, depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other risk factors.
- Provide unconditional support.
- Convey a sense of optimism about every child's future.

### **Social Connections**

- Hold family activities that encourage interaction between families; invite fathers, grandparents, and extended family to participate. Encourage families to be involved in planning these events.
- Provide a welcoming space where families can meet and talk.
- Offer support groups for parents and families with similar interests, concerns, and/or needs.
- Establish mentoring programs to help when children and families are struggling.
- Invite families to share skills, talents, and cultural traditions with other families.
- Some parents may need to develop social skills and self-confidence in order to expand their social networks. Help them identify resources and/or provide opportunities for them to make

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



## Health Care Providers

### What Are Protective Factors?

When children are raised in loving and caring environments, they are more prepared for the future. Every family experiences challenges and stress from time to time, so all parents need help to raise children to their fullest potential and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment.

Even when different families face similar struggles, some cope better than others. There are many reasons why families handle stress differently, but one has to do with protective factors. Protective factors are characteristics that promote optimal development by helping families succeed and thrive, even in the face of risks and challenges.

Following are five protective factors that, when present, increase the overall well-being of children and families:

#### Concrete Support in Times of Need

*Families need support and services that address their needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.*

#### Parental Resilience

*Ability of parents to be strong and flexible when encountering difficulties, adversity, and trauma.*

#### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

*Parents need information and strategies to support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.*

#### Children's Social and Emotional Competence

*Children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.*

#### Social Connections

*Families need to build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*

Pediatricians reach most American children. Parents look to them for expertise, guidance, and reassurance when children's behaviors or development are not typical. Given regular well-child check-ups, pediatricians are able to notice patterns of behavior over time and decide if additional supports and services may be necessary.

Parenting and children's health and development have a reciprocal relationship – each impacts the other. Many parents recognize how their stress affects their parenting and relationships. Pediatricians can help identify healthy ways to cope. In addition, health concerns, challenging behaviors, and other issues can cause a lot of stress. Providers need to be familiar with local support services to help families deal with these challenges.

Children are at greater risk of maltreatment when families are under a lot of stress. Numerous studies have shown that protective factors can reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect. Health care providers can help parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing their children find resources, supports, and coping strategies to help them parent effectively despite risks.

A growing body of research shows that childhood trauma, including exposure to violence, is linked to long-term negative mental and physical health outcomes. Particularly problematic are adverse experiences including living with a parent who has an untreated mental illness, substance abuse problems, and a family member's incarceration. When trauma is severe, prolonged, or unrelieved it can affect children's brain structure and function.

Protective factors can help relieve stress for many children, but for those in more severe cases, health care providers need to be ready to intervene.

On the other side of this factsheet is a list of the many ways health care providers can help strengthen families' protective factors.



## **What Can Health Care Providers Do to Support and Strengthen Families?**

*Health care providers could have some influence on all five protective factors.*

### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

- Post up-to-date brochures about local programs, services, and activities.
- Reduce stigma against needs assistance by focusing on benefits for children and family well-being.
- Have materials available about effects of traumatic experiences on children and specific ways families can build resilience.
- Keep a resource book about local continuing education, job training, financial counseling, health care, housing assistance, utility assistance, and other emergency assistance.
- Ensure all staff know and understand requirements and steps for making referrals to child protective services.

### **Parental Resilience**

- Check on parents' mental health, especially post-partum depression.
- Talk about healthy ways to deal with stress and emotions. Mention that parents are their children's role models, so it is important for parents to manage their feelings, too.
- Recognize parents' efforts and point out specific ways their actions have helped their child.
- Train staff to work with parents who have had adverse experiences and may need extra help to feel confident as parents.

### **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

- Talk about typical child development to help parents develop realistic expectations for their children's behaviors and abilities.
- Provide handouts with easy to understand parenting and child development information.
- Partner with local groups to offer parent education classes or provide a list of classes offered in the area. Include topics of interest to most parents (e.g., toilet training, discipline, alternate forms of punishment, appropriate developmental expectations, and social and emotional development in children) as well as more challenging parenting concerns (e.g., difficult child temperaments, recognizing and addressing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, parenting children with developmental delays). Information about parenting or other family concerns needs to be relevant to diverse family types including single parents, grandparents, foster/adoptive parents, and gay/lesbian couples.
- Learn about local family resource centers, home visiting programs, and other support groups.

### **Children's Social and Emotional Competence**

- Emphasize the importance of healthy attachment and social-emotional development.
- Talk with parents and identify ways they can help if concerns are identified.
- Provide unconditional support and convey a sense of optimism about every child's future.

### **Social Connections**

- Encourage parents to develop and maintain connections with others.
- Set up the waiting room to be inviting for interaction between families.
- Offer parent support groups or parent education opportunities for parents with similar needs, challenges, and interests.

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



## Parents and Caregivers

### What Are Protective Factors?

When children are raised in loving and caring environments, they are more prepared for the future. Every family experiences challenges and stress from time to time, so all parents need help to raise children to their fullest potential and reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment.

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#### Social Connections

*Families need to build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*

Families come in many shapes and sizes with different beliefs, values, and customs. One thing all families have in common is that they need protective factors to be strong and resilient.

Every family has strengths, and sometimes every family faces struggles. Even positive challenges, such as having a baby, starting a new job, or moving to a new home can cause a lot of stress for families. Trying to balance the many demands of work, keeping the home running, and keeping children happy, healthy, and safe can make us feel like there isn't enough time in a day.

All parents want the best for their children. We want our children to be happy, healthy, and to behave well. But we feel frustrated when we don't know how to handle problems.

One of the most important tools parents and caregivers need is information. If you or your child are struggling, do not be afraid to ask questions and seek help. If we as parents try to do everything on our own without seeking support, we only add to the stress we are already experiencing and also have less time to spend with our children.

Sometimes when bad things happen, we think of all the things we should have done differently. It is important to understand that no parent is perfect; no parent has all the answers. We can only do the best we can with the tools we have available to us.

When there are changes or problems at home, be sure to touch base with children's caregivers or teachers. These events could affect your child's behavior at school and teachers can help. For example, an illness or death in the family, divorce, parent's absence, or job loss could all cause stress for children. Teachers can give an extra hug and provide support if they are aware of these changes.

On the other side of this factsheet is a list of the many ways parents can help strengthen protective factors.

## **What Can the Parents and Caregivers Do to Support and Strengthen Families?**

*There are many ways parents and caregivers can help support and strengthen all five protective factors in their own family and those around them.*

### **Concrete Support in Times of Need**

- Join parent groups. Invite other parents to attend with you.
- Seek help and resources when you need them. It will help strengthen your family and improve child well-being.
- Volunteer to serve as a mentor for families in need in your school, church, or community.

### **Parental Resilience**

- Remember you are one of your children's most important role models. Find healthy ways to handle feelings and impulses.
- Build and maintain close relationships with family, friends, and other sources of support.
- Have confidence in your strengths and abilities.
- Find a trusted caregiver and take time for yourself from time to time. This is especially important if you are a single parent.
- See yourself as resilient (rather than as a victim).
- Find healthy ways to deal with stress; avoiding harmful coping strategies, such as substance abuse.
- Look for positive meaning in your life despite difficult or traumatic events.

### **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

- Ask questions or share concerns – contact your child's caregiver, teacher, pediatrician, or others who can help answer questions and ease your mind.
- Attend parent education classes. This will help you learn more about typical child development so you have realistic expectations for your children.
- Sit and observe your children trying various tasks. See what they can and cannot do.

### **Children's Social and Emotional Competence**

- Be supportive and understanding – provide encouragement and help them feel valued.
- Joke and laugh with children.
- Provide unconditional support.
- Be willing to apologize and admit mistakes.
- Provide regular routines for children.
- Ask what makes them feel happy and sad.
- Be involved in your children's school – it will increase your social connections and help your children see that you value education.

### **Social Connections**

- Participate in family activities in your children's school, neighborhood, or community. Fathers, grandparents, and extended family are also encouraged to participate. Build more social connections by helping plan these events.
- Participate in support groups with other parents and families who have similar interests, concerns, and/or needs.
- Encourage your employer, school, church, and other community groups to offer family-friendly activities.

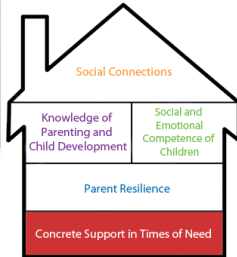
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# Concrete Support



## Concrete Support in Times of Need

*Sometimes we all need help finding and accessing support and services that meet our needs and reduce stress caused by challenges.*



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## It's Tough to be a Good Parent During Tough Times

- EVERY family, at some point, needs help
  - ▣ Serious illness?
  - ▣ Job loss?
  - ▣ Move?
  - ▣ Birth of a child?
  - ▣ Loss of a family member?
  - ▣ Family member in prison?
  - ▣ Divorce/separation?
  - ▣ Short on money?
  - ▣ Car broken down?



Concrete Support = We have access to what we need to handle challenges and be successful

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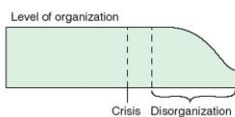
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## Concrete Support and Crises

A crisis often leads to *disorganization*



What might affect the possible levels of disorganization?



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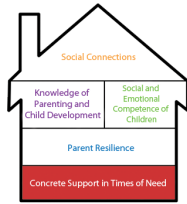
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## Concrete Support in Times of Need



Mental Health Services	Transportation	Housing Assistance	Medical/Trauma Services
Substance Abuse Services	Educational Services	Healthy Food	Childcare

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## Three Essential Needs



Brain systems have two settings: **Responsive and Reactive**.  
When each need is met, system defaults to *Responsive*

- **Safety –**  
avoid harm      When I feel safe, responsive mode brings calm, peace.
- **Satisfaction –**  
approach rewards      When I feel satisfied, responsive mode brings gratitude, pleasure, contentment, accomplishment.
- **Connection –**  
attach to others      When I feel connected, responsive mode brings belonging, love, compassion, kindness, worth.

When **Concrete Support in Times of Need (Safety)** is not met, we **REACT** with fear, frustration, anxiety, and anger.

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## Getting Help



- We respond better to crises when we:
  - Recognize we need support
  - Know what services are available
  - Know how to access services
  - Have some financial security
  - Have basic needs met
  - Are resourceful with what we have
  - Are committed and persistent
  - Advocate effectively for one's self, child, and/or other family members to receive necessary help



~Start with one step at a time~

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## Locating Concrete Support



- When a family's basic needs are not met, how is family interaction affected?
- How are basic needs related to strong footings in a building or house?



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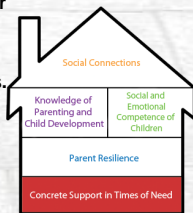
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## Concrete Support in Times of Need



### Key Principles:

- When basic needs are met it is easier to focus on others and their needs.
- Know where to turn in times of crisis.
- Recognize our strengths.



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

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## Concrete Support in Times of Need

### *Reach Out When You Need Help*

All families need help sometimes. Some have basic needs such as food, housing, and clothing; others need help finding child care and locating physical and mental health services. Parents may not always know about community services and resources that can help meet their basic needs or how to find essential services. Other times parents know about available resources but they are hesitant to seek help due to pride or stigma against getting help. Be respectful and caring to build a trusting relationship and to help foster resilience. Parents like learning from other parents about services they used in times of stress or crisis. Some parents just need contact information, but others might need help making that first contact or appointment. It is also important to remember that language barriers or cultural differences make it difficult for parents to know who to ask or where to turn for help. Help build self-confidence by encouraging parents to be active participants in getting the help they need.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Learn what steps the parents have already taken to deal with the problem and talk about how well the current plan is working.
- Identify from the family's perspective the most critical need, such as staying in their house, keeping a job, finding child care, getting the car fixed, or paying the electric bill.
- Talk about the family's current connections that might offer help or advice. For example, the friends or neighbors, pediatrician, child care or school, or the local faith-based community.
- Provide a list of local resources and services so parents may select what is best for their needs. Be familiar with the resources and services you recommend so you can tell parents what to expect at different agencies. Those who have a lot of needs may be overwhelmed with all the different paperwork and agency requirements. If they know about these requirements ahead of time, they will feel more comfortable using the resource.
- Explore the parents' ability to find ways to access services such as transportation, encouragement, phone calls, and other personal help.
- Link parents with culturally appropriate services where their language is spoken or their culture is observed.

Here are some specific questions you can ask:

- What is your biggest concern?
- What have you already done to deal with this? Did it work? Why or why not?
- Have you had to deal with this before? What worked that time? What didn't work?
- Have you thought about contacting \_\_\_\_\_? (child's school, pediatrician, local program, faith community, etc.)
- What kind of help do you need to make this contact or get to an appointment?
- I want to follow up with you to see how well this works. What is the best way to reach you? What time of day is best?



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



## Connect to Support

A support system of family, friends, and trusted neighbors is very important. It is also important to know about community organizations, counselors, and other supports that are available when you need help or advice.

	Name:	Number:
Doctor:	_____	_____
Pediatrician:	_____	_____
Dentist:	_____	_____
Child care:	_____	_____
Tutor for child:	_____	_____
Counseling:		
Individual	_____	_____
Couples'	_____	_____
Child	_____	_____
AA or NA:	_____	_____
Mechanic:	_____	_____
Need a ride:	_____	_____
Home repairs:	_____	_____
Legal advice:	_____	_____
Housesitting:	_____	_____
Pet care:	_____	_____
Need to celebrate:	_____	_____
Need to laugh:	_____	_____
Feel discouraged:	_____	_____
Share hobbies:	_____	_____
I am so angry I could hurt someone:	_____	_____

## Community agencies offering workshops on parenting and relationship education

A lot of tools and skills can be learned in these classes. Many local Extension offices, non-profit organizations, faith-based groups, and other community organizations offer parenting workshops and relationship and marriage education.

	Organization/Agency Name	Program Type	Address	Phone
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

## Counselors and/or marriage and family therapists

Sometimes workshops are not enough. There are times when we need support from a licensed professional, such as a counselor or therapist.

	Name	Services Available	Address	Phone
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Other helpful resources:


What are some possible obstacles to you seeking or receiving support?

What are some possible solutions?

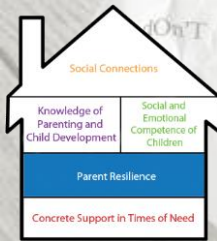
# Parental Resilience



## Parental Resilience



**Be strong and flexible when  
you face difficulties,  
adversity, and trauma.**



**Personal stress**  
**Family/social stress**  
**Work/school stress**  
**Environmental stress**

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## Building Parental Resilience



- Think of a time when you lost your patience:
  - ▣ How did you feel when it was happening?
  - ▣ What kind of day were you having?
  - ▣ Was there anyone who stepped in and helped?
  - ▣ What might make the situation worse?

**20% of us are born with an ability to be resilient, but 80% of us can learn to be resilient**



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## H.A.L.T.



- How well do we interact with others when we are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired**?
- Our **response** matters more than the stressor.
- What happens to our bodies when we are stressed?



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## Why Some Adapt to Stressors Better than Others



1. An outlet for frustration
2. A sense of predictability
3. A feeling of control
4. An optimistic outlook
5. Social support



Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, Dr. Robert Sapolsky

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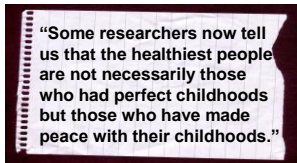
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## How do you best manage stress???



- Positively managing stress helps us feel better; feeling better helps us act better, which helps others treat us better, which helps us feel better!



(From "Taking Care of the Parent: Replacing Stress with Peace")

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## Your Reality is Your Choice



- The human brain receives 11 million pieces of information every second from our environment, but can only process 40 bits per second.

The Tradeoff:  
I think about  
**negatives**, and the  
less **positives** I  
see... **OR**



Change my mindset  
and **choose** to think  
about more **positives**  
around me!

- We have to **choose** what we focus on and what to dismiss or ignore (but our brains are wired to focus on threats!)
- Your reality is a **choice** – what you choose to focus on shapes how you perceive and interpret your world.

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## Rethinking STRESS



70-90% OF DOCTOR VISITS ARE  
DUE TO STRESS-RELATED  
ISSUES

STRESS NEG  
MOST OF TI  
HUL

STRESS  
IS  
DESTRUCTIVE

STRESS IS LINKED TO THE 6  
LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH



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## Rethinking & Reframing STRESS



- Research **also** shows stress **CAN** be helpful – if managed correctly
- Stress **CAN** create:
  - ▢ Greater mental toughness
  - ▢ Deeper relationships
  - ▢ Increased awareness
  - ▢ New perspectives
  - ▢ A better appreciation of life
  - ▢ Heightened sense of meaning
  - ▢ Strengthened priorities

STRESS  
IS (can be)  
ENHANCING

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## Rethinking & Reframing STRESS



- The lesson? Stop dwelling on it and sharing it – it leads to more stress, anxiety, and depression!
- When stress happens:
  - ▢ View it as a challenge, instead of a threat.
  - ▢ Recognize it can improve your productivity as a person **and** as a parent.
  - ▢ Think about the meaning behind the stress.
  - ▢ Replace stress with strengths!

Stress is inevitable, its  
negative effects are not!

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## Why We React (instead of respond) to Stress the Way We Do



Born with ~86 billion brain cells called neurons!



What happens when it rains on a fresh pile of dirt?



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## Police Car Drawing



On a sheet of paper, you will take 30 seconds and draw a picture of a police car.



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## Training Your Brain to See Multiple Perspectives



Focus on the picture below and see how many attributes, phrases, labels you can come up with in 30 seconds (ignore grammar – go for speed!)

- +3 points for every positive (and true) descriptor and +1 for every negative one



Research shows that people who have a positive to negative ratio of 3:1 are more optimistic and happier.  
2:1 – languishing  
1:1 – depressed

Try to balance every piece of bad news with 3 pieces of good news.

Seek out the positives!

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## Child's Mess



Focus on this picture and see how many attributes, phrases, or labels you can come up with in 30 seconds (ignore grammar – go for speed!)

- +3 points for every positive (and true) descriptor and +1 for every negative



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## We can learn to see things from different perspectives



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## Brain-body Connection: Positive Visualization



- Study: 3 groups of volunteers
  - ▣ Group 1 – finger curls, 15 min/day, 12 weeks
  - ▣ Group 2 – visualize finger curls, same time period
  - ▣ Group 3 – do nothing, same time period
- Results
  - ▣ Group 1 – 53% increase in finger strength
  - ▣ **Group 2 – 35% increase in finger strength**
  - ▣ Group 3 – no increase
- **Thinking** about exercise activates the same areas of the brain as real exercise!



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## Preventing vs. Managing Stress



- Take in more positivity – dwell on it, 5-15 sec.  
*Loads positive experience into implicit memory*
- Create positive experiences in the present and/or recall them in the past
- Absorb them, stay in the moment, appreciate it
- Share them, write them, share them again!

### Activates positive mental state & installs it in brain

**“When you tilt toward the good, you’re not denying or resisting the bad. You’re simply acknowledging, enjoying, and using the good. You’re aware of the whole truth.”** – Rick Hanson, *Hardwiring Happiness*

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## Raising Positivity = Happiness Advantage



- When brain is positive:
  - Performs better than negative, neutral, or stressed brain (Happy people solved 20% more word puzzles than unhappy people in one study)
  - Builds a sense of community by lowering defenses and bringing people together – increases the strength of human connections
  - Intelligence rises, creativity rises, energy rises
  - Brain is 31% more productive
  - Dopamine rush makes you happy and **turns on all learning centers in the brain**, allowing you to adapt to the world and see different perspectives (view things as *less stressful*!)

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## Raising Positivity = Happiness Advantage



- Perform each of the following, 2 min/day for 21 days to **rewire your brain** for more positivity
  - 3 gratitudes – *trains the brain to scan for positives*
  - 3 good things – write down 3 things that go well that day and *why* those things happened
  - 3 extra smiles (10:5 rule) – *releases dopamine, improves mood, contagious*
  - Journaling about 1 positive experience in the last 24 hours – *allows your brain to relive it and remember it; lowers levels of worry and pessimism*
  - Exercise – *teaches your brain that your behavior matters, decreases anxiety/worry by 20%!*
  - Meditation – *allows your brain to slow down and focus on the task at hand*
  - Random acts of kindness – *doing good leads to feeling good, ripple effect; first observe, then serve*

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## Previous Thinking on Happiness

Happiness is the reward we get for doing our best

- Work hard at our job = Successful = Happiness
- Work hard at being a parent = Successful = Happiness
- Work hard at our marriage = Successful = Happiness

“New research in psychology and neuroscience shows that it works the other way around: We become more successful *when* we are happier and more positive.” –Shawn Achor, *Happiness Advantage*, p. 15

Happiness → Better Parent → Positive Outcomes

## Tying it All Together

- How does all of this relate to parenting, stress and resilience??



To build **better** futures, we need to build **better, happier, and more positive** brains in children AND in parents

Choosing to stay positive when things get negative helps prevent our brains from “fighting” or “fighting”

## Quick Tips to Remember

- Power of 3s:  
Will \_\_\_ matter in 3 hours? 3 days? 3 months? 3 years?
- Tone of voice influences how our message is received.
- Irritation is an invitation... (e.g. compassion, understanding, slow down and see things differently).
- Remember children (and adults) do things that make sense to them.
- People matter more than problems, projects, and profits.



How we **choose** to **RESPOND** changes everything

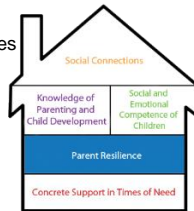


## Parental Resilience



### Key Principles:

- Parenting – when we are not happy and balanced, our parenting suffers. Being a healthy happy person is the beginning of good parenting.
- The way we respond to stress sometimes has a greater impact than the stressor.
- Choose to see the positive.
- Stress impacts our relationships.
- We need to manage stress in healthy ways.



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

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## Parental Resilience

### *Do Your Best in Times of Stress*

Being a parent is a very rewarding experience, but it can also be very stressful. Parents who can take it in stride when everyday life is stressful and can cope with occasional crises are said to be resilient. Everyone has had a difficult day or times when it feels like nothing is going right: a flat tire on the way to work; a loved one is very ill; the school calls and says your child is behaving badly; the air conditioner stops working on a hot day; or the credit card is maxed out. Some of these can be more easily resolved than others. All parents have inner strengths or other resources that serve as a foundation of resiliency during tough times. Bigger challenges require parents to use their inner strength and be proactive to look for the best solutions for their families. Most can handle everyday hassles, but everyone needs help from time to time. Multiple life stressors, such as a history of abuse or neglect, physical or mental health problems, relationship conflict, substance abuse, domestic violence, financial trouble, unemployment, and homelessness can reduce parents' capacity to cope with everyday stressors of raising children. These are times when parents need extra support seeking help. Using the word "courage" instead of resilience during stressful times or a crisis may help parents see a way to survive and regain their ability to keep on going. When parents take care of themselves during stressful times, their children see a model of how to cope.

Here are some ways you can help:

- The first step in dealing with stress is to identify parents' biggest worries or concerns.
- Have staff who can build and maintain trusting relationships with parents and families.
- Train staff to look for signs of distress in parents and children and develop strategies to reach out to those families.
- Encourage concrete skills to cope with stress, including regular exercise or relaxing activities such as listening to music, meditating, or prayer.
- Talk with parents about developing an action plan in the event of unexpected challenges. For example, identify someone who can provide temporary child care with little notice or build a small savings to take care of minor repairs.
- Provide a list of local resources and services so parents may select what is best for their needs.

Here are some specific questions you can ask:

- What are your dreams for yourself and your family?
- What helps you cope with everyday life?
- How do your strengths help you be a better parent?
- What kinds of frustrations do you deal with during the day?
- How are you able to meet your children's needs when you feel stress?
- How do you and your partner communicate and support each other when one or both of you feels stressed?
- What family members, friends, neighbors, or community services can you look to?
- What are your goals for your family or children in the next week or month?
- What steps can you take to work toward these goals?



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



## What are My Strengths?

When we hear the word “strengths,” we often think of talents like being athletic, singing, being artistic, or playing a musical instrument. But strengths can also refer to unique qualities, such as kindness, fairness, curiosity, and being a good parent or partner.

Read through the statements below. Mark in the boxes to indicate how well each statement describes you.

	Not like me	A little like me	Quite a bit like me	Exactly like me
1. I am curious about the world.				
2. I enjoy learning new things.				
3. I like to think of new ways to do things.				
4. No matter what the social situation, I am able to fit in.				
5. I am able to look at things and see the big picture.				
6. I have taken frequent stands in the face of strong opposition.				
7. I finish what I start.				
8. I keep my promises.				
9. I have voluntarily helped a friend/neighbor in the last month.				
10. I have people in my life who are as concerned about my feelings and well-being as they are about their own.				
11. I avoid sarcasm and put-downs.				
12. I treat all people equally regardless of who they might be.				
13. I often get people to do things together without nagging.				
14. I control my emotions.				
15. I do not engage in activities that could put me or my children in danger.				
16. I mix work and play as much as possible.				
17. I often say thank you, even for little things.				
18. I look for positives even when things are not going well.				
19. My life has a strong purpose.				
20. I don't hold grudges.				

### Think about it:

- What are some of your other strengths that are not listed?
- How can you use your strengths to help strengthen your relationship with your child(ren)?

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



## Raising Positivity

When we are happy and positive we get along better with others. We are better at seeing things from others' views, we tend to be better parents, and we are better prepared to get through tough times.

**Think about conversations you have had with your children in the past week and answer the following questions:**

What are some positive things you said to your child? How did it make your child feel?

What are some positive things your child said to you? How did it make you feel?

When you said positive things, how did it make you feel about your child and your relationship with him or her?

*Practice being more positive. Try each of the following for 2 minutes a day for 3 weeks:*

- Share 3 things you are thankful for. Talk with those in your home or call, email, or text friends and family to tell them thanks for something they did that helped you or made you feel good.
- Give 3 *extra* smiles.
- Journal about 1 positive experience in the past day.
- Exercise or meditate to help slow down your brain and focus on the task at hand.
- Perform random acts of kindness—doing good makes you feel good!

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



## Signs of Stress

We know that we have to fill a car's gas tank before the gauge is on empty. The gas gauge is a signal that it's time to stop and get more fuel. As well, when cars hit potholes or curbs, tires get out of alignment and the car has trouble driving straight. A shaky wheel is a signal that alignment is needed. When oil is left unchanged for a long time, it causes other parts of the car to not work and break down. Odd noises under the hood, trouble starting the car, and sometimes smoke are signals that maintenance is needed. Just like a car, our bodies also signal when we need to take care of ourselves. These signals are sometimes called "stress signals." We sometimes experience physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral signs.

**What are some things that happen to you when you are stressed?**

### Physical

- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Body aches
- ◆ Heart pounds and breathe fast
- ◆ Upset stomach
- ◆ Feel very tired
- ◆ Not hungry
- ◆ Want to eat all the time
- ◆ Muscles tighten up

### Emotional/Mental

- ◆ Worry something bad will happen
- ◆ Feel helpless or overwhelmed
- ◆ Feel frustrated
- ◆ Become moody or grouchy
- ◆ Cannot concentrate
- ◆ Think people are disappointed in you
- ◆ Have trouble remembering things
- ◆ Get nervous and can't relax

Other "stress signals" you experience:

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What are some ways your partner and your partner's body responds to stress?

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Feeling stressed is not a bad thing. In fact, sometimes it can push us to do well or do something positive. But, sometimes how we respond to stress can harm us and could hurt others whom we care about. When we feel stressed, the first step in handling our stress is to understand how it makes us feel. Help those you care about, and who care about you, understand your stress signals.

When you start noticing your stress signals use healthy coping strategies to make yourself healthier.

*When you are healthy, your relationship with others will be healthier!*

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



## Managing Stress

When it comes to stress, sometimes we need to take care of ourselves before we can care for others. How we take care of ourselves and react to stress is important. There are many ways to cope with stress. Some are healthy and some are not.

### What are some ways that you deal with stress?

#### HEALTHY

- ◆ Go for a walk or exercising
- ◆ Meditation
- ◆ Read a relaxing book
- ◆ Listen to music
- ◆ Do a favorite hobby
- ◆ Eat just enough healthy food
- ◆ Go to religious services
- ◆ Pray
- ◆ Get enough sleep at night
- ◆ Seek help from a professional
- ◆ Talk to your partner or a close friend
- ◆ Write your concerns down in a journal
- ◆ Think positive thoughts
- ◆ Look for the good in your life

#### UNHEALTHY

- ◆ Yell, shout, scream, or curse
- ◆ Dwell on things that make you angry
- ◆ Smoke
- ◆ Drink
- ◆ Use drugs
- ◆ Hurt yourself or others
- ◆ Eat unhealthy food
- ◆ Eat too much or too little
- ◆ Sleep too much or too little
- ◆ Buy things you do not really need
- ◆ Avoid being with or talking to others
- ◆ Complain a lot to others
- ◆ Take things out on other people
- ◆ Destroy or damage things

List other healthy coping strategies you use:

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List other unhealthy coping strategies you use:

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#### **Make an Action Plan:**

How can you use more healthy coping strategies the next time you feel stressed?

What do you need to help you cope with stress?

Who can you turn to for help when you are stressed?

*When we are healthy, our relationships with others are healthier!*

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



## Goals for Better Health

Many of us want to take better care of ourselves, but it is not always easy. We might not think we have enough time, money, or energy to do things that will help us be healthier. But, if we focus on our strengths and what we already do or have in our lives, we set ourselves on a path to success. Taking steps to live a healthy life starts by first understanding what we already do well and then deciding what else we can do to improve.

**Read through the list below and mark some of the ways you  
already take good care of yourself:**

- ◆ Get enough sleep (not too much, not too little)
- ◆ Keep a regular sleep schedule
- ◆ Eat a variety of healthy foods
- ◆ Rest when my body tells me to
- ◆ Limit alcohol intake
- ◆ Avoid drugs
- ◆ Talk with others when I feel stressed
- ◆ Get regular exercise
- ◆ Spend some quiet time alone each day

What are some other ways you already take good care of yourself?

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What are some ways you would like to take better care of yourself?

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How can you make those changes? Come up with specific goals that you can reach.

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What else might need to change for you to be successful?

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When we share our goals with others, they can check-in from time to time to offer support and encouragement. Who can you turn to for help in reaching your goals?

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*When you take care of yourself it is easier to take care of others!*

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



## Take Care of Yourself

We tend to think of a couple as one unit, but individuals within couples remain just that – individuals. How good or how bad partners feel and how well they care for themselves will affect their relationship. For example, if one partner is under a lot of stress, he or she might not be as patient. Or if one partner had a really good day at work, he or she might be more upbeat. When we handle stress well, it makes us healthier and happier. It also helps us be better able to take good care of others.

What are some things you do to take care of your own needs – to make you feel good?

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What are some hobbies you have that you enjoy doing alone?

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What activities do you do with others that make you feel good?

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What is it about the activities you enjoy (alone or with others) that makes you feel good?

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Activity you want to do:	When can you do it? Are there better or easier times of the day and week to do this?	Is this something you prefer to do alone? Or is it something you can do with others? Who?
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

*Stress makes it difficult to pay attention to our needs and the needs of others.  
Take time to care for yourself so you can care for others.  
Put on your own oxygen mask first!*



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



## What Went Well?

When we feel a lot of stress, it can seem like we have very little control over our lives. We tend to be negative and wonder what bad thing will happen next. If we try looking for the good instead, and give ourselves credit for having a positive influence, we will feel more in control and find better ways to solve problems.

Seeing the many good things you do for yourself and others every day is one way to be positive and in control. Before you go to sleep each night, write down two things that went well that day. Next, ask yourself – “How did I make this happen?”

	What went well?	How did I make this happen?
<b>Sunday</b>		
<b>Monday</b>		
<b>Tuesday</b>		
<b>Wednesday</b>		
<b>Thursday</b>		
<b>Friday</b>		
<b>Saturday</b>		

*Learning to think positively about life can help you  
and your relationship with others.*

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



## What Makes Up Well-being: The PERMA Model

Dr. Martin Seligman, one of the leading professors and pioneers in the world of positive psychology, has studied well-being for more than 20 years. He has found that our well-being, or how we are doing, is heavily influenced by five factors that make up the acronym PERMA.

### Positive Emotion

Before we can experience well-being, we need positive emotion. This includes feelings of happiness, peace, love, connectedness, hope, and gratitude. The important part is to enjoy yourself in the moment. These include small, simple things in life like enjoying a bowl of your favorite ice cream, reading a good book, watching your favorite television show, spending time with family and friends, and exercising. Doing fun and enjoyable things is important in life and it makes us feel better inside.

### Engagement

When we lose track of time while doing something we love, we experience “flow”. Time stands still as we focus on the present. Knowing what brings you to a state of flow can enhance your well-being. Look for opportunities to do the things that really fulfill you. This could be playing with your children, reading a good book, playing a musical instrument, or using your talents to create something.

### Relationships

Positive relationships are at the core of our well-being. People who have positive, meaningful relationships with others are happier than those who do not have these close bonds. Think about ways you can strengthen your current relationships or develop new relationships.

### Meaning

Meaning comes from belonging to or participating in a cause that is higher than ourselves. Most of us want to believe we are living and working with a greater purpose. For some this is tied to spirituality or religion; for others it is raising a family, involvement in a charity, or helping humanity in some way.

### Accomplishment/Achievement

Setting our sights on something and dedicating time and attention to better ourselves is good for us. This includes working hard at a skill, achieving a goal, or winning a game or competition. Well-being is tied to the steps we take more than the goal itself.

*Instead of focusing on happiness alone, we can have a much richer, more meaningful life if we focus on these five elements to enhance our well-being.*

## Taking Care of the Parent

Parenting is hard work. There are so many things to take care of. The demands don't stop at night. There is no one else who can easily take over and give you a break. It is hard to know how to deal with some situations. Further, most of us get no training to be parents.

All these challenges can combine to make a person tired and discouraged. They can also make a person irritable and angry. There are several areas that are important to being a good parent, including information (such as books and knowledge), resources (such as a crib, a safe house, and diapers), social system (such as friends and family that you can count on), health (such as energy and well-being), and purpose (such as enjoying parenting and having a strong spiritual life).

**Know your strengths.** As you think about your parenting, consider what strengths you have. Maybe you have lots of good information on caring for children and you have good friends and family members who are glad to help you. It is good to know what your strengths are.

**Know your needs.** We all have needs and limitations as well as strengths. Maybe you do not have a stroller for your baby and your energy has been low. Noticing those needs prepares you to do something about them.

**Get help.** All of us need help. In a job as difficult and important as parenting, most of us need lots of help. Use the strengths you have to help you deal with your needs. Maybe you can call on friends and family members to help you locate a stroller. You may know mothers who can help you understand your health needs. Or maybe friends and family members will take turns helping you with your baby so that you can get out once in a while.

**Make time for your own growth.** In the crunch of parenting it is easy to ignore our own needs. Make time to do things you enjoy. Maybe you can arrange for a neighbor to watch your baby a few minutes every day while you take a nature walk, go to the library, take music lessons, or visit your grandmother. For more ideas on how to find your talents and develop them, see the unit in this series, "Learning and growing: Using your talents."

**Be patient.** There are "seasons of imbalance" in parenting. A baby is generally 3 months to 1 year of age before being ready to sleep through the night. This can be tough on parents! It is why it is so important to know what your strengths are and use them well to deal with the demands of being a parent.

Despite all the challenges of being a parent, most people still choose to have children. The reason is simple. There is nothing quite as amazing and satisfying as watching a human you love grow and develop.

## Applications:

Fill out the chart below. It may be useful to have a partner, friend, or other family member help you so that you don't miss important elements to add to your chart.

Strengths:
Needs:
Ways to get needs met:
Information (such as books and knowledge) For example, what books and knowledge do you already have to help you?
What books and knowledge do you still need?
How can you get the books and knowledge you need? Borrow a book from the library or talk with a friend?
Resources (such as a crib, a safe house, and diapers)
Social system (such as friends and family that you can count on)
Health (such as energy and well-being)
Purpose (such as enjoying parenting and having a strong spiritual life)

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# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Taking Care of the Parent:

## Replacing Stress with Peace



In the book *Alexander And The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Alexander has a day when everything goes wrong. He gets gum in his hair, trips on a skateboard, gets scrunched in the car, is deserted by his friends, goes to the dentist, and falls in the mud. At home he is scolded by his mom, gets in trouble with his dad, has lima beans for dinner, gets soap in his eye, and is left alone by the cat.

Have you ever had a day when everything went wrong? Bad days make it hard to be patient and loving. A tired, frustrated, angry person is not likely to be a good parent.

This publication is intended to help you deal with stress so that you can be a more peaceful person and a more effective parent. We suggest that you take the time to do the exercises throughout this publication. That way, you'll be making your personal plan to replace the stress in your life with peace.

## What makes you feel stressed?

Every person has bad days. Sometimes a person has lots of bad days. Think of the things that make you feel stressed. List as many things that cause you stress as you can, especially the ones that bother you most. Make your list as complete as you can.

Maybe your list includes lack of money, whining or nagging children, and loneliness. Having a list of your worries may be useful as you try to deal with them.



## What does stress do to you?

When stress builds up, it can result in anger, headaches, discouragement, depression, stomach-aches, feelings of helplessness, self-hate, and other "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad" feelings.

What are some of the reactions and feelings you have when you get too much stress?

One of the worst effects of stress can be a feeling of helplessness that comes when we feel there is nothing we can do to fix things. When we feel helpless, we may stop trying to solve problems. Then the problems get worse. And we feel worse. Then we get angry or discouraged. We do less. And things keep getting worse. That is a trap!

## STRESSORS:

## STRESS REACTIONS:



## How can you deal with stress?

What can you do to deal with the stresses in your life? There are many things that can help. A first thing is to think about things you love to do. Do you love to sing? Do you love to be alone in nature? Do you love to talk to friends? Do you love to play with your children? Do you love to ex-

ercise? List 20 things you love to do.

Next, ask yourself: "Do I take time in my life for the things I love?" What can you do to make more time for the things you love?

Filling your life with things you love is a first step toward dealing with stress. There are other tools that can help also.



THINGS I LOVE TO DO:

WHAT I CAN DO TO MAKE TIME  
FOR THE THINGS I LOVE:

## Suggestions for dealing with stress:

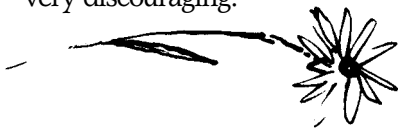
Read over the list below and mark the suggestions that will help you deal with your stress. You can use them to make a personal stress plan.

\_\_\_ 1. Recognize the things that bother you. Becoming aware of your stresses is a first step to dealing with them. It also is part of showing respect for your own feelings.

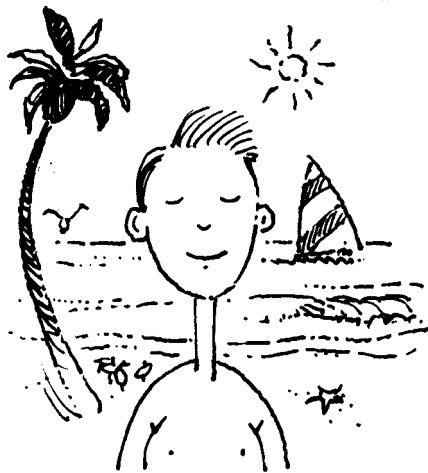
\_\_\_ 2. Recognize that you may not be able to fix everything at once, but there are things you can do that will help. Maybe they are little things. But they make a difference.

\_\_\_ 3. Throw away stresses that you cannot change. For instance, you may worry that an earthquake or tornado is going to destroy you and your family. While it is possible that you could move to a safer house or city, it may be more appropriate to throw away that worry. You may want to close your eyes and mentally tie the tornadoes in a knot and throw them in the trash or lock them in a closet. Decide which of your stresses you cannot change by thinking about them. Then don't think about them.

\_\_\_ 4. Replace stressful thoughts with pleasant ones. Think of it as emotional gardening. You pull the ugly weeds out of your garden, and you cultivate the good plants. Instead of dwelling on a hurt or an injustice, think about someone you like and perhaps about some way you can help that person. A beautiful garden is very satisfying. A garden of weeds can be very discouraging.



\_\_\_ 5. Allow yourself to have vacations from stress. Sometimes we feel so worn-out or frustrated that we want to cry or scream. That's a good time for a mental vacation. Find a place where you can be alone. Lie down, close your eyes, and imagine that you are lying on a beautiful, peaceful beach. Imagine the sun on your face. Listen to the sounds of birds and waves. Feel the warm sand. Breathe deeply and slowly. Enjoy relaxing for several minutes. Then imagine yourself jogging, swimming, shopping, or anything you would enjoy doing on your vacation. When you are feeling better, open your eyes. Think of some small thing you can do to make things run more smoothly.



\_\_\_ 6. Use your sense of humor. When I start to get frustrated and angry with my children, I hold a training session. For example, when the children have left lights on throughout the house, I may feel like screaming at them. Instead, I call them together and tell them that a crime has been committed. Someone has sneaked into the house and turned on all our lights. I suspect it may be an elephant. Maybe we could all hunt through the house looking for the elephant—and turn off lights. I am very careful to avoid sarcasm or hurt. I make my statements ridiculous so that everyone starts laughing, including me.



\_\_\_ 7. Be sure you are keeping yourself strong. Are you eating well? Do you regularly get some exercise or relaxation? Make time in your schedule to keep yourself physically fit. For child care, you might take turns with a friend. Today you watch her children for an hour or two while she takes a break. Tomorrow she watches yours while you take a break.

\_\_\_ 8. Draw strength from friends and family members. You may have some friends who help you make decisions, feel loved, and feel hopeful. Call them. Ask them if they will listen to you. Talk to them. Tell them how you feel. You may have some friends or family members who make you angrier or sadder. It might be good not to talk to them when you feel stressed. Anger makes stress worse.

\_\_\_ 9. Focus on things you love to do. Go back to the list you made, and pick out some of the things you love to do most. Make time for them. Set aside money to do them. Ask people to help you do them.

\_\_\_ 10. Anticipate problems and solve them. Deal with them. For example, maybe your toddler loves to play with the stereo, and that bothers you. Put the stereo up out of reach. Put interesting and safe toys where the children can play with them. Baby-proof your home. Make a special play area for your children. Prevent the troubles that drive you crazy by planning ahead.

\_\_\_ 11. When you are feeling tired and discouraged and don't want to do anything, look for a little job. Maybe you could wipe off the cabinets. Maybe you could take out the trash. Look for a little job to get started. Once you finish the little job, give yourself credit for it. Don't beat yourself up with a long list of all the things you still need to do. Once you get started with a little job, you may feel like tackling bigger jobs.



\_\_\_ 12. Deal with rejection. One powerful stress for most people is the feeling that no one cares. Maybe when you talk to your mother she only preaches to you. Maybe your husband or wife doesn't understand you or show respect for your feelings. Some researchers now tell us that the healthiest people are not necessarily those who had perfect childhoods but those who have made peace with their childhoods. Maybe Mom was not nice and maybe Dad deserted the family. But healthy people don't stay angry and upset with the

past. They accept what has happened, and they live in the present. They accept what their parents have done and can do for them. They build good friendships.

\_\_\_ 13. Get outside yourself. Sometimes we worry so much about our problems that we can't see anything else. It may help to take some cookies to the neighbor, to volunteer some time for a church or community group. You don't need a lot of extra demands. But taking a little time to help others can bring peace and satisfaction.

\_\_\_ 14. Be creative. Organize to solve problems. Look for good solutions. For example, if your children are always cross by dinner-time, maybe you could provide them with a healthy afternoon treat. Or you could eat dinner earlier.

\_\_\_ 15. Get help if you need it. If you begin to feel overwhelmed—especially if you feel suicidal—get help! Go to your minister or mental health clinic. Everyone gets discouraged from time to time. But if those feelings become severe, get help.

\_\_\_ 16. Be patient. Some problems solve themselves with time. Eventually children outgrow diapers. They get past teething. The rain stops and the sun comes out. Work on the things you can change. Be patient with things that take time.

\_\_\_ 17. Be a friend to yourself. Don't expect yourself to be perfect. Stop doing things that tear you down. Notice the good things you do, and dwell on those things. Don't try to force yourself to be perfect or always kind. Treat your feelings with respect. Other people may sound bigger and stronger and more sure of themselves. But your feelings are important. Listen to them. Instead of dwelling on a mistake, learn what you can from it and

then let the mistake go. Examine the expectations you have for yourself. Check to be sure they are reasonable.

\_\_\_ 18. Take control of your life. Helplessness is a terrible feeling. While you may not be able to change everything, notice the things you can change.



\_\_\_ 19. Discover meaning in your life. Some people find meaning through religion, some through learning, some through service. Enjoy the contribution you make. See the purpose of people doing good.

\_\_\_ 20. Don't compare yourself to others. Your sister may be a wonderful cook. Your neighbor may be incredibly organized. But don't compare yourself to them. No one has every talent. Discover your talents. Enjoy them. Use them to help others.

\_\_\_ 21. Can you think of other ways you can deal with stress? If so, list them.

**OTHERS :**

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## Make a stress plan.

As you have read over this list of ideas, have you marked those that seem helpful to you? Then you are ready to pick one of your stresses and come up with a plan for dealing with it. Don't plan how to deal with all of your stresses. Just start with one. The stress that I am going to start with is:

What I plan to do to prevent or deal with that stress: (Pick something from the list or use your own ideas.)

Do I need to involve others in helping me with my plan? How will I involve them?

What is my goal? How do I hope to change things?

After you have tried out your plan, see how well it works. Praise yourself for your success. Plan how to be successful in dealing with other stresses. You may want to keep this publication handy to remind you of ways to deal with stress.

As you make room in your life for things you love and replace stressful feelings with feelings of peace and calmness, you will find your personal and family life more satisfying. You are likely to find that you are more successful in your work, more effective with your children, and more at peace with yourself.

### If you want to learn more . . .

Newman, Mildred, and Berkowitz, Bernard (1971). *How To Be Your Own Best Friend*. New York: Ballantine Books.

### Just for fun . . .

Viorst, Judith (1972). *Alexander And The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. Hartford, Conn.: Atheneum.



HE-674

**Ellen Abell**, *Extension Specialist*, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University. Originally prepared by **H. Wallace Goddard**, former *Extension Family and Child Development Specialist*.

**For more information**, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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15M, Reprinted March 2004, HE-674

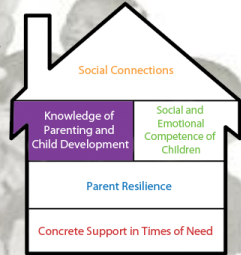
# Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development



## 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.*




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## 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)

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## 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




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## Knowledge of Parenting



Moving from **“Prescriptions”** to **“Principles”**



“Just do X when your child does Y and it will work”



Specific *prescriptive* answers to individual children and parents who are unique do not *always* work.

**Principles** are guidelines for parenting;

**Applications** are actions we take in response to principles

A new approach to parenting **shifts away from prescriptions** that specify what parents should say or do in a given dilemma. Research-based **principles** guide parents to finding applications that work in their unique situation.

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## Knowledge of Parenting



Two fundamental areas of healthy parenting & caregiving:

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



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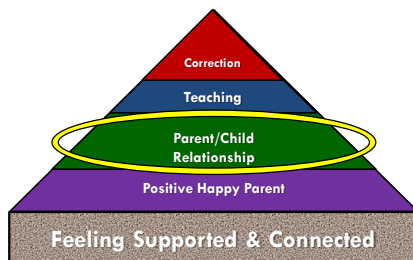
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## Parenting Pyramid



Adapted from Parenting Pyramid, Arnsperger Institute.

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## Using the Parenting Pyramid

- 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!

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## 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..."

Live with NO regrets...

"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."

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## 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."

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## Make Time for 9!



- **9** meaningful touches
- **9** 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
- **9** minutes of conversation




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## Build Your Relationships Daily



At least **once** per day...



**STOP**

**SLOW**

**GO LET THEM KNOW**

When you **SEE** something **SAY** something

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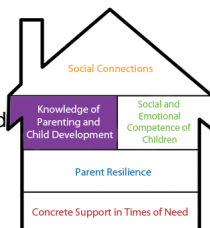
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## Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development



### Key Principles:

- Parents can 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, which depends on the parent-child relationship.
- Make time for 9!
- Stop, Slow, Go Let Them Know




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

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## Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

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### *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?

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

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## **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

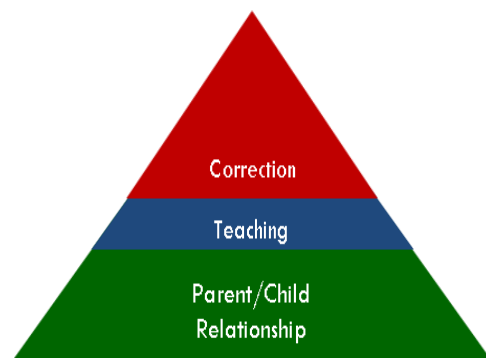
Do you feel like you spend most of your time disciplining and arguing with your children when things go wrong? Many parents get caught in this trap.

The Parenting Pyramid (developed by the Arbinger Institute, [www.Arbinger.com](http://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?

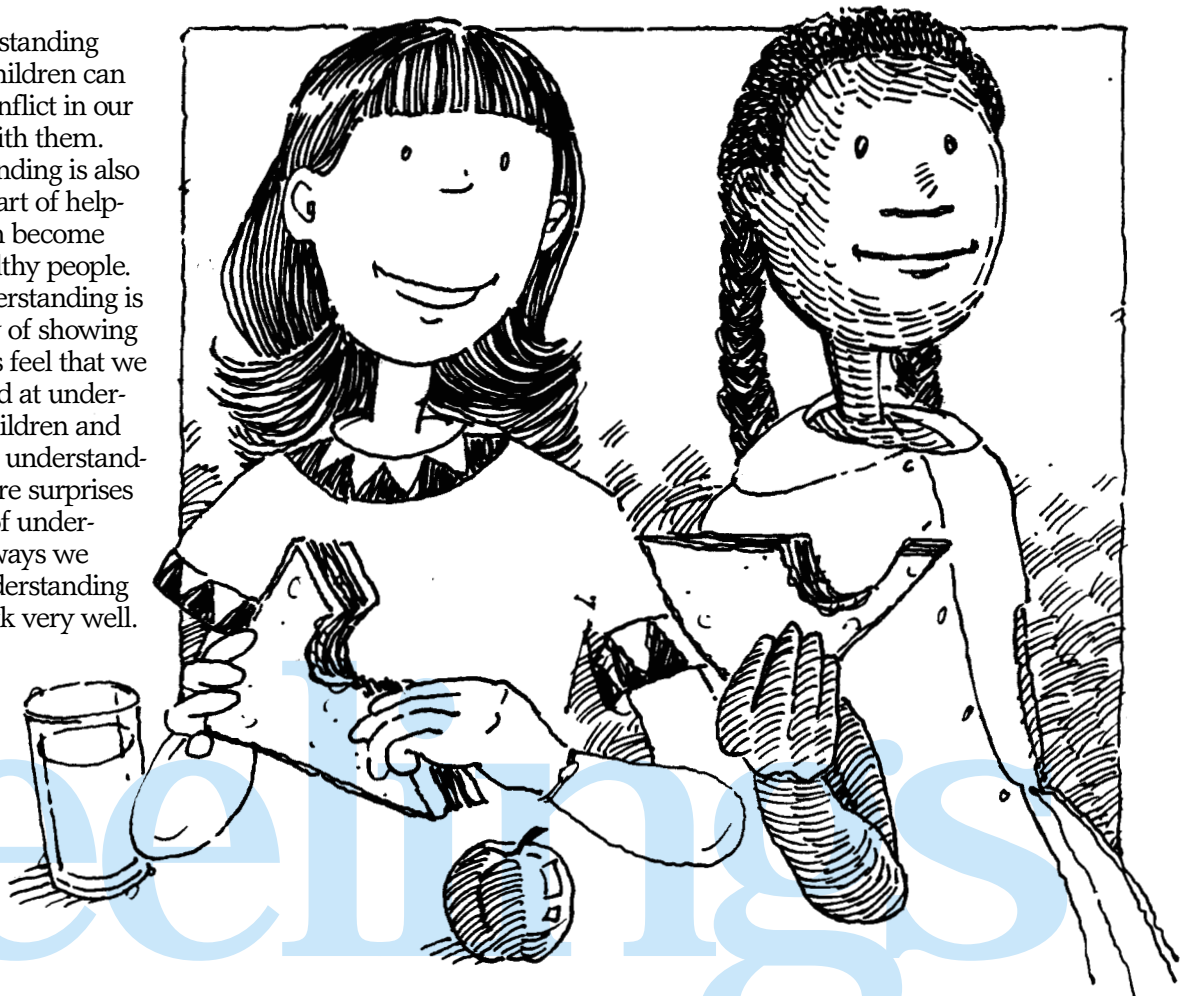
Do you call on other caring adults to help you with your children when you need a break?



# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## Being Understanding: A Key To Developing Healthy Children

**B**eing 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.



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## 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.

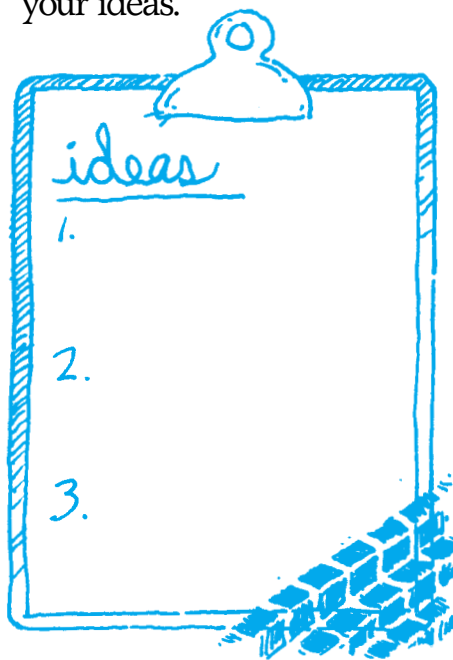
### **What about these situations?**

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.

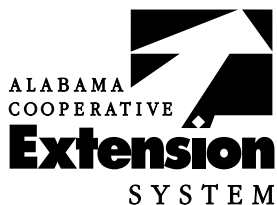
If we take time to listen to and understand our children, they are more likely to become confident and caring people. It takes many years to learn how to be as understanding as we would like to be. But it's well worth the effort.

### If you want to learn more . . .

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HE-682

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# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## Building a Positive Relationship with Your Child

Most of us spend a lot of time talking only about a few things with our children. "Wash your hands." "Stop teasing your sister." "Do your homework." "Stop that." "Go to bed."

Think about each of your children. During the last week, what are the things you have talked (or yelled) about with each child? Make a note about whether the talk was friendly (helpful, happy) or unfriendly (angry, bossy, mean).

**Name of child:**

**What we have talked about:**

**Friendly?**

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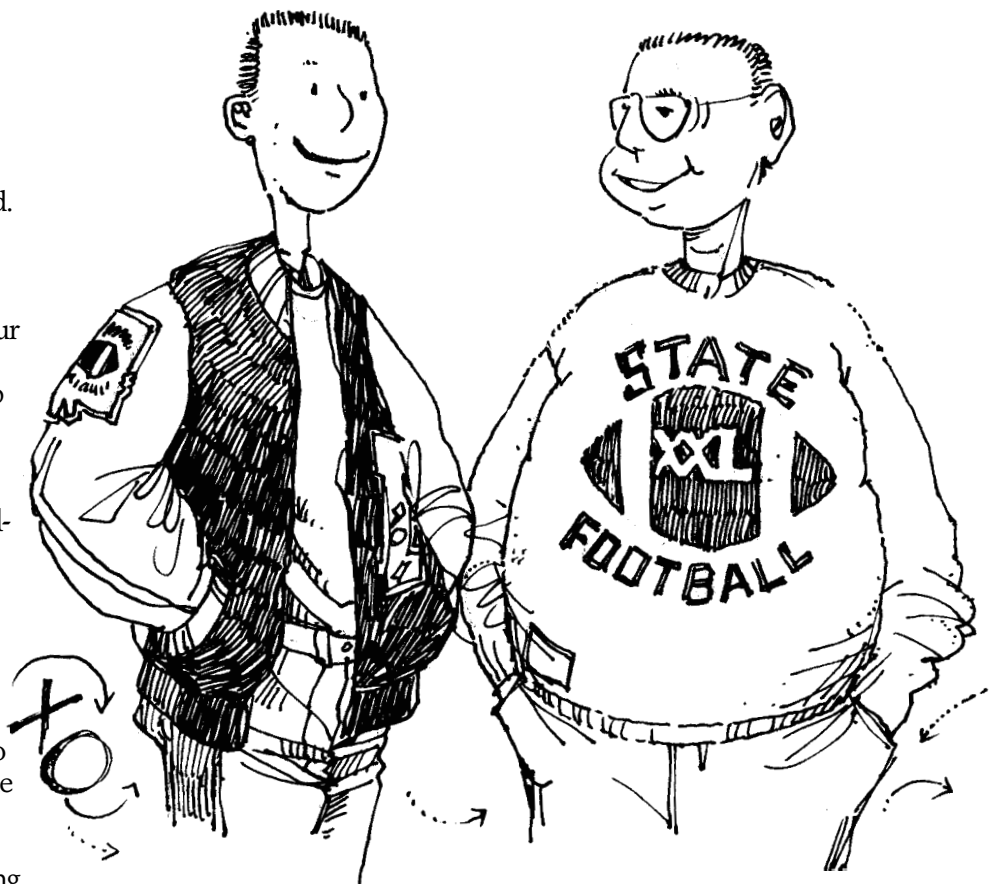
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The things we say and do with our children determine the kind of relationship we have with them. For instance, when you think about your relationship with your parents as you were growing up, there are probably certain words that come to mind. Maybe *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.

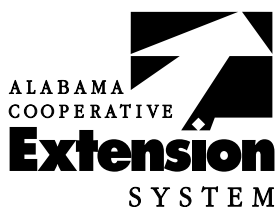
There are other tools that can help parents have appropriate control in their relationships with their children. If you don't seem to be able to control your children, you may want to read Extension Circular HE-687 in this series, "Something Better Than Punishment."

## 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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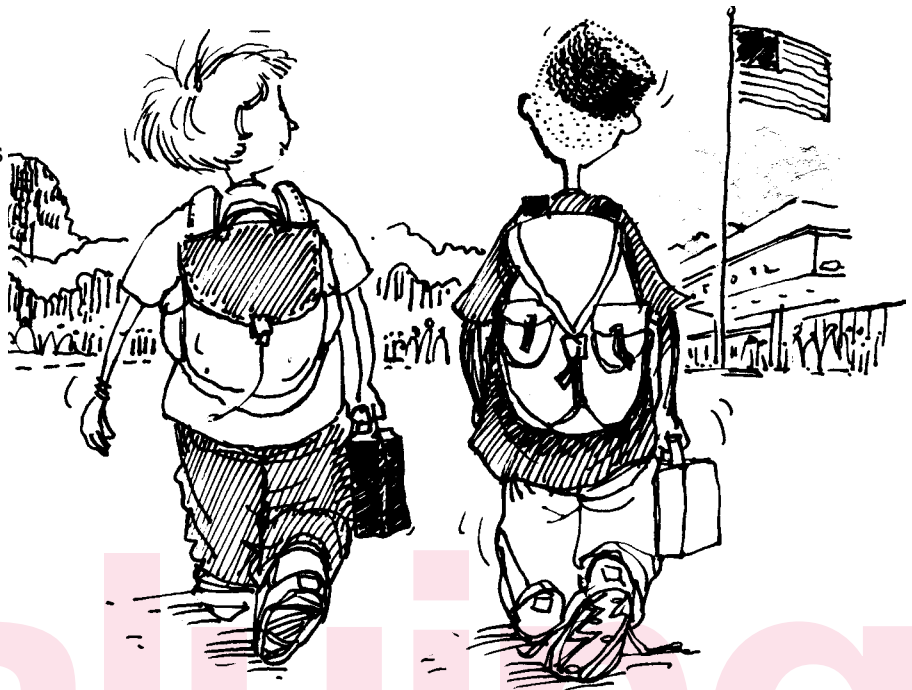
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# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## 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.



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.

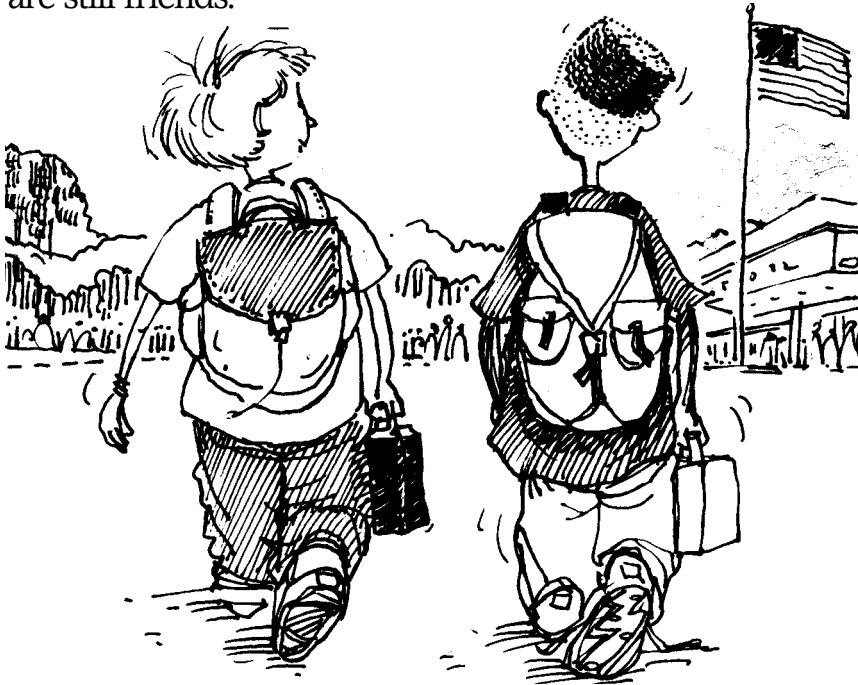
Every child is good at something. Maybe your child is athletic or creative or dramatic or smart or good at caring for younger children. There are many different talents. Even some things that we see as faults can also be seen as talents. For example, the child who cries easily may be very sensitive or 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.



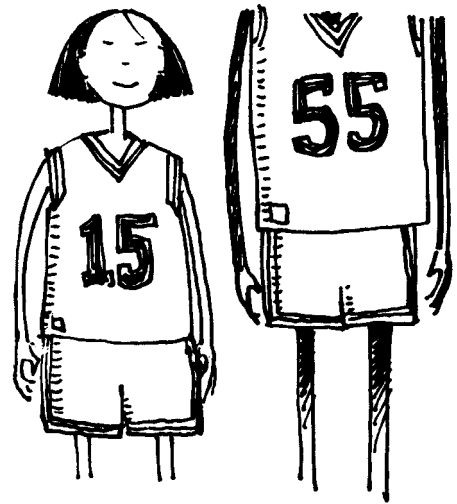
### No one has every talent.

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.

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.

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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## 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

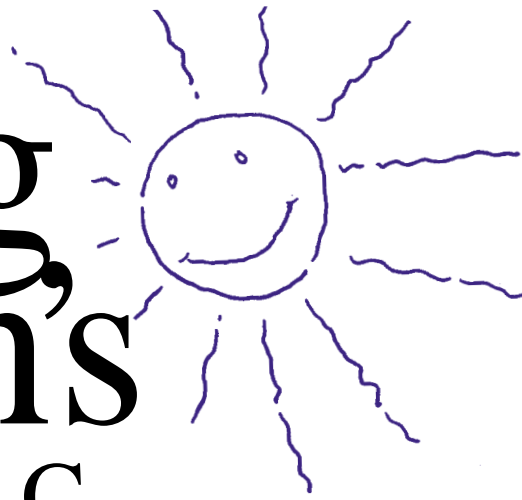
Russell Barkley has recommended 14 guides for raising children with ADHD. Review the list below (adapted from his book) and see where you can make improvements in the way your family deals with the child who has ADHD. (More information about his book is listed at the end of this unit.)

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.

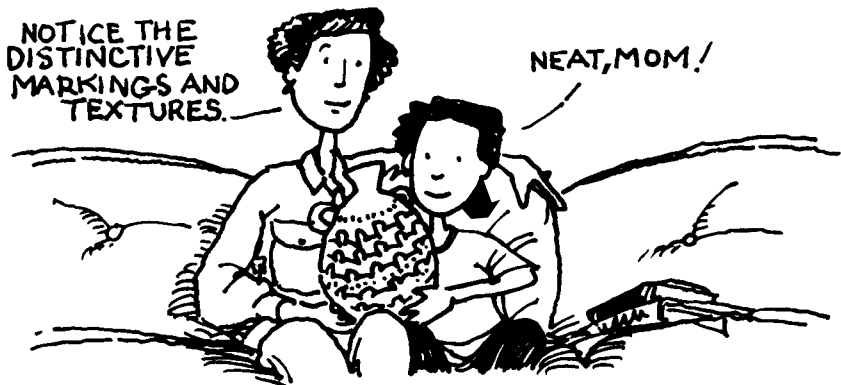
For example, think of a child with colic who seems to cry no matter what you do. A parent may feel angry and helpless. Getting angry at the child for having colic does not help. What can the parent do? First, check with the doctor to find out if the child has a serious problem. If the doctor does not 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.

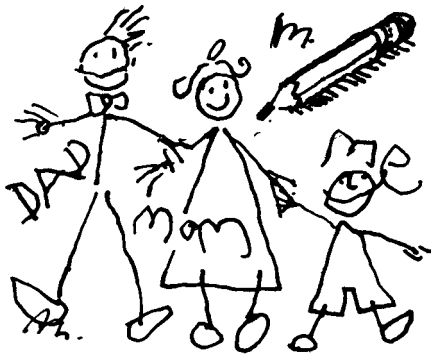
### **Children are different at different ages.**

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."

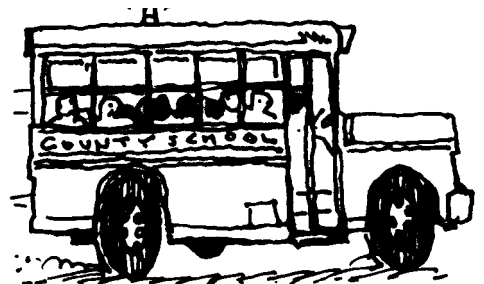
When we allow children to try things they want to do (while directing them toward jobs where they are likely to be safe and successful), they develop their skills and confidence. Often we expect children to do things that they are not yet able to do.

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.

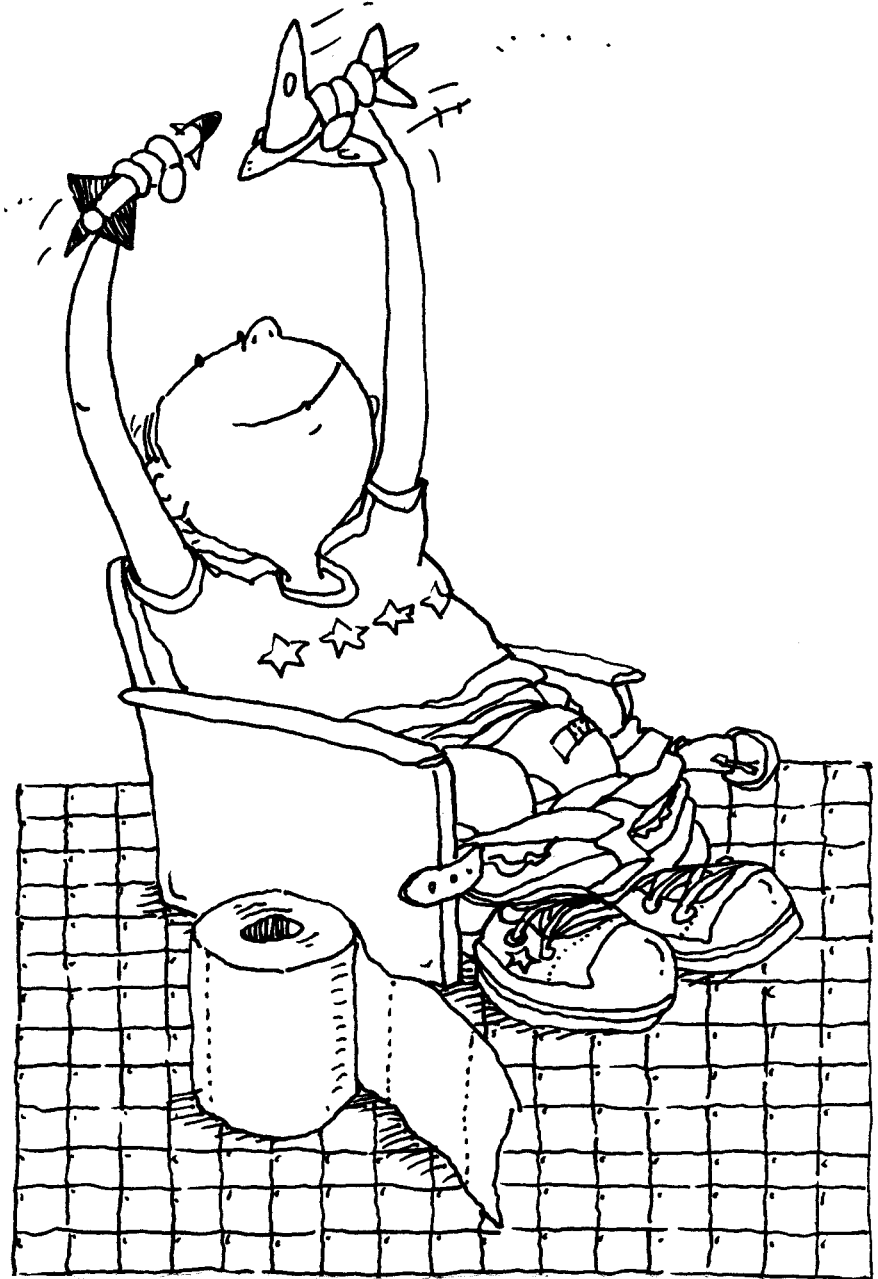
Sometimes we think that our children know that we are proud of them. Often they do not. We should tell them often about the things they do that we enjoy. They need to know that we appreciate them and care about them.

### **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.

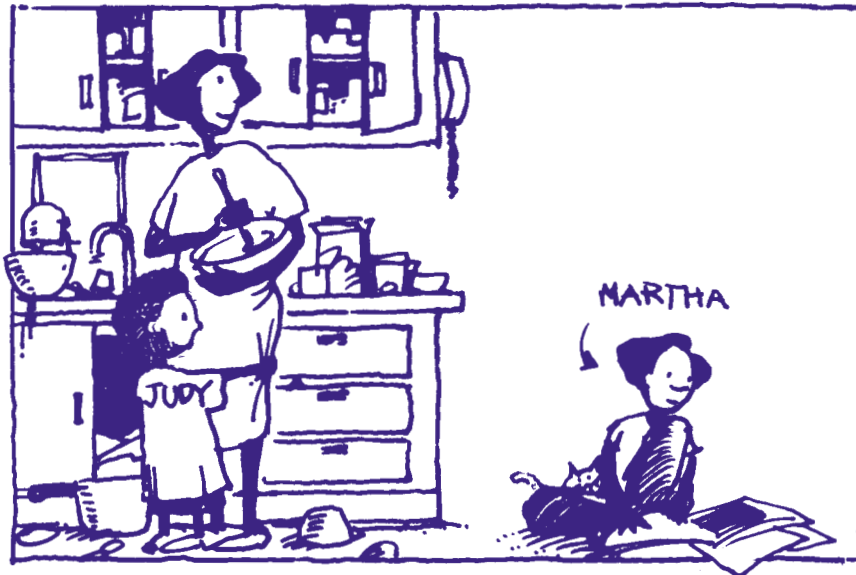
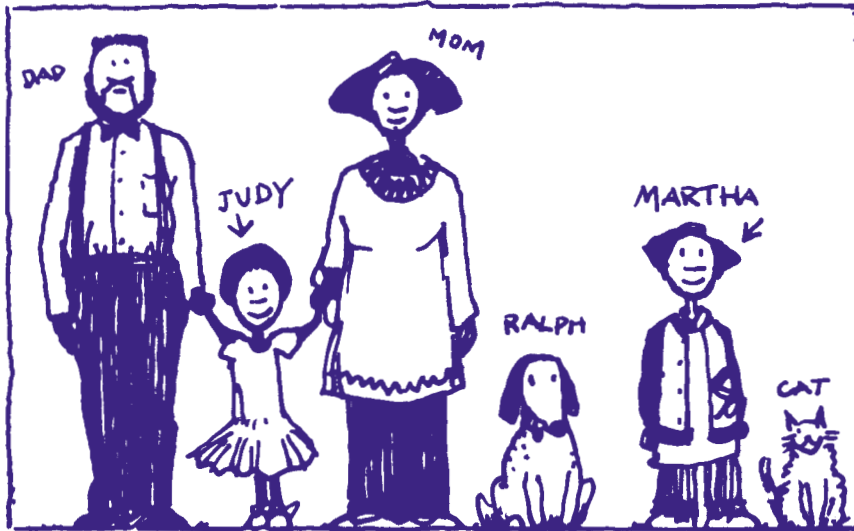
No two children are the same. It is unwise to rush children in their development or to try to get them to be like some other child. The helpful parent will help children develop as they are ready.

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 . . .

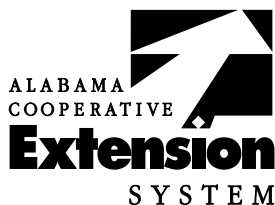
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HE-685

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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.

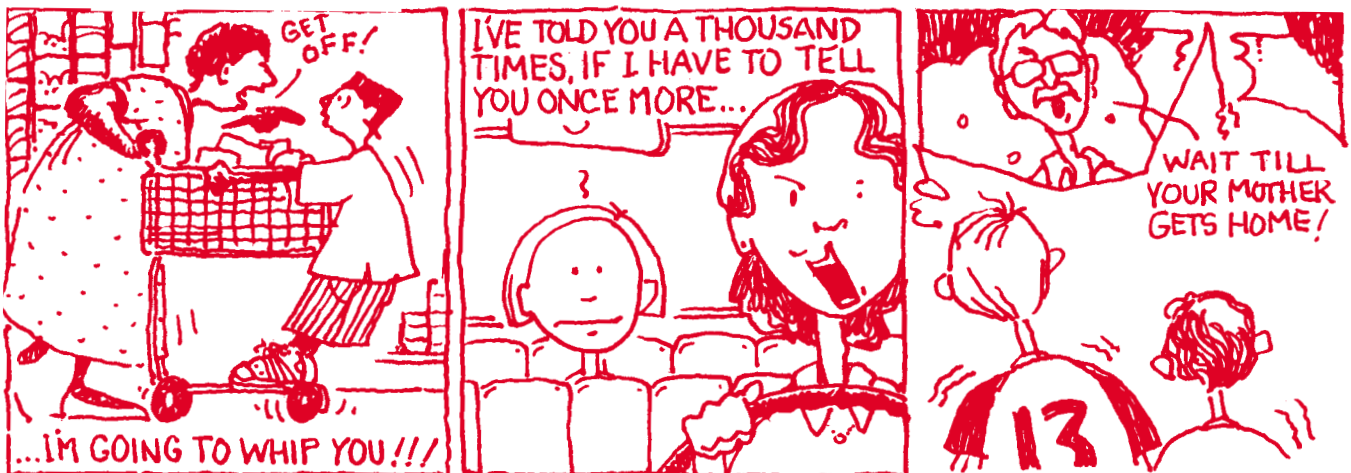
What is a reasonable consequence if your child does not obey the rule? Plan ahead how you will respond so that you are prepared.

# 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."

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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.

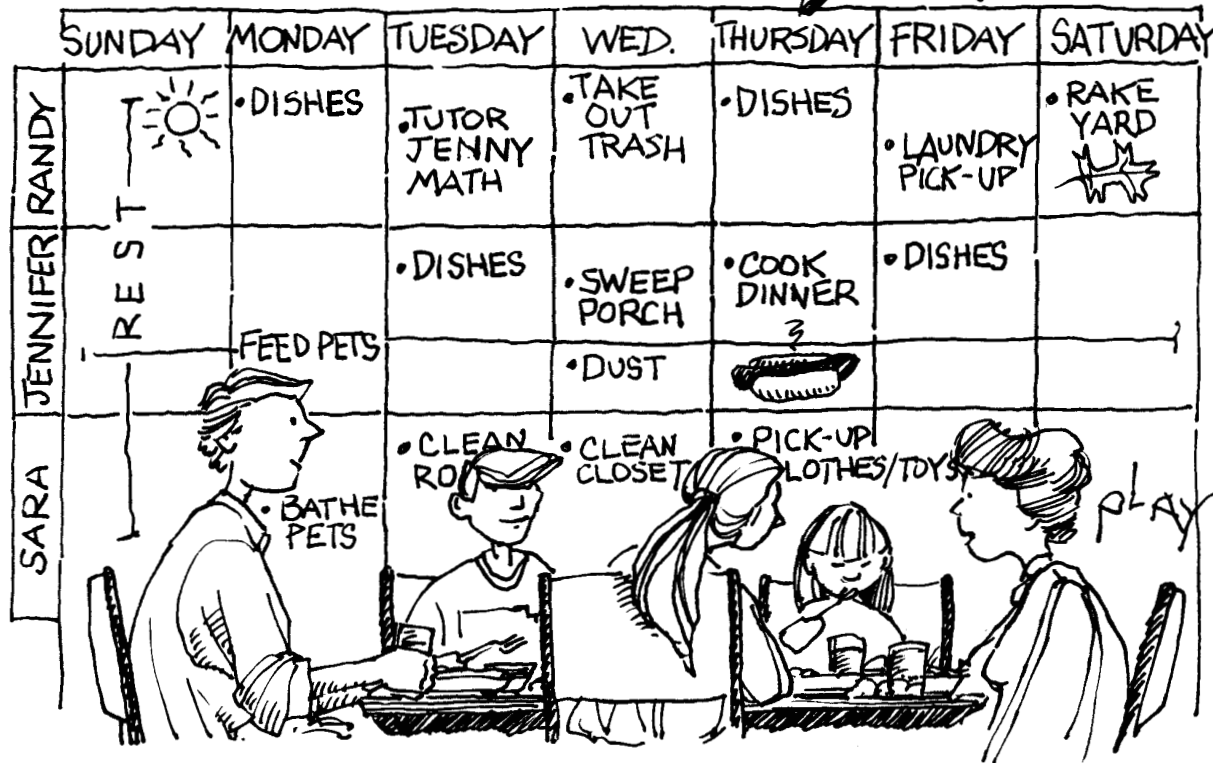
Being consistent in enforcing rules does not mean that the parent cannot adapt to circumstances. We make allowances for tiredness, age, influence of other children, and so on. Consistency means that when we make a rule that we think is reasonable and when a child violates that rule, the child will normally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

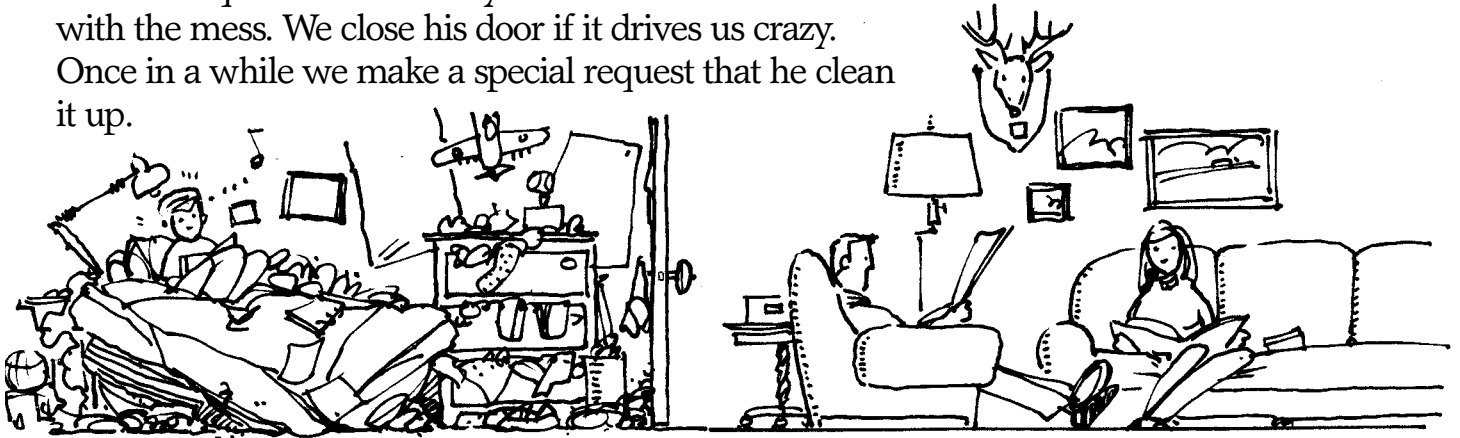


	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WED.	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
RANDY	SUN	• DISHES	• TUTOR JENNY MATH	• TAKE OUT TRASH	• DISHES	• LAUNDRY PICK-UP	• RAKE YARD ★
JENNIFER	REST		• DISHES	• SWEEP PORCH	• COOK DINNER	• DISHES	
SARA		FEED PETS	• CLEAN ROOM	• CLEAN CLOSET	• PICK-UP CLOTHES/TOYS		PLAY
		• BATHE PETS					

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.

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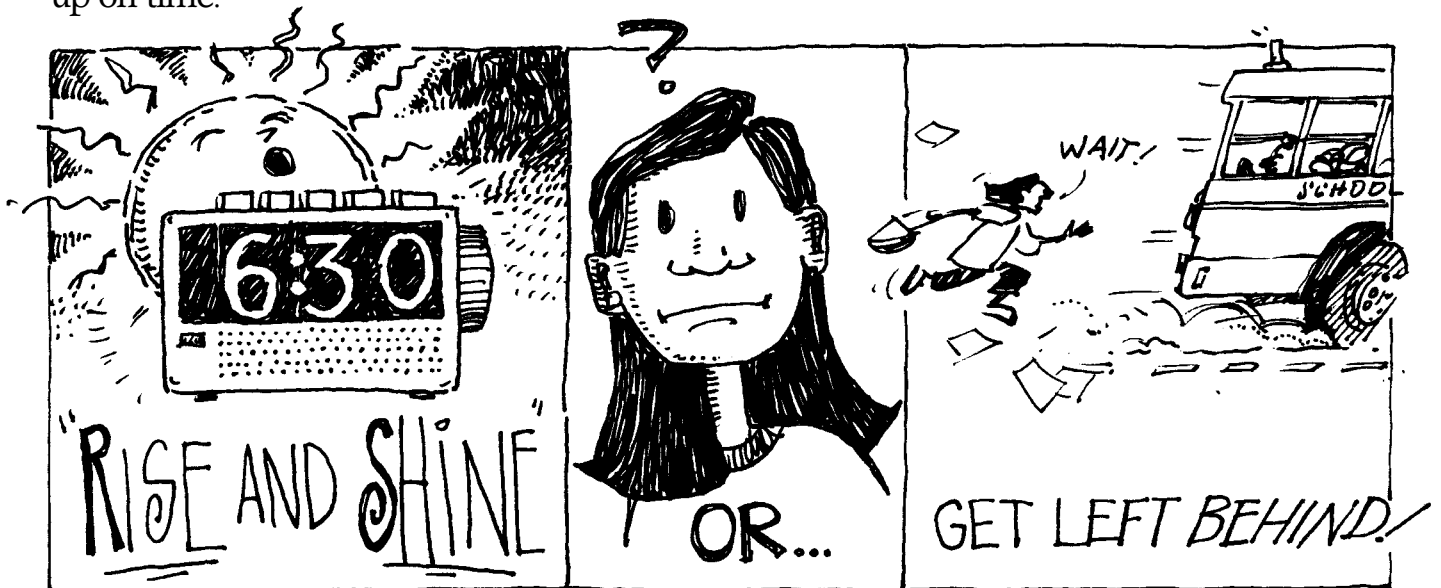
We like our children to have clean rooms. Our son likes a messy room. We finally decided that the reasonable consequence for a messy room is for him to live with the mess. We close his door if it drives us crazy. Once in a while we make a special request that he clean it up.



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.

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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 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.

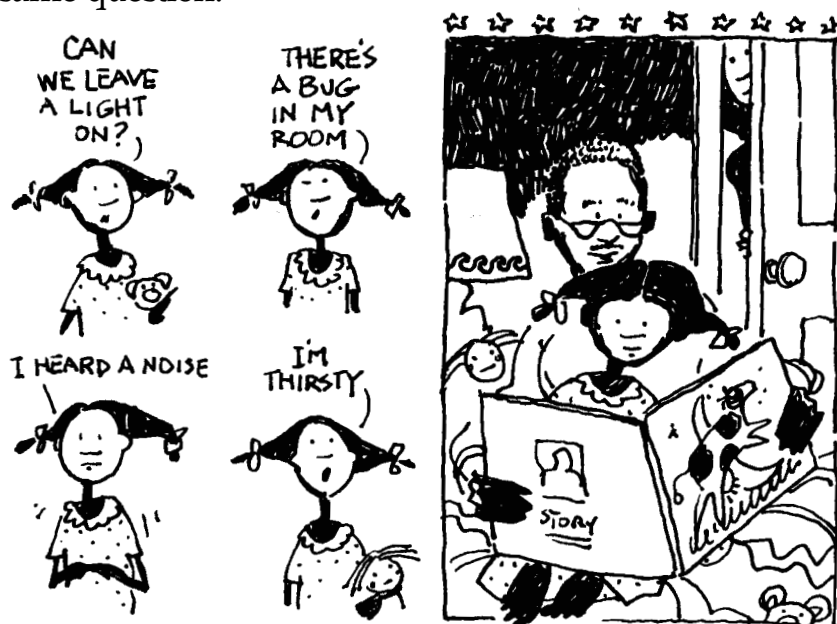


## Give children real choices.

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.

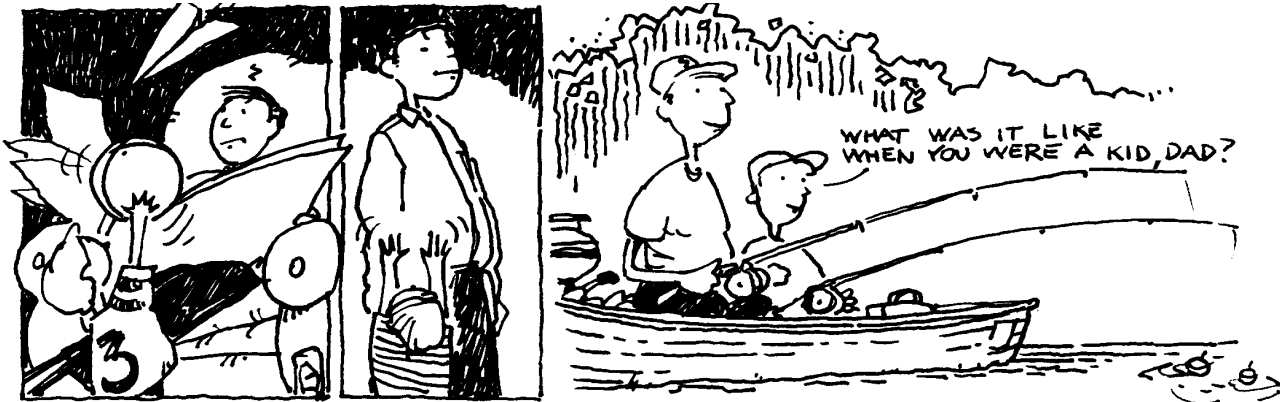
## Keep it positive.

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.



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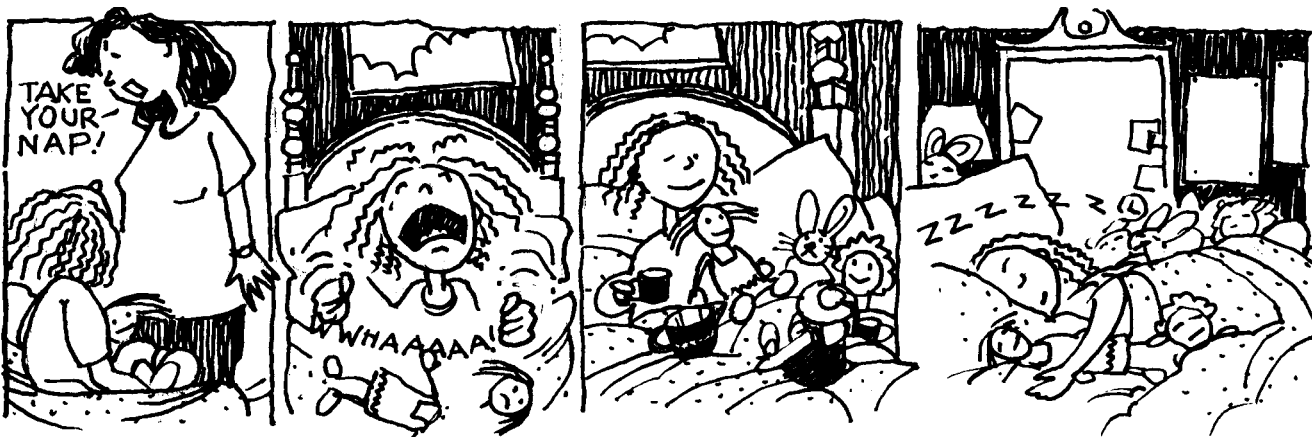
Tommy was always whining and pulling on his dad's pantleg. The dad would get angry because it seemed that his little boy always wanted his attention. One day he decided to take more time for his son. When his son would pull on his pantleg he would pick him up and talk to him, take a walk with him, or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

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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.

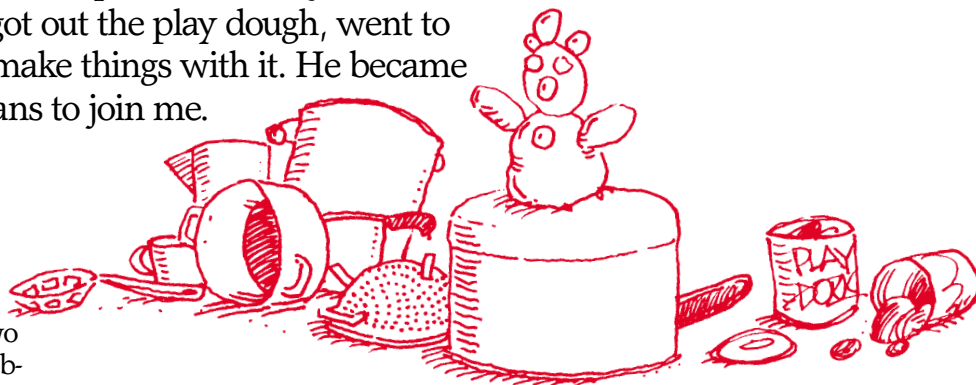


This wise mother learned how to get her daughter to get a rest without fighting with her. A mother should also be sensitive to the age at which a child no longer needs to take a nap.

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

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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**

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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## 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.

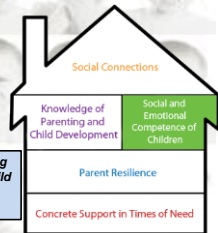
# **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**



## Social and Emotional Competence of Children



Sometimes children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents and caregivers can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.



"Perhaps the closest thing to a general law of parenting is that supportive, warm, sensitive, and responsive child rearing is associated with the development of social competence in the young" (Peterson & Hann, 1999, p. 336)

## Social and Emotional Competence of Children



Children need to learn **social skills**, such as sharing and being respectful, and **emotional skills**, such as using words to express feelings and emotions

- 753 kindergartners followed for 20 years. Those rated high in social competence skills were... (i.e. "resolves peer problems", "listens to others", "shares materials", "cooperates", is "helpful") (at age 25)
  - ▣ More likely to attain higher education
  - ▣ Working in higher paying jobs
  - ▣ Experiencing better mental health
  - ▣ Less likely to drop out, abuse drugs & alcohol, need government assistance & have a criminal record



## Parenting and Emotions

Fish swim, birds fly, people feel



- **Emotion Dismissing**
  - ▣ Unhappy emotions should go away/be minimized.
  - ▣ "There is no reason to be \_\_\_\_\_" or "Just get over it!" or "Cheer up, it's not that bad"
  - ▣ Discourages children from sharing feelings or trusting their own feelings.
- **Emotion Disapproving**
  - ▣ Emotions are a sign of weakness – Children should be tough.
  - ▣ "You shouldn't feel that way!" or "Don't be a wimp!"

(Based on Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting, John & Julie Gottman, 2013)

## Emotion Coaching



- A parenting style that promotes positive behavior and health of children. Values all emotions, not all behaviors.
  - ▢ Be aware of children's emotions
  - ▢ Recognize emotions as opportunities (bids) for connection
  - ▢ Help child verbally label emotions
  - ▢ Explore why a child feels a certain emotion
  - ▢ Express empathy and understanding
  - ▢ Help child figure out what to do about the emotions/reaction they are having
  - ▢ Help them learn from their mistakes
  - ▢ Set limits and problem solve



(Based on *Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting*, John & Julie Gottman, 2013)

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## Emotional Mirror



- Children need caregivers to respond appropriately to their emotions, especially their strong emotions.
- They need an environment where they feel safe expressing their emotions.

"Mirror"  
children's  
emotions



From a mirror kids want an  
image, not a sermon

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## Messages of Love



- There are at least three "languages" of love:
  - ▢ Show Me (e.g. time, gifts, service)
  - ▢ Tell Me
  - ▢ Touch Me
- Parents and caregivers can send a message of love by:
  - ▢ Noticing what children ask for
  - ▢ Noticing how children send messages of love



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## Bids for Connection



- Three ways to respond to bids for connection:
  - ▣ Turning away
  - ▣ Turning against
  - ▣ Turning toward
- Why do children make so many bids?
- Can you think of examples?
- Why is it important to “turn toward” bids for connection?
- What might turning toward children’s bids for connection teach them in their own relationships?



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## Granting in Fantasy What Can’t be Granted in Reality



- If wishes can’t be granted, grant them in fantasy.
  - ▣ It does not give them what they want, but it gives them the next best thing – knowing you heard them and understand.



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## How do positive responses to children build emotional and social competence?



- Early experiences (positive & negative) impact brain development, including “adverse childhood experiences”

Genes cause brain cells to form connections – but so do positive interactions with caregivers – including reading and responding!



- Resilience is possible – secure warm relationships have a protective effect
- Positive attention & stimulation cause new connections to form neural “learning pathways” & strengthens existing ones.

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## Children with Special Needs



- If you have a child with special needs, what do you need from others in order to support his/her social/emotional development?

- If you work with families who have children with special needs, what do you already do to support their social/emotional development?



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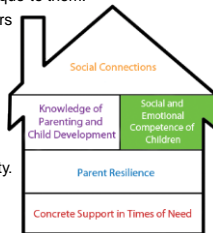
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## Social and Emotional Competence of Children



### Key Principles:

- Parents and caregivers serve as the primary role models for children.
- Children need messages of love that are unique to them.
- Children do best when parents and caregivers turn toward their bids for affection, attention, and connection.
- Children need an environment where they feel safe expressing their emotions.
- Feelings must be dealt with before behavior can be improved.
- Grant in fantasy what you can't grant in reality.
- Parents should model the principles.



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

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## Social and Emotional Competence of Children

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### *Listen to Kids and Help Them Put Emotions into Words*

Children's experiences during early childhood help set the stage for later health, well-being, and learning. Research shows that just as children's brains and bodies develop so do their emotions and their ability to express themselves. As children learn to tell parents how they feel and what they need, parents become more responsive to children's needs. Parents today have a lot on their plates. Juggling the demands of work, home, and other responsibilities leaves many parents feeling like they do not have nearly enough time with their children. But it is important for parents to remember that even though the *quantity* of time matters, the *quality* of time is also important. Even small acts of kindness, protection, and caring—a hug, a smile, or loving words—make a big difference to children. Sometimes parents need extra support if their children have problems or needs due to age, disability, or other factors. Parents need practical tips and resources to help them promote healthy social and emotional development.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Share information about children's social and emotional skills, including skills they typically do and do not possess at different ages.
- Talk about the importance of feelings when you work with children and parents.
- Help parents learn how to be empathic. Demonstrate how to reflect emotions back to children.
- Provide opportunities for children to express their feelings through drawing, writing, and other activities in addition to helping them express feelings verbally.
- Encourage parents to talk with other parents about how they promote their children's social and emotional development.
- If concerns arise, help parents identify staff or consultants who can talk with them.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- What kinds of daily routines do you have with your child?
- All families have conflict sometimes. What happens when there is conflict in your house?
- How do you keep your child safe at home and in your neighborhood?
- When you spend time with your child what do you like to do together?
- What are your child's greatest gifts and talents?
- How do you encourage these talents?
- What do you do when your child does something great?
- How does your child show affection?
- How does your child act when he/she is frustrated or angry? How does he/she calm down? What do you do to help?



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



## Emotional Mirror

Children start to learn about feelings and relationships when they are first born. When parents and caregivers respond in a warm and caring way, it helps children develop good social and emotional skills. These skills help children make friends, talk about feelings in healthy ways, work through conflicts peacefully, be patient, and show empathy when someone is hurt.

Children need to feel safe about sharing how they feel. When they feel safe, they are better at soothing themselves. If they have strong emotions, like fear, anger, sadness, or stress, it is not easy for them to listen or learn.

**To help children, use an “emotional mirror” to reflect their feelings:**

- Notice emotions and help children say how they feel. Do not ignore them. Instead, say things like:
  - “You look angry”*
  - “You are disappointed”*
  - “That is a pretty strong word”*
- Talk about why they feel that way
  - “Can you tell me more about that?”*
  - “Let’s think about another way to look at this.”*
- Help children solve problems so they can manage their feelings next time. If a child is upset or feels a strong emotion, it may be best to simply hold the child so they can cool down until they are ready to talk.

*A child’s feelings should be taken seriously, even though it might not seem like a big deal to others. Children will not act out as much if they feel understood.*

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

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## Bids for Connection

Children of all ages reach out for attention and affection to build positive bonds with their parents. These actions are called “bids”. Children constantly make bids for connection to their parents and caregivers – for attention, affection, reassurance, and help. How parents and caregivers respond to these bids is important. It affects children’s sense of self and feelings about their parents.

If a parent ignores a child’s bids or says something negative, the child might be less likely to make similar bids in the future. Sometimes misbehavior is a bid for connection, especially if other bids have gone unnoticed or were not successful.

On the other hand, if the parent “turns toward” and shows interest in what the child is saying or doing, this helps strengthen the relationship. Children love when parents watch them perform, try something new, and provide encouragement.

### **Here are some examples of bids:**

Questions: “Guess what I did today?”

Gestures: Reaching out to hold hands and motioning for parents to watch

Facial expressions: Smiling or frowning

Touch: Hugging

### **There are three ways to respond to a person’s bid for connection:**

- Turning away—Ignore bid and continue doing what one was doing
- Turning against—Become frustrated; tell child to go away because you are busy
- Turning toward—Give undivided attention by listening and/or watching (even if you feel like you have watched the same action a thousand times!)

Positive responses to bids for attention and affection send a message that parents care and understand their children. It also helps make children feel good about themselves and the relationship.

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

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## Granting in Fantasy

Sometimes children want things that parents simply cannot give them. Parents can get caught up trying to reason with children or explaining why something is not possible. Instead of saying “No” over and over again, a better strategy might be to grant in fantasy what you cannot grant in reality.

Here are some examples:

A child is whining because a special toy or blanket was accidentally left at home.

*A parent could try to reason and say something over and over such as:*

“I don’t have your blanket! Stop asking for it! I can’t get it for you!”

*Or a parent could grant in fantasy and say:*

“You really love your blanket. You miss it and you are very sad. You would love to snuggle with it right now. If I could race back to our house in a rocket, I would grab your blanket and zoom back.”

It is a stormy day and your child is complaining about staying inside and being bored.

*A parent could try to reason and say something over and over such as:*

“I told you before, you can go outside later. Now go find something else to do!”

*Or a parent could grant in fantasy and say:*

“Wouldn’t it be fun if we could be playing at the park instead? We could have fun playing catch or seeing how high we can swing.”

A child is hungry and only wants pizza, but someone ate the last slice.

*A parent could try to reason and say something over and over such as:*

“It’s gone. We will have pizza again another day. You have to pick something else to eat or don’t eat anything.”

*Or a parent could grant in fantasy and say:*

“Don’t you wish we lived in a pizza restaurant so you could have pizza all the time? You could walk into the kitchen and have any kind you want every meal!”

Granting in fantasy does not change how things are, but it shows the child you hear and understand and see why they are upset. Turn it into a game and see how imaginative you can be. Often children become so focused on imagining that they do not think about what was upsetting them. Letting children know we understand is very important. A parent may not be able to give what their child wants, but they can offer the next best thing—comfort and compassion.

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



## Rethinking the Brain

During the past 40 years, many studies have looked at how children develop, learn, and grow. This research has helped confirm the benefits of language activities like reading, storytelling, and singing. At one time, many thought our development depended mostly on our genetic makeup. Now, researchers recognize that nature (our genes) interacts with how we are nurtured (care, surroundings, stimulation).

Old thinking...	New thinking...
How your brain develops depends on the genes you are born with.	How a brain develops depends on a complex mix between the genes you are born with and your experiences.
Your experiences at a very young age have little impact on later development.	Early experiences have a big impact on the architecture of the brain and adult capacities.
A secure relationship with a primary caregiver creates a great place for early childhood development and learning.	Early interactions don't just create a context, they directly affect the way the brain is wired.
Brain development doesn't vary much; the brain's capacity to learn and change grows steadily as an infant progresses toward adulthood.	Brains continue to develop; there are prime times for learning different kinds of knowledge and skills.
A toddler's brain is much less active than the brain of a college student.	By the time children reach the age of three, their brains are twice as active as those of adults. Activity drops during adolescence.

*How can parents and other caregivers help promote children's positive development?*

Genes cause brain cells to form connections, but so do positive experiences with caregivers! Spend time reading and talking about pictures and stories. When children read and do other activities with caregivers, it not only promotes children's brain development but also their emotional and social development.

Early experiences (both positive and negative) impact brain development. Children can bounce back from difficult experiences, especially if they have secure, warm relationships with caregivers. These relationships have a protective effect that can help children cope with stressors and challenges later in life. Both children's and adult's brains can be rewired through positive experiences and close relationships.

*Adapted from: Making Connections: How Children Learn. A Summary of Recent Brain Research. September 1997.*

## Sending Messages of Love to Children in Their Own Language

Each of us likes to be loved in a little different way. It is true for adults and it is true for children. Even small children have their own ways that they like to be shown love.

We love best when we customize our message of love to the person receiving it. In fact, messages of love are effective only when the person to whom we send the message feels loved, valued, supported, or cared about. We can say, "I love you" to our children all day long, but they will believe us only if they feel loved. To help them feel loved we must discover what is important to each person - or their love language.

We can learn the love languages of the people in our families. Knowing how to best show love does not come automatically. It takes effort. That effort will pay off with closer relationships and more understanding. Family life can actually be more fun!

There are two love languages that seem to work with everyone. They are taking time and being understanding. Taking time means doing things together that both of you enjoy. Being understanding means listening to the feelings that are important to that person. There is a special unit dedicated to each of these languages.

There are some love languages that work very differently with different people. Some people are "tell me" types. They want to be told regularly that they are loved and valued. Some people are "show me" types. They are not convinced by words, they want actions. Some people are "hug me" people. They like to be held or hugged. Each of these languages of love is important enough to have a special unit dedicated to it.

Most people prefer love in some combination of languages. Some people may like a little telling, some hugging, and lots of showing. There are several ways to determine how people prefer to be loved: We can notice how they show love; we can notice what works in showing them love; we can ask them.

Love languages change. Even when you have discovered a family members' preferred way to be loved, your messages have to be adapted for their changing moods and their changing lives. A child who once loved getting a teddy bear may now prefer a T shirt. A partner who usually likes to be told may prefer to be hugged when tired or lonely. Consider languages of love as something you never stop learning. Experiment. Try new ways of showing love to the members of your family.

Don't think of this as extra work; think of this as smarter work. As you learn to show love to family members in the way they prefer, you will feel closer and even work together better. Give it a try!

### Applications:

Discovering languages of love: For each member of your family, consider the following:

Notice: How does that person usually show love toward people?

Think about: What has seemed to work at showing love toward that family member?

Ask: "What are the things people do that best help you feel loved?" or "What can I do that will best show my love for you?"

Experiment: Try sending messages of love and see what works.

You may also be interested in reading the unit, "Learning Languages of Love in Marriage."

# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

Sending  
Messages  
of...



Love

**E**very child (and adult) needs to be reminded often that people love and value him or her. Often we get busy and forget to send messages of love to our children. Or we send messages poorly. Or we send only angry messages.

Sometimes we send a message of love, but the child does not get it. It is as though we are talking different languages. There are at least three "languages" of love: showing, telling, and touching. Consider examples of each.



A child who likes show-me messages of love may want you to do things for her. She may want you to wash the dishes for her, to buy her a gift, to take time with her, to take her for ice cream, or to repair her bike. A tell-me child wants to hear words like: "I love you." "You're important to me." "I love to be with you." A touch-me child may want a parent to hug him, rock him, cuddle him, or hold his hand.



"YOU'RE IMPORTANT TO ME."

That all seems easy enough. But sometimes the message of love does not get through because we don't speak the child's "language." For example, if I send a message of love to my daughter by telling her that I love her but she wants me to take time to fix her bike, she might not get a message of love. She might feel that I don't really care. To make it more complicated, if you have more than one child, each child probably has a different way of getting messages of love.

How can you effectively send a message of love to a child? One way is to notice what your child asks for. Does he want time, attention, a listening ear, materials for a hobby, outings? Another way is to notice how the child sends messages of love to you and others. Does she tell you, hug you, write you notes, clean up the house? Observing these things can help you know how to be more effective at sending messages to a given child.

## You can learn to send the right messages of love to your children.

As you read the following list, think of each of your children and consider whether this method (or something like it) would be effective in sending messages of love. Write your children's names in the blanks to show which messages each child may need to receive.

### Child's name: Ways to send messages of love:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Say, "I love you."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a bike ride together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hug the child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a nature walk together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Say, "I sure enjoy being with you."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make a trip to the library together. Research a topic of interest to the child. Check out books for you to read to him or him to read to you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Say, "I sure am glad you're my child."
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work on a craft together: sculpt with clay or playdough, build with sticks, sew, draw.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work on a hobby together: writing, stamp collecting, woodworking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give the child a back-rub.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sit with the child and talk.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arm-wrestle, thumb-wrestle, or play a game involving physical exertion. (Be sure the child has a good chance to win!)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visit a relative or neighbor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thank the child for helping (or trying to help). Go to a park and swing together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Build a playhouse with the child, even if it's only a sheet thrown over a table. Then play in the playhouse together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have the child help you with grocery shopping.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have the child sit on your lap or close to you while reading, talking, or watching television.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give the child an "Eskimo kiss" (rub noses).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

Children often enjoy even jobs that seem like "work" if they provide a special time to be with the parent. For example, a child might feel important if allowed to go grocery shopping with a parent, especially if the child is allowed to help.

As you put your children's names on the ideas above, was one of your children very easy to show love to, while another was very difficult? It's important to find effective ways of showing love to each of your children. The child who is hard to love needs love as much as any child. Be sure to find effective ways to send love to that child also.

## Schedule special times with each child.

Some parents schedule dates or special times with each of their children.

Once a month Nancy would schedule a special time with each of the children. On Andy's day she would take him for a hike because he loves to hike. On Emily's day she would take her shopping and for a malt. On another day she would sew with Sara. For each of the children she scheduled the things that they most liked to do.

6	7	8	9
Andy	Emily	Sara	me
-HIKE	-SHOP	-SEW	

Of course, once a month is not often enough to send a message of love. But it may be a reasonable schedule for special times. You may want to use a calendar to schedule such special times for each child.

At least once every day we should find some way of sending a message of love to each child. It may include taking a few minutes in the evening to talk with a child about her day. It may mean inviting your son to help you cook dinner. It may be reading a story to your daughter. But every day the message of love should get through to each child.

In any family there are times of conflict. It's not reasonable to believe that there can be no differences, arguments, or fights at home. But while learning to control the problems, we can be sure that the message of love is still getting through.

## Send clear messages.

One of the difficulties of sending messages of love is that we sometimes send mixed messages.

Tom was visiting with me when he saw his son do something that upset him. He marched over to the boy, picked him up, yelled at him, and, when he was finished with the lecture, said, "And I love you." I don't think the boy got a message of love. I think all he heard was his dad's anger.



The dad may have thought he had taught his son about responsibility and still let him know that he loved him. Probably the boy did not learn anything about responsibility but only learned to be afraid of his father. A parent's anger can be so frightening to a child that he does not hear any of the words a parent says.

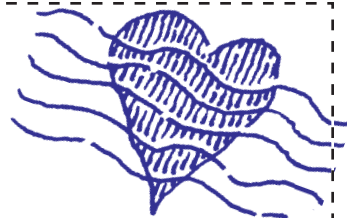
Another difficulty in sending messages to our children is that our own needs may keep us from seeing our children's needs.

When Andy earned an award, I told him I was so proud of him that I would take him out to dinner. He said he would rather have me help him buy a bike. I realized that I was going to take him to dinner because that's something I like to do, not because it's something Andy likes.

One of the challenges in sending effective messages of love is being aware of what's important to the child. Take a few minutes right now to make a plan of how you will send messages of love to each of your children in the coming week.

Child's name:

How will I send the message:

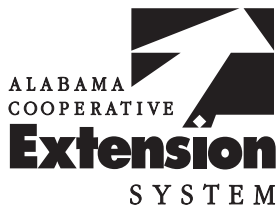


Children want to know that they are loved and valued by their parents. We can be effective at sending messages of love if we learn their "language," send messages regularly, schedule special time with them, and avoid letting anger block our message.

### 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.



HE-0683

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15M, Reprinted March 2004, HE-0683

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## Dealing with Tantrums

Tantrums are a real problem, and they are common. When a child starts to yell and scream, what is a parent to do?

Children usually have tantrums because they are tired, frustrated, and don't know how to express their feelings. The good news is that tantrums peak at about two years of age and generally disappear by three years of age. As a child learns to talk and to regulate her own feelings, she is less likely to resort to tantrums.

There is a lot that can be done to prevent tantrums. Don't take your daughter shopping when she missed her nap. Don't drag your son along on errands when he is hungry or bored. If we notice when our children are tired and frustrated, we can prevent many tantrums by not adding extra stress at a time of tiredness, hunger, or frustration. When you do take children along on errands, take things for her to do while she waits for you. If you see a tantrum looming, set aside what you are doing to calm your child. Talk gently. Hug or stroke him. Breathe deeply. Provide something for the child to do.

**Respond calmly to tantrums.** A berserk child does not need a berserk parent. Stay calm. Remove the child from any danger. Sometimes it soothes a child if you calmly stand nearby. When the child gets more settled, a parent might try to give words to the child's frustration: "You really wanted to go out and play, didn't you?" "You are feeling very tired." Recognize that tantrums are a normal way for children to express frustration.

**Give children control when possible.** Children like to have some control in their own lives. Offer them choices. "Would you like milk or orange juice for breakfast?" "Would you like to play with cars or blocks?" "Would you like me to read you a story or sing you a song when I tuck you in?" Children whose preferences are regularly respected, are less likely to get frustrated.

**Don't let tantrums set the rules.** If a parent responds to tantrums by frantically working to appease the child, that child may become a terrorist. Some children, especially after three years of age, throw tantrums because they have learned over time that it is the best way (or the only way) to get their way. We can understand their desire for something without feeling that we must indulge their whim. We can hold to limits while acknowledging their desire: "You really wish we could buy that toy for you."

**Make sure that you are involved in your child's life in many positive ways.** Notice the good things she does. Plan activities with him. Have fun together. A child's frustration is often worsened when there is not a parent available to help the child work through the frustrations of growing up. After a tantrum, do not punish or lecture. Provide the safe and loving environment that helps children grow.

If tantrums continue after the third birthday or become frequent or damaging, talk to your pediatrician.

### **Applications:**

What are the signs you see that one of your children is about to have a tantrum? Are there certain situations or pressures that seem to make them more likely?

What have you found that helps your child calm down instead of escalating to a tantrum? What have you found that helps your child get involved in something else?

What have you done that helps you stay calm when your child has a tantrum? Have you found anything that helps your child settle down after she or he starts a tantrum?

When your child is calm (at least an hour after a tantrum) you may be able to teach a child how to let you know what she is feeling or what he needs. What would work to help your child express him or herself without a tantrum?

## Empathy and Understanding Strengthen Children

Imagine that you have just done something dumb. Maybe you slammed your finger in a door or tripped on a curb. Does it help to have someone point out your error? Would you feel better and smarter if someone said, "You need to pay attention to where you are going!" Would you be glad if your spouse said, "Well, I guess we will need to hold classes for you on walking." No doubt you would feel insulted and angry. The same is true for children. When we state the obvious or emphasize ordinary mistakes, we insult people. This does not result in better performance; it results in damaged relationships. Our usual way of responding to our children's bad ideas and mistakes is to correct them. Haim Ginott, the famous child psychologist, has observed the following:

When a child is in the midst of strong emotions, he cannot listen to anyone. He cannot accept advice or consolation or constructive criticism. He wants us to understand him. He wants us to understand what is going on inside himself at that particular moment. (Ginott, 1965, p. 22)

**There is something very healing when people show understanding and compassion for our pain.** Maybe it is because understanding shows that we care enough to put ourselves in the other's shoes. Maybe it is also because understanding shows respect while advice may feel like criticism. After all, the answers to any problem are usually within the person with the problem, even when that person is a child.

Sometimes we assume that showing understanding will make children think we agree with their view or accept their misbehavior. But understanding really sends a very different message. It tells the child that we care about what happens to him or her: "Your situation is very painful. I feel bad for your pain. I know you want to do things right. I hope my support and love can help you find the peace that will help you solve the problem."

The person with the problems knows the situation, their feelings, their concern and their resources. The best way to help a person in pain is to provide understanding. When we provide understanding, the person is likely to find answers within him or herself.

**Understanding can be like a foreign language.** Most of us did not get very much understanding growing up; most of us are not used to speaking in that way either. Understanding involves observing the child and bringing our own human experience of pain to activate and inform our compassion. So, for instance, if a child tells us about being picked on at school, we might respond with something like one of the following:

"How frustrating."

"I wonder if you felt pretty lonely."

"You wished you had someone to stick up for you."



Many challenges in family life are not solved with understanding alone. We also need to set limits and do problem-solving. See additional units in this series for more information on these subjects. In the exercises that follow this unit there are examples of responses that are understanding and some that are not.

As you get better and better at showing compassionate understanding with your children, they will feel more loved and more confident in their ability to solve problems. And they will feel more love and trust with you.

### Applications:

Place yourself in the position of the person in the situation described in the top left of the box. Consider why the understanding responses are helpful while the less understanding responses might make you feel insulted. In the empty rows at the bottom of the table, you might add other things that you commonly hear (or say) and additional ways that might show understanding.

## Helping Children Learn to Respect Other People

There are some tricks to teaching children to respect people. Parents are tempted to command respect: "You will do as I say." "You will honor your mother." In fact, parents can command compliance, but they cannot command respect. We can make children do what we want them to do (as long as we are more powerful than they are) but we cannot make them respect us or others. Respect is cultivated and earned.

Respect is not earned simply through niceness. There is nothing wrong with being nice, but the parent who tries to "nice" children into doing things is likely to have a difficult child. Earning respect takes more than niceness.

There is another trick to developing respect: Parents are tempted to point out children's mistakes in order to get them to do better. This can backfire. When children feel judged and rejected, they are not motivated to improve. When children are criticized, rather than learn to improve, they are more likely to learn to condemn - themselves or others.

**Children will learn to respect people who show respect to them.** The people who are most likely to be respected use a unique combination of being loving and setting limits in firm but caring ways. (There are many units in this series that provide specific ideas in these areas.) While children do need constructive feedback, it must come within a relationship of love, support, and sensitivity if it is to motivate good behavior. Children also need limits, but they can be established with kindness and respect.

For example, if a child starts to hit his sister, a parent could react (unhelpfully!) with, "What's wrong with you? Stop hitting your sister you barbarian!" That parent could smack the child. That does not teach respect. On the other hand, if a child starts to hit his sister, we could catch the child's hand and say, "We never hurt others. Would you like to tell me what is bothering you?" The wise parent sets limits but does it without attacking or insulting the child.

**Children will learn to respect people when people who are important to them set an example of respect.** Children benefit from seeing us honor people who are examples of values that are important to us. We can regularly express admiration for such people.

It is easy to make fun of people who bother us or are different from us - people from a different country or of a different faith or with different beliefs. Our willingness to show respect for people who are different from us sets an example of respect.

That does not mean that we agree with everything that other people believe and do. "They believe that women must wear veils over their faces. Their views make sense to them. My view is different." It also does not mean that we accept dangerous or illegal behavior.



In order to teach respect, we must be willing to admit our own imperfections. We apologize to a child when we have been unreasonable. We ask for their forgiveness when we have hurt them.

Respect is the basis for strong relationships and it is the natural result when parents use love and guidance.

### **Applications:**

Who are some of the people you most respect? What have they done to earn your respect?

What are some of the ways you show respect to your children? (Do you listen respectfully to the things they say? Do you spend time with them? Do you try to honor their preferences?)

What are one or two ways that you can better show respect to your children?

When people claim to be better than they are, we notice their faults more. When people admit their shortcomings, we are more likely to overlook them - especially when we know they are trying to do better. Do you admit shortcomings to your children and ask for their patience and help? For example, you might say, "When I am tired, I sometimes get mad at you easily and am not as kind as I should be. I am trying to get better. I hope you will be patient with me."

Sometimes a parent is wise to let children know of their difficulties. "I am having a bad day. I hope you will give me a little extra room so that I don't say something that hurts your feelings." But a parent should not burden a child with worry for their well-being. "I expect to be feeling better after I have a few minutes to relax."

# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## Raising Good Children: Helping Your Child Become a Moral Adult

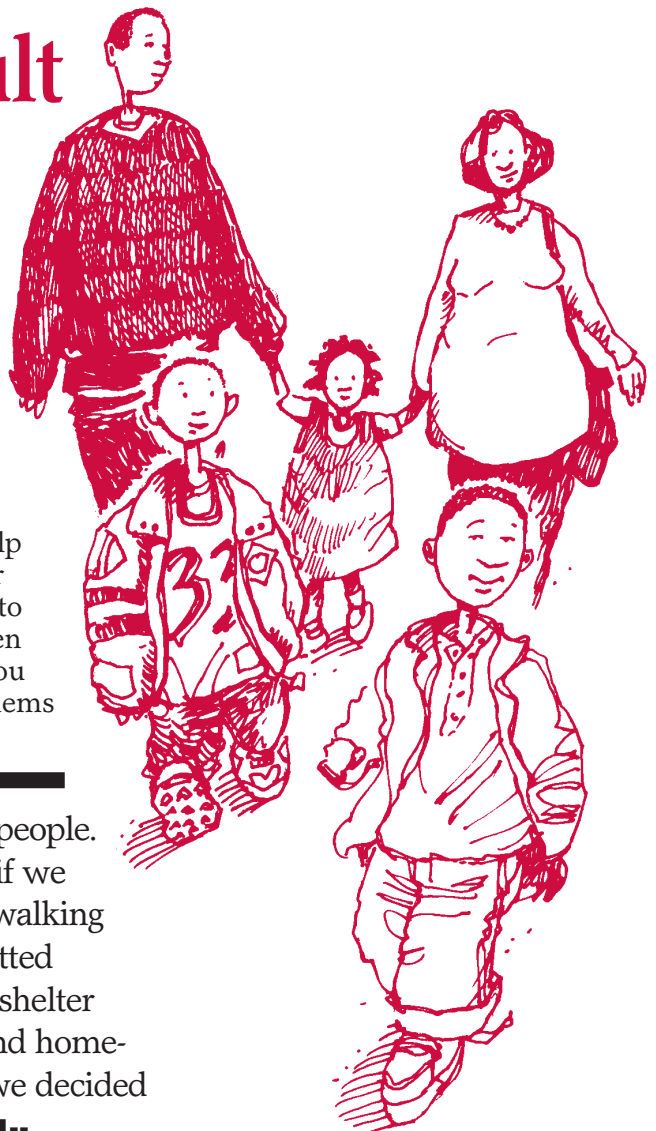
Most parents want their children to be kind and caring. We want our children to respect and help people rather than be cruel. We want our children to have inner standards of goodness that can guide them through difficult choices.

People who show concern for others and who make good choices are often said to be moral. Fortunately there are ways to raise your children so that they are more likely to develop into moral adults.

### Be an Example

Your actions send a powerful message to your children about what you think is important. Your willingness to help neighbors can teach your children how to be helpful. Your willingness to participate in church or community efforts to make the community a better place can teach your children how to be involved. Your willingness to apologize when you make mistakes can teach your children how to solve problems and work well with other people.

We have always wondered how to help homeless people. We contribute to charities but we always wondered if we should do more. Early one morning when we were walking along Canal Street on a visit to New Orleans, we spotted three unkempt older men huddled in a doorway for shelter from the rain. It seemed clear that they were poor and homeless. We weren't sure how we could help them but we decided



that we might take them to breakfast. My husband and I approached them and asked if we might take them to a restaurant a few doors away and buy them breakfast. They were very glad for a warm meal and for caring company. As we ate breakfast, they told us about their lives, both the pains and the joys. We felt very blessed by our visit with them. We did not solve all their problems that morning but we did a small thing to make life a little better for three people.

When parents actively seek ways to help other people, their children are likely to learn a powerful lesson. You may choose to share your musical talents with shut-ins. You may visit and talk with people who are lonely. You may offer a ride to a neighbor who has no car. You might volunteer to help at school. We can all find ways to use our talents and resources to make life a little better for others.

There is always a danger that people may be so anxious to help that they become unwise. It is not good to neglect good sense in our efforts to help others. And it is not wise to try to help in ways that do not fit our resources. But our willingness to try to be helpful with others can make a very big difference for children who are learning about how people relate to other people.

**Q: What are some ways you can serve and help in your community?**

## Discipline Children To Help Them Learn

The reason for disciplining children is to help them become strong and caring adults. The best discipline respects children and helps them to learn.

Think for a moment what it must look like to a child to be spanked for hitting his sister. It must be terribly confusing to have someone hit you to teach you not to hit. Spanking children may teach them to be mean.

Showing respect for children's preferences teaches them about sensitivity and consideration. Discipline that sets limits but also helps children find good ways to get their needs met, can help them become moral adults.

One motto that expresses the challenge of parenting is, "My job as a parent is to help my children get what they want in a way that I feel good about." We want to respect children's preferences while still setting limits.

Children are more likely to learn about good behavior when their parents are willing to calmly discuss ideas and rules with them. If parents blame, criticize, and punish their children a lot, the children are likely to become discouraged or angry. If parents do not set limits for their children, the children are likely to become careless about rules.

Children learn best by gentle parental teaching and by parents' wise use of limits and consequences.

You may want to study Extension publication HE-0687, "Something Better Than Punishment," as you think about good ways to raise moral children.

My five-year-old wanted to help me wash the dishes. She likes to be involved. But when she helped me with the dishes, she would often break a cup or a plate. So I asked her if she would like to set up her own dishwashing. She was very excited. We would set a bowl of soapy water and a bowl of clean water on the table and she would wash, rinse, and dry her plastic plates and spoons. She really enjoyed having her own work to do. Of course she splashed water on the table and floor, but it was easy enough to wipe up the spills when she finished. And I was able to wash the family dishes without breakage.



The common problems with discipline seem to be of two kinds: sometimes we are too insensitive to children's wishes and other times we are unwilling to set limits. When we do not listen carefully to children's wishes, we teach them by our example to be insensitive. When we are unwilling to set limits, we teach them that they do not need to respect rules. The solution is to help them have the experiences and opportunities that they want but to use our adult wisdom to set limits.

For example, some families have a rule that children will be at home rather than hanging out on the streets. Some families set a standard that their children will not date until 16 years of age. Setting standards is important.

But it is also important to be sensitive to the children. For example, a family may allow friends to come to their home to play rather than have their children hang out on the street. Teens can be allowed to have friend parties in their home rather than go on dates before they are ready.

There are better ways to teach children than through spanking and punishment. Hurting children may teach them that the world is a cruel place. Any discipline that is insensitive to what children need and want does not teach them about sensitivity and consideration. Discipline that sets limits but helps children find good ways to get their needs met can help them become moral adults.

**Q: How well are you doing at helping your children get what they want in ways that you think are appropriate? Are you using positive, helpful discipline?**

## Help Your Children Learn Compassion

The basis for moral behavior is empathy, compassion, or feeling for other people. Moral people do not like to see other people suffer. There are many things we can do to help our children develop their compassion.

We can read or tell stories to children that illustrate compassion. For example, in the children's book *Miss Tizzy*, an older woman draws neighbor children into both fun and service. When Miss Tizzy becomes ill, the children know what to do. They serve her.

You may also know stories from the lives of your ancestors or heroes that illustrate the blessing of compassion. Reading such books or telling such stories can help children become more compassionate. A short list of children's books that can help you teach com-

passion is provided at the end of this publication.

We can also give children chances to serve with us. When we visit shut-ins or prepare a meal for someone who is bedridden, we might invite our children to help us. Children should not be forced to participate. But if we tell them about the other person and his or her suffering, and if we show how they can be helpful, many children will choose to help.

When I was invited to deliver some money to a struggling family, I invited my family to help. Each member of the family made gifts or cards or prepared treats. We all worked together to do something for the needy family. The gifts and money were all delivered anonymously.

The next week the family wrote a letter of thanks that was published in the local newspaper. Each family member felt very glad to have been a part of the little project.

The way we talk to children when they hurt others can also help children develop compassion. Instead of blaming children who cause the injuries, we might talk to them about the effect of their behavior on other children. "When you push Cedric down he feels very afraid and lonely. We don't want Cedric to feel that way. What can we do to work with Cedric without hurting him or making him feel bad?"



One of the best ways to help children develop compassion is to get them involved in service. Ideally the service should fit their talents, maturity, and interests. Small children can join you in making and delivering cookies or in singing to lonely neighbors. Older children may be able to help you clean or paint an older neighbor's house. Teenagers may want to join Habitat for Humanity or some other community service effort. As we involve children in service and talk with them about suffering and people's efforts to help, our children are more likely to become moral adults we can be proud of.

**Q: What ways can you help you children develop their compassion?**

## Principles and Feelings

Talk with your children about the feelings and principles that guide your life. Children like to be taught rather than lectured. Good stories can be powerful teachers. Perhaps you had a fifth-grade teacher who was especially caring. Tell the children about her and what you appreciated. Perhaps there is a historic figure whom you have patterned your life after. Share with your children stories and lessons from that person's life.

In our family we all want to learn from each other. Every Sunday as we sit down for a leisurely family dinner, we invite every family member to share his or her best experience of the day. Some family members tell about sharing with a good friend. Some may tell about



things they have learned. Some tell about feelings of peace or love or joy. We like to encourage every family member to notice what they are feeling and to share it with family members.

Songs also teach powerful lessons. We can use the time riding in the car (especially with young children) or playing together to sing fun songs about things that we believe in.

Some families establish a tradition of meeting one evening every week to learn and to share. Family members can take turns leading the weekly discussion or lesson. Even young children can be taught to share stories about their heroes. It is also useful if parents teach their children to understand other people, their differences and their qualities.

There are some influences that can deaden people's sensitivities. Violent, abusive, or cruel movies or games can damage human sensitivity. Wise parents will limit children's exposure to experiences that are harsh. But they will also teach children about positive, sensitive, and tender experiences. They will listen to children and encourage them to be aware of their feelings. (See "Being Understanding: A Key to Developing Healthy Children," Extension publication HE-0682.) Sometimes the best parental teaching is done by listening. Teaching children to be in tune with their feelings can help them make compassionate decisions and become moral adults.

Sometimes children learn to be afraid of the bad without

learning to love the good. Try to understand their feelings of fear and anxiety. Parents also need to help their children to be optimistic, happy, and hopeful. Notice how much each of your children feels positive and hopeful. Help them to notice the things they are excited about. Help them to deal with the things they worry about. You may want to watch the movie *Polyanna* with them and talk with them about playing the glad game.

**Q: What are some ways you will talk with your children about the feelings and principles that guide your life?**

## Help Children Experience Loving, Caring Relationships

The most important factor in helping children become moral adults may be the experience of loving, caring, helping relationships. Every child needs someone who is crazy about him or her. It might be a parent or some other relative. It might be a teacher. But every person needs to be loved.

I always loved visiting my grandmother's house. She seemed to love having me around. She listened to me tell about my experiences. And she cooked special treats for me. Grandma is one reason I am a happy adult today.

The best pattern is for a child to have many people in his or her life who enjoy, appreciate, encourage, and celebrate

that child. Of course different children have different preferences for how they want to be loved. (See "Sending Messages of Love," Extension publication HE-0683.) But all children need to feel valued. A wise parent not only finds ways to show love to each child but helps each child have experiences with other adults who are supportive and caring.

**Q: Does each of your children have regular experiences with people who care about them?**

Imagine that some day when your children are grown you will study their lives and you will see people who are caring and considerate, and who make wise and sensitive decisions. You will know that your efforts to encourage moral development have paid off.

**Some children's books to help you teach compassion are:**

*Miss Tizzy* by Libba Moore Gray, published by Simon & Schuster, 1993.

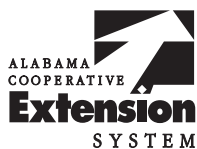
*Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen* by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan, published by Morrow Junior Books, 1991.

*Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, published by Dial Books for Young Readers, 1991.

*Little Polar Bear Finds a Friend* by Hans deBeer, published by North-South Books, 1990.

*Rose Blanche* by Roberto Innocenti, published by Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1985.

For further reading about moral development, you might be interested in *Raising Good Children* by Thomas Lickona, published by Bantam, 1994.



HE-0678

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**Reviewed March 2013**, HE-0678

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# PRINCIPLES OF Parenting

## Communication: Building A Strong Bridge Between You And Your Children

Sometimes we think that communication is the same thing as telling someone something. But communication is much more than that. Communication is any sharing of meaning between two (or more) people.

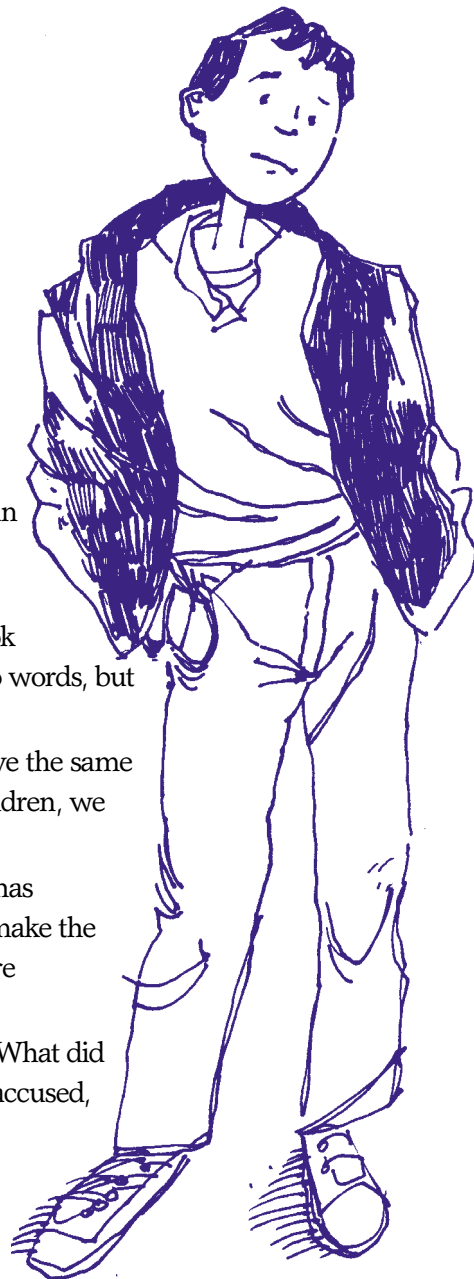
We very often communicate without words, such as when I look threateningly at a child who is about to take a cookie. I may say no words, but the child gets a message.

One of the challenges of communication is that we may not have the same meanings as the people we communicate with. Even with our children, we may have very different meanings.

For example, if your son comes home from school and says he has had trouble with his teacher, you might ask, "What did you do to make the teacher mad?" When we ask that question, we are looking for more information so we can help the child be better behaved.

What do you think is the meaning for the child when we ask, "What did you do to make the teacher mad?" It's possible that the child feels accused, feels that you care more about the teacher than about him, that no one understands him, or that you don't care about his feelings.

So what can you do to communicate better?



## Take time to discover children's meanings.

A very important way to build a relationship with children is to ask questions about their interests, activities, and feelings. The questions should not sound like a policeman trying to get information from them. They should sound like a friend showing interest in them. For example:

"How did your project at school go?"

"What did you enjoy about your visit at your friend's house?"

"Will you tell me about your best experience today?"

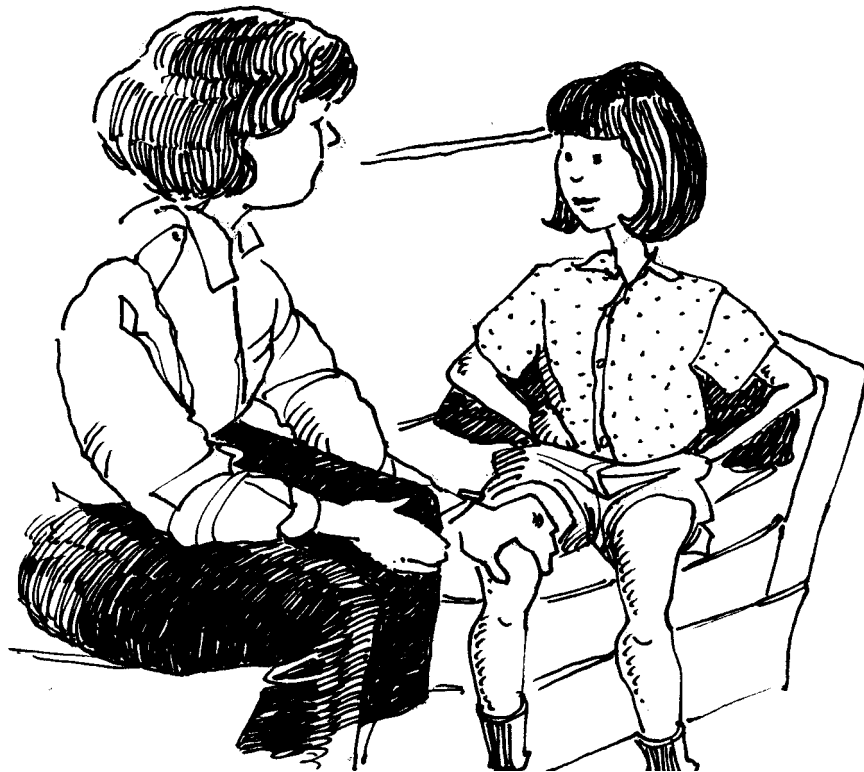
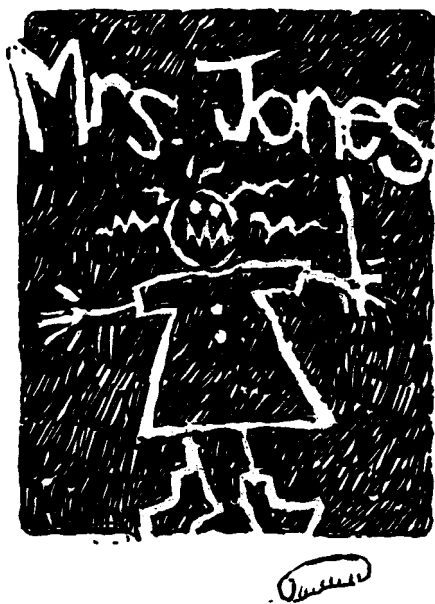
"You seem worried (happy, tired, angry). Will you tell me how you feel?"

One of the most important times to understand children's feelings is when they have strong feelings. If your child has just told you about trouble with his teacher, you might say one of the following:

"How did you feel about what your teacher did?"

"That sounds like it was very embarrassing."

"I wonder if you felt angry."



The first step in effective communication is taking time to understand. Some parents worry that showing understanding to children means that the parent agrees with their behavior. The fact that you understand how your children feel does not necessarily mean that you agree with their behavior. It means that you care about their feelings! That is a very important message. Of course, after you have understood, it's good to find a solution to the problem. You don't need to decide whether the child or the teacher was to blame. Teaching children how to behave is what matters. You can simply ask, "What do you need to do to prevent trouble with your teacher in the future?" If the child has felt safe and understood, then he should be willing to think of ways to prevent future trouble. As a parent you can help the child think of possibilities: "Would it help to sit by different friends?" "Do you need to tell your friends that you want to finish your work before you talk?"

In order to be effective at this part of communication, you should concentrate on what the child says, try to notice how the child feels, and ask questions that help you understand better. (For more information on how to show understanding, see Extension Circular HE-682 in this series, "Being Understanding: A Key To Developing Healthy Children.")

In order to understand children's meanings, it is often helpful to stop what you're doing, sit at their level, and, if you're listening to a small child, put her in your lap. Even if the child is older, you might put a hand on her shoulder or arm, look into her face, and concentrate on what she says. Of course, if the child is uncomfortable being held, don't try to force contact.

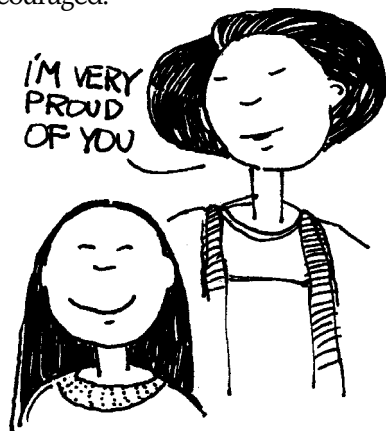
As you listen to the child, you may be tempted to argue or correct. What is the message you send to the child if you argue with him or correct him? Is that the message you want to send? Wouldn't it be more helpful to listen, understand, and help him make decisions?

## Send clear and encouraging messages.

The next step in being an effective communicator is to send clear messages. Does our talk with our children ever sound like the following?

Why aren't you up? Are you going to sleep all day? Who said you could use that? Clean the dishes off the table. Hurry up and get dressed. Why did you put that on? Turn down the radio. Have you made the bed yet? That skirt is too short. Your room is a mess. Stand up straight. Can't you get anything right? Clean your plate. Quit chewing your gum like that. I don't care if everyone else does have one. Have you done your homework? Don't slouch. You didn't make the bed. Look it up in the dictionary. Get off the phone. Why do you do that? Turn the music down. Take the dog out. Turn that radio off and go to sleep.

We may think that such messages teach children to be responsible. But when most of the messages a child receives are like those, the child may feel dumb and unloved. The child gets instructions. But the other message that comes with nagging, reminding, criticizing, threatening, lecturing, questioning, advising, evaluating, telling, and demanding is that the child is dumb or bad. The child can get very discouraged.



But parents can learn to send clear and encouraging messages to their children. Consider the following:

Good morning. Thank you for hanging up your pajamas. Thank you for cleaning your plate. I'm glad you got yourself dressed. Will you help me?



Sometimes it's hard to be encouraging with our children because we're so worn out, tired, unhappy, or angry. It's easy to feel overwhelmed with all that a parent is expected to do. If you feel overwhelmed very often, you may want to read Extension Circular HE-674 in this series, "Taking Care Of The Parent: Replacing Stress With Peace."

Sometimes we try to express feelings to our children when we feel angry. Usually that is a bad idea. If you feel like hurting or insulting the child, wait until you have had time to calm down before you try to discuss your feelings. After you have had time to settle down, you may be able to share your feelings without insulting the child.

Taking time to encourage children pays off. And it's easier to deal with a child who feels understood, valued, and encouraged.

There's another kind of clear message that is important to send: the relationship message. A relationship message is any message that tells a person he's important to you. For example:

"I really enjoy being with you."

"Thank you for being a helper."

"You're a big help. I appreciate it."

"Will you come with me to the store? I like to have you with me."

By regularly sending positive relationship messages, we can make it clear to our children that we value them, respect them, and love to be with them.



## Share your feelings in helpful ways.

When it's necessary to share some hurt or frustration with your child, there are effective ways to do it. One way is to use "I" messages. "I" messages are different from "you" messages in which a person blames: "You make me so mad." "You're so inconsiderate." "You" messages hurt people.

In an "I" message, a person shares her feelings without blaming. An "I" message usually takes the form: "When (describe what happens that is a problem), I feel (describe the feeling)." For example:

"When I see mud on the floor I feel discouraged or angry."

"When you hit your brother, I feel sad and angry."

"When you leave your backpack on the floor, I feel frustrated."

"When you ask me questions while I'm on the phone, I feel trapped."

The key to a successful "I" message is that it informs the child of your feelings without insulting or blaming. A good "I" message also lets the child know what he is doing that is causing trouble.

Sometimes when we've had a bad day and are feeling very tired, it's good to let our children know how we feel so they won't think they're causing our crankiness. We might say, "I'm very tired today. I'm sorry I may be cross. Let's be extra careful today so we won't irritate each other."

## Keep the relationship positive.

Most of the messages we share with our children should be positive ones. It's good to tell them about our joys and accomplishments. It's good to tell them when they please us. It's good to share with them what we are learning. It's especially good when we tell them about the joy they bring to us. And it's great when we encourage them to tell us about their joys and accomplishments.

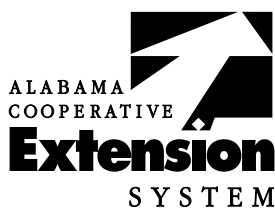
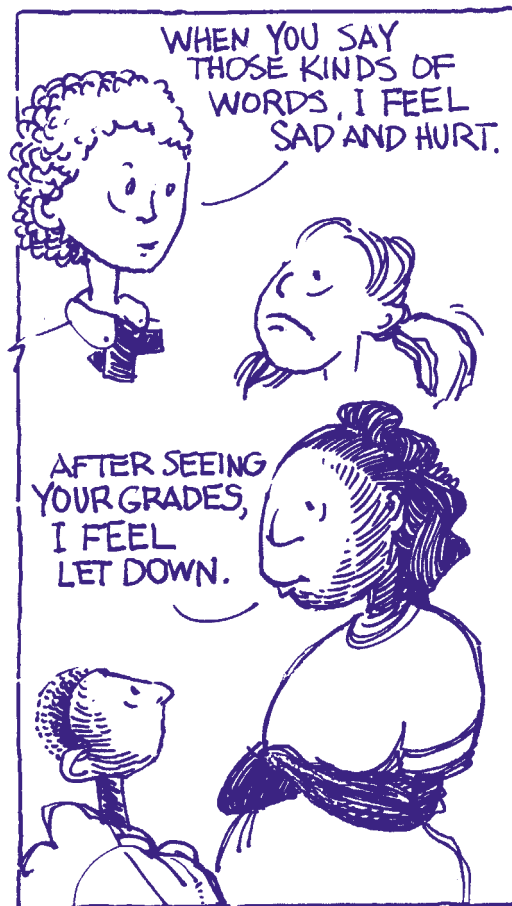
The purpose of communication with our children is to share love and caring while teaching them about suitable behavior. If we think about the messages we send, we can become more skillful communicators. It takes time and effort to become good at communicating. But it's worth the effort.

## If you want to learn more . . .

Faber, Adel, 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.

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



HE-686

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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# Social Connections



## Social Connections



*Build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.*



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## What is the #1 predictor of how long and how well you will live?



*The quality of your close personal relationships!*

Dr. Dean Ornish says he knows of no other factor – "not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery" – that has such a major impact on quality of life, incidence of illness and premature death from all causes.

(Dr. Dean Ornish, founder of the Preventative Medicine Research Institute in California)

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## Benefits of Social Connections

*(one of our 3 basic needs)*



- Strong connection between perceived social support and happiness (.70 correlation)
- Social support affects health – high levels are as predictive of living a long time as regular exercise (low levels are as damaging as high blood pressure)
- Oxytocin is released, reducing anxiety, depression, improving heart and immune systems
- People receiving emotional support during 6 months after a heart attack were 3 times more likely to survive



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## Benefits of Social Connections



- When parents have good connections, children have access to more caring adults.
- Children learn about building and maintaining friendships by watching how adults interact.
- Children's safety depends on *strong* families; *strong* families depend on *strong* connections.



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## Quality Connections vs. Quantity Connections



- How many “friends” do you have on Facebook or other forms of social media?
- How much support do you feel from them? ☺
- Research shows it is not how *many* people an individual knows, but the quality of the relationships people have and the support they feel.



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## Social Support – Reaching Out



- Most research focuses on what people receive.
- Benefits of providing social support to others:
  - ▢ Giving feels better, does more for you, and has more benefits in the long run than getting support.
  - ▢ A “good life” focuses on what we receive. A “meaningful life” focuses on what we give.

**“Even people who think they don’t want a lot of social contact still benefit from it. And it’s not just that we ‘all need somebody to lean on’; recent work on giving support shows that caring for others is more beneficial than is receiving help”**

– Jonathan Haidt

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## Opportunities to Reach Out



- Many professionals have a list of resources to give parents when they need help
- Fewer professionals have a list of ways for parents to turn outward and serve others



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## Ways to Build Connections



- Giving back by volunteering and serving in one's community helps people feel better about themselves *and* they can connect with others.
- What are some other ways families can build connections in your community?



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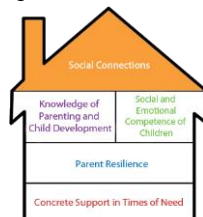
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## Social Connections



### Key Principles:

- Child safety depends on strong families, and strong families depend on strong communities.
- Some families need extra help building and maintaining quality social connections.
- Recognize parents' bids for connecting and find ways to turn toward them.



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## Ideas and Insights for Improvement



- What have you learned?
- What have you committed to do with what you have learned?

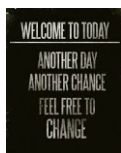
Strong Parents, Strong Children:  
Building Protective Factors for  
Everywhere Families

Ideas and Insights for Improvement – (to all caregivers, adults, etc.)

Things I am doing well...

New ideas and things I will try doing more of...

Things I will do less of...



Willing to share?

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## Summary – Five Protective Factors



- **Concrete Support in Times of Need** – basic needs must be met to thrive; services and supports must be available during crises
- **Parental Resilience** – bouncing back from challenges, managing stress and problems in healthy ways, and reaching out for help
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development** – accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children's behavior; building the parent-child relationship through nurturing and guiding
- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children** – effectively communicating and reflecting feelings; interacting positively with others; turn towards bids for connection
- **Social Connections** – social networks provide emotional support, help solve problems and offer opportunities for parents to give back

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## Resources – [www.ctf4kids.org](http://www.ctf4kids.org)



- Resources in the binder are available free to print from <http://www.uaex.edu/health-living/personal-family-well-being/parenting/> and <https://store.aces.edu/>
  - ▢ Nine 2-page guidesheets on Ages and Stages
  - ▢ Over 50 guidesheets on parenting and children topics



The Parenting Journey

Learn the six principles that will make you a more effective parent.



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## Additional resources



- Visit <http://ctf4kids.org/request-for-literature/>

Text-tip cards and bookmarks are FREE!



Wheels are 75 cents




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## Online Resources



- Center for the Study of Social Policy – Strengthening Families  
<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families>
- National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds – [www.ctfalliance.org](http://www.ctfalliance.org)
- Department of Mental Health – Early Childhood Mental Health  
website: <http://dmh.mo.gov/healthykids>
- Extension resources - [www.Extension.org/parenting](http://www.Extension.org/parenting)
- National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families -  
<https://healthymarriageandfamilies.org/>




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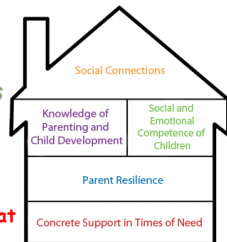
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**Strong Parents,  
Stable Children:**  
*Building Protective Factors  
to Strengthen Families*



Entire training available online at  
[www.ctf4kids.org](http://www.ctf4kids.org)

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

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## Social Connections

### *Make Time to Unwind with Social Connections*

Parents need to know they have someone who cares about them and who they can call on once in a while when they need someone to listen, give some advice, help solve problems, or just when they feel a little “down.” When parents feel connected and believe there are others who care about them, they feel more confident and secure, have a better parental mood, and are more responsive to their children. These supports also help buffer against stressors, which helps parents be more nurturing to their children and promote secure attachments. Finding out about and building on parents’ current or possible social connections, interests and abilities is a great way to partner with parents. It is difficult for some parents to find time to establish and maintain social connections. Building new social connections is particularly difficult for some parents, including those who are new to a community, recently divorced, and new parents.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Create or find opportunities for parents to participate in social events with other parents.
- Talk about the benefits of getting out with others for fun or joining a group to learn a new skill.
- Think about what you can provide to parents to help them get out for an evening.
- Share information about community activities and events or support groups that might be of interest.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- Do you have family or friends close by who help you out from time to time?
- How easy is it for you to make friends?
- Do you belong to a church, temple, or mosque? Or to a community group or service organization? What do you like best about participating in these groups?
- Who can you call for advice or just to talk? How often do you see them?
- What do you enjoy doing for fun or to relax?
- Do you have family members or friends nearby who can help you out once in a while?
- Are you interested in meeting other moms/dads who have similar interests as you?
- What would you need so that you could participate in some activities outside the home?
- How does your partner help so you can interact with others from time to time?

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



## Growing Family Connections

Extended family members offer love and support in good times and in bad. When we spend pleasant, positive time together with extended family, we build up a reserve of good feelings. When we are having some difficult times, those good feelings make it easier to reach out for help and also offer support to others.

**Who is in your extended family? How do they offer you help and support? What are some ways you help them? List your answers in the spaces below.**

People in my family:

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Ways they help us:

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Ways we help them:

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**How does it feel when you receive help from your extended family?**

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**How does this support help make you stronger? Your children?**

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**How do you feel when you offer support to your extended family?**

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### Additional Tips

- ◆ Getting along with in-laws and relatives is not always easy. Family members can avoid hurting each other's feelings by not repeating past mistakes. Focus on the present and work together to build stronger relationships for the future.
- ◆ Adults and children need opportunities to have fun and learn from extended family. Building and maintaining supportive relationships among family members and with people in the community is important for you and your children.

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



## Give to Others

When an individual does a good deed, it feels good. It gives that person a sense of accomplishment. When a couple does a good deed together, it has even greater meaning. Doing things for others provides couples with a greater overall sense of connectedness, both to each other and to their community. It also gives partners more time together!

What are some things others have done for you without being asked, or expecting anything in return? How did it make you feel?

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Think of the last time you did something for someone else without needing to be asked. How did it make the other person feel? How did it make you feel?

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What are some of your shared strengths or skills that you could put to use to help others?

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If you already have engaged in volunteer work or service with your partner, what did you do and how did it make you feel?

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*Our lives are improved and our relationships are strengthened when  
we put our strengths to use by giving to and serving others.*

## The Privilege of Parenting

Some researchers have found that when people have children their level of happiness drops. That is something of a surprise since we generally see the arrival of a baby as a "blessed event." Yet maybe it should not surprise us that all the demands of caring for children can also wear people out. One scholar has suggested that, while happiness may drop when a child is born, the meaning we get from life may increase. Even with all the demands associated with having children, they can make life more meaningful. Rather than live merely for ourselves, we begin to live for something that will last longer than we will. It is probably good for prospective parents to be prepared for the demands of parenting: lack of sleep, inconvenience, and frustration. It is also good for prospective parents to be prepared for the joy, learning, and love that come with having a child.

**A wise parent will get information and help** in order to be more effective. Your mother or a good friend who has had children may be able to help you in the first days of adjustment to a baby. Since the demands on a mother's body can cause exhaustion or depression, it is wise to counsel with your doctor as you make the adjustment to motherhood. Also, there are good books that can be helpful. (See a list of books at the end of this unit.) The study of parenting materials (such as these units) can help you be more effective.

**Parenting is education on being a human.** Like any education, parenting can be difficult, even confusing, at times. But parenting teaches the parent priceless lessons about understanding other people, the miracle of development, patience, service, learning, and love.

**Parenting is an opportunity to draw people together.** Involve other family members in loving and caring for your child. If you have other children, you can invite them to hold or feed the baby. Relatives can provide you with support and help. You may need to call on friends and family occasionally to care for the baby while you get a break.

**Fathers can make a vital contribution to children's development.** They should be involved in caring for the child, in supporting the mother, and in learning about child development. When there are two caring parents involved in a child's life, the child will learn important lessons from each parent.

**Parenting is never finished.** Even when our children are adults, they still need our listening, our counsel, and, most of all, our encouragement. Our children will make mistakes but, like us, they can learn from them and become better.

## Applications:

Make a list of the people in your life who can teach you and support you during the vital transition to parenthood. In the weeks before birth, talk with them about both your fears and your excitement. Invite them to be a part of the journey. Each may help in a different way. One may call and encourage you. Another may make baby clothes or blankets. Another may be glad to care for the baby occasionally so that you can get out and exercise.

Keep a journal. Record the events as well as the feelings as your baby grows inside of you and then in the months and years beyond. Your journal might be just a few words about what the baby did or what you felt or it might be sketches you make or it might be a longer narrative. It might be notes on a calendar. In whatever way you keep a journal, it can be a reminder to you of struggles, growth, and joys in the process of parenting.

Ask people you know and admire about their experiences with parenting. What have they learned? What do they most cherish? What was most difficult? How did they solve problems?

There are excellent books that can help parents know how to be effective with their children.

*Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* by Benjamin Spock and Michael Rothenberg is like an encyclopedia for dealing with the needs of growing children from hugging to feeding.

*To Listen to a Child* by T. Berry Brazelton helps parents understand and deal with the normal problems of growing up.

*What to Expect the First Year* by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee E. Hathaway is another encyclopedic work that provides a month-by-month guide to care for a child during that vital first year.

*Between Parent and Child* by Haim Ginott is the classic book on dealing with children once they get beyond babyhood. He provides sound advice on being understanding while setting limits.

You can also search the web for resources to help. Some advice you will get is wise; some will be foolish. You can identify good advice because it is both practical and compassionate - it helps you deal with real problems while it shows caring and understanding for humans - both children and adults.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.  
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# **Additional Resources**





## Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences

### *Building Self-Healing Communities*

The ACE Study confirms, with scientific evidence that adversity during development increases the risk of physical, mental and behavioral problems later in life. The ACE Study and other research using the Study's framework have taught us that ACEs are the leading cause of health and social problems in our nation – the most powerful determinant of the public's health.

#### **Brain Development is Experience-Dependent and Sequential**

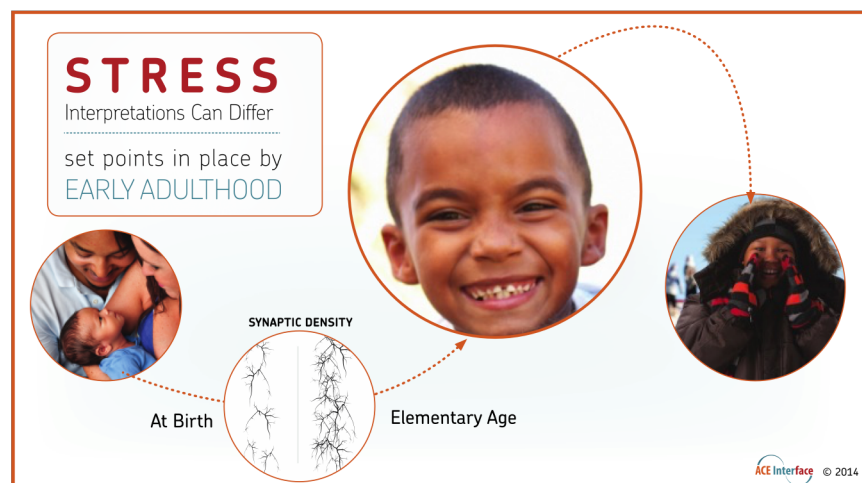
The wiring of the brain – the making of complex neural networks – is experience dependent. What gets experienced the most tends to lead to more robust connections between nerve cells. Over time, these connections form robust networks. The least “experienced” connections tend to withdraw at about the time of puberty.

Experiences that cause stress chemicals to be continuously produced have a big impact on development of brain cells and the connections among cells. When stress hormones, like cortisol, are at high levels in the body for long periods of time they can be toxic to development of brain cells. This toxicity includes making it difficult for brain cells to develop healthy neural networks and can even cause brain cells to die. Under these circumstances, brains prepare and adapt to respond to the experiences of an unpredictable and even dangerous world. The people whose brains adapt to a dangerous or stressful world are more likely to survive when life is tough; those whose brains adapt to a safe world are more likely to be prepared to meet society's expectations in tranquil times.

As the brain develops, there are sensitive periods for each brain region when the size and functional abilities of the region are most affected by experience and are most vulnerable to toxic stress. Stress may be interpreted by the brain as something we can tolerate and work through or as something that is overwhelming and requires an immediate response. In the latter case, a small amount of stress may be perceived as crisis. Our set-points for that interpretation are largely in place by early adulthood.

Toxic stress during childhood can effect processing of sound, development of verbal language, perception of social cues and facial expressions, ability to coordinate movement or to integrate rational ideas when in a highly emotional state. Toxic stress can effect brain interaction

with body systems and lead to disease, disability and social/relational problems throughout the life course. *But childhood times are also windows of opportunity for building resilience – after all, the developing brain is sensitive to all kinds of experience.*



Human development is a magnificent dance of experience and adaptation generating age-appropriate capacities for feeling, thinking and responding to the world around us.

For More Information: <http://www.aceinterface.com/>

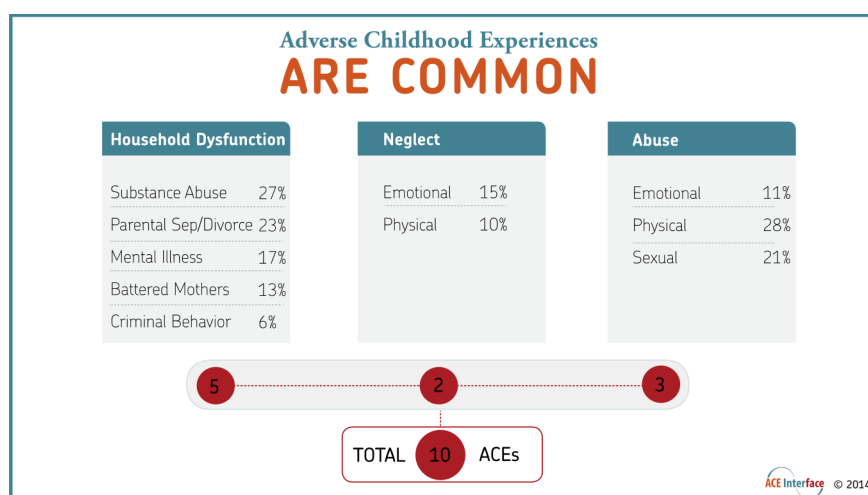
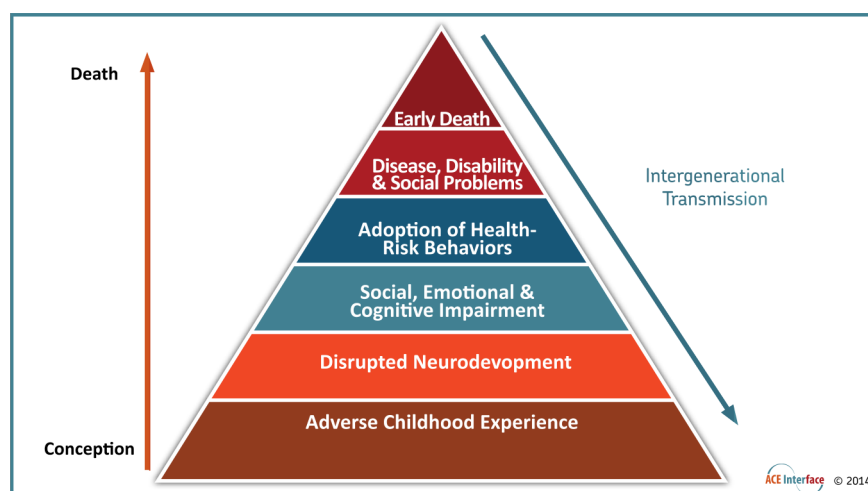


## The ACE Study

The ACE Study considers the effects of childhood adversity on population health and wellbeing. A partnership between Kaiser Permanente in San Diego and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, The ACE Study takes a broad public health perspective of the effects of multiple forms of childhood adversity on population health. The ACE Study is the largest of its kind, with over 17,000 participants.

The ACE Pyramid represents the life course model of the ACE Study: ACEs lead to impaired neurodevelopment, which in turn lead to social-emotional and cognitive adaptations that can then lead to the risk factors for major causes of disease, disability, social problems, and early death. The ACE Study is designed to help us understand how Adverse Childhood Experiences influence human development in predictable ways.

The ACE Study considers ten categories of childhood adversity. Study findings include:  
**ACEs are common across all socio-economic and culture/ethnicity lines. They are interrelated; accumulation of multiple ACE categories has a powerful impact on public health. ACEs tend to be held in the body, leading to mental, physical, and behavioral health problems throughout the life course.**



### EXAMPLES OF ACE-ATTRIBUTABLE PROBLEMS

Alcoholism & Alcohol Abuse	Liver Disease
Chronic Obstructive	Mental Health Problems
Lung Disease	Obesity
Coronary Heart Disease	Sexual Behavior Problems
Depression	Smoking
Drug Abuse & Illicit Drug Use	Unintended Pregnancy
Fetal Death	Violence
Intimate Partner Violence	Workplace Problems

ACE Interface © 2014

As the ACE Score goes up the risk of these health and social problems goes up in a “dose-response” fashion. As a result we see that as the ACE Score goes up in a population, the percent of people with these problems also goes up. It is also important to understand that some of those problems become ACEs for the next generation—thereby perpetuating the cycle of adversity and their attendant problems.

### ACE Prevention: Our Powerful Legacy

ACE Prevention is the greatest opportunity for improving the well-being of human populations. ACEs are considered the most powerful determinant of the public's health because of the breadth of impacts – from heart disease to homelessness, from depression to violence – and because of the large percent of each of these problems that are attributable to ACEs.

Epidemiologists use a standard statistical calculation to estimate the amount of a disease or condition that is caused by a disease agent – called the Population Attributable Risk. The dark area in the center of the graphic (upper right) represents the portion of each condition that is attributable to ACEs – from 22% of asthma to 67% of life dissatisfaction. As we are successful preventing accumulation of ACEs in the next generation, we will reduce all ACE-attributable problems accordingly.

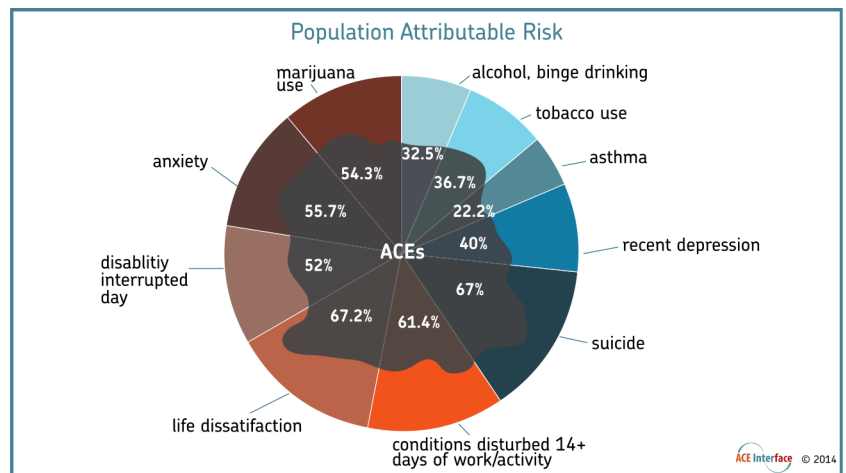
### Protective Systems Promote Resilience

Three protective systems interact and guide positive adaptation: 1) individual capabilities, 2) attachment and belonging, and 3) community, faith, and cultural processes. These three systems are nested: people do best when they are living in flourishing families and communities.

People most affected by ACEs are leading formation of *Self-Healing Communities* that have a rhythm of engagement that includes:

1. **Safe and regularly scheduled ways of coming together for belonging and cooperative action,**
2. **Networked social and inter-organizational processes characterized by learning, reciprocity, social bridging, and efficacy,**
3. **Shared times and venues for critical reflection and decision making about hope-filled action,**
4. **Continuous expansion of opportunities for informal and formal leadership.**

*Building Self-Healing Communities* is about investing in the people who have the most at stake—especially people affected by ACEs-- so they can be expert leaders of their own community's change. We live at a time of great hope and promise – the greatest public health discovery of our time is about us. The ACE Study provides a discovery – a common framework and language – that we can use to profoundly improve the health and well-being of our society now and for future generations to come.



### Core Protective Systems

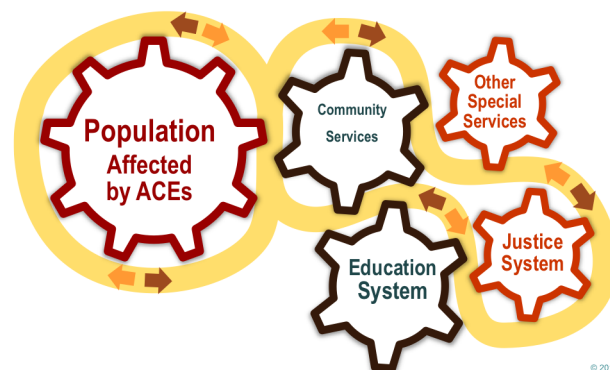


“Nurturing the healthy development of these protective systems affords the most important preparation or ‘inoculation’ for overcoming potential threats and adversities in human development. Similarly, damage or destruction of these systems has dire consequences for the positive adaptive capacity of individuals.”

*Ann Masten, 2009*

ACE Interface © 2014

### Building Self-Healing Communities



For More Information: <http://www.aceinterface.com/>

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

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

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### Objectives:

- List the five protective factors that help strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect.
- Understand how the five protective factors relate to child and family well-being.
- Recognize how you, as a parent/caregiver or you and your organization already support the development of protective factors.
- Commit to learning new strategies and resources that can support your efforts to help the families in your community.
- Identify specific program strategies to envision a healthy parent-child relationship.

### Materials:

- PowerPoint
- Participant binders
- Glitter Bottle (Parental Resilience)
- Blank half sheets of paper (Parental Resilience)
- Glasses (Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development)
- Mirror (Social and Emotional Development of Children)

### Session Outline

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| 1. Welcome and Brief Introductions               |            |
| 2. Why Are We Here?                              | 5 minutes  |
| 3. Project Background                            | 3 minutes  |
| 4. Objectives                                    | 2 minutes  |
| 5. P.I.G.S.                                      | 5 minutes  |
| 6. Why are Protective Factors Important?         | 3 minutes  |
| 7. The 5 Protective Factors                      | 2 minutes  |
| 8. Concrete Support in Times of Need             | 25 minutes |
| 9. Parental Resilience                           | 45 minutes |
| <b>BREAK</b>                                     | 15 minutes |
| 10. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development | 45 minutes |
| 11. Social and Emotional Competence of Children  | 45 minutes |
| 12. Social Connections                           | 25 minutes |
| 13. Other Resources and Conclusion               | 10 minutes |

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## 1 Welcome and Brief Introductions

5 minutes

### Slide 1 Title Slide

*\*\* Presenter: Welcome participants and take a moment for brief introductions.*



## 2 Why Are We Here?

3 minutes

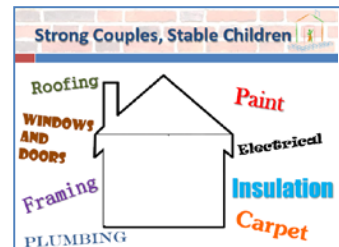
### Slide 2-3 Why Are We Here

As we think ahead about the topics we will cover today, let's begin with the end in mind. What's the big picture? Why are we all here? What is our collective purpose and our ultimate goal? To protect and strengthen families! Life is about relationships, and we all want to have good relationships. To thrive, children and families need healthy relationships and a safe and stable home – in terms of family members who live in the home, as well as the structure itself.



*Ask: What is the purpose of a house?* [Allow time for responses]

- Example: To protect us from the elements. Much like a house, a family also protects its members from the elements and predators. Families provide comfort, warmth, and an environment for growth and learning.



We chose a house as a symbol to represent parts that are necessary to hold things up and keep them together. A house requires many experts (plumbing, electrical, framing, carpet, roofing, paint, etc.), so too do strong families and parenting. A doctor helps with physical/medical needs, recognizes developmental delays, self-regulation, challenging behaviors, special needs, so they refer, support, guide; a pastor helps with spiritual and emotional needs; a neighbor addresses physical needs; and so on. The point is that strengthening families requires "experts" not only in parenting or child development, but in many other areas.

### Slide 4 It Takes a Village...

Parents and children do best when they are surrounded by caring people who can help, including:

- Other parents/friends
- Educators/child services
- Clergy/Faith-based leaders
- Business professionals, and
- Health care professionals

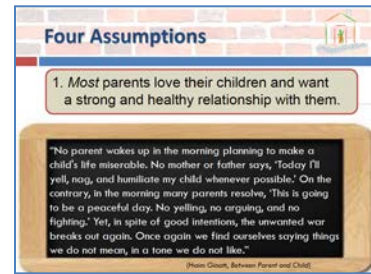


# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 5 Four Assumptions

This curriculum was developed with some core assumptions. We assume at least 4 things right up front.

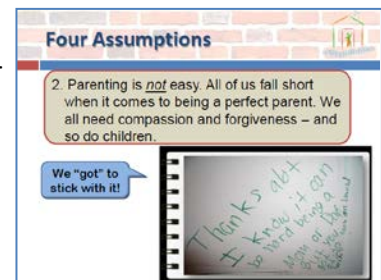
1. We assume that *most* parents love their children and want a strong healthy relationship with their children. While it is true that we see reports in the media of some parents severely abusing or neglecting their children, in this training we assume most parents want to be better and do better.



## Slide 6 Four Assumptions

2. We assume all of us fall short when it comes to being a perfect parent. All of us need compassion and forgiveness – and so do children.

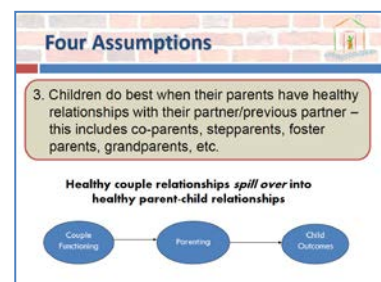
[Presenter: Include a brief example, such as “After a rough day at work, one parent was short with his kids and told them to go to bed and not come out again. A few minutes later he heard footsteps by his door and a sound on the door. He barked the kids back to their rooms then went to the door and found a note taped on the door by his 7 year-old daughter (click to show the note). “Thanks a lot. I know its hard being a mom or dad but you have to stick with it.” On the side it said “Look on back” and on the back it said, “Don’t worry, we still love you!” Do we make mistakes? Do we lose our cool? Of course we do. So it’s important that we show compassion to other parents because we’re not perfect either.”]



## Slide 7 Four Assumptions

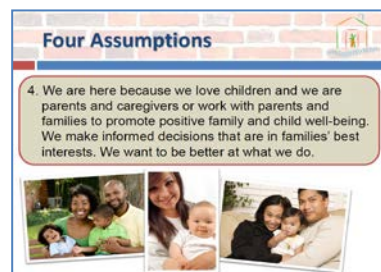
3. We assume that children do best when their parents have healthy relationships with their partner/previous partner including co-parents, stepparents, grandparents, etc.

When things are going well with the parents' relationship, it spills over into the parent-child relationship. So information that helps parents have happier, healthier relationships promotes positive parent-child relationships.



## Slide 8 Four Assumptions

4. We assume you are here because you are a parent or caregiver, you love children, and you might also work with parents and/or families. We also assume all of us want to promote positive family and child well-being and make informed decisions that are in the best interests of children and families.





# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## 3 Project Background

3 minutes

### Slide 9 Project Background

Today's workshop and curriculum was developed by Dr. David Schramm when he was a professor at the University of Missouri. He collaborated with the Missouri Department of Mental Health/Project LAUNCH, the Missouri Children's Trust Fund, and University of Missouri Extension. He is now with Utah State Extension.



### Slide 10 Project Background

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) developed the Strengthening Families framework to:

1. Increase family strengths,
2. Enhance child development, and
3. Reduce child abuse and neglect.



And while this approach is not the only tried and true approach to strengthening families, the principles can be useful for anyone who works with parents. The material we cover today is based on this framework.

(<http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families/the-basics/protective-factors>). CSSP identified five protective factors that, when present, increase the overall well-being of children and families. We will address each of these protective factors separately and talk about how we can help support families to build each of the protective factors and enable children to thrive. We will also review some tools you can use to help families directly.

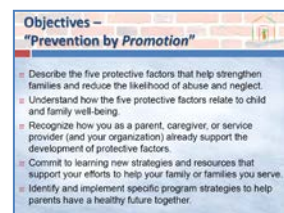
## 4 Objectives

2 minutes

### Slides 11-12 Objectives – “Prevention by Promotion”

Some of you might already be familiar with the five protective factors. Our goal today is to help you become more familiar with each factor and help you identify ways you can promote each protective factor in your day-to-day interactions with families. After the workshop, we hope each of you will be better able to:

- Describe the five protective factors that help strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect,
- Understand how the five protective factors relate to child and family well-being,
- Recognize how you, as a parent/caregiver or you and your organization already support the development of protective factors,
- Commit to learning new strategies and resources that can support your efforts to help the families in your community.



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

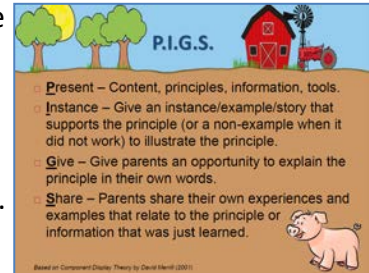
## 5 P.I.G.S.

5 minutes

### Slide 13 P.I.G.S.

There are many ways to present information, both in a setting like this as well as with parents and families you work with. I would like to briefly describe one method of sharing information with others.

The confusing academic term is called Component Display Theory. But today we will call it PIGS. This is a fairly simple way of presenting information but it has been shown to be very effective.



*[Click to advance slide and bring up first line]*

We'll start with the letter "P". "P" stands for "Present". This is the content, the principles, the information, the tools, etc. For example, I might say something like, "Children are more likely to be compassionate as adults when they are cared for by people who are sensitive to their needs, and are committed to them, and build close relationships with them")

*[Click to advance slide and bring up next line]*

The "I" stands for "Instance". The presenter then shares an instance/example/story that supports the principle, or a NON-example when it didn't work, to illustrate the principle. (e.g. "at the end of the day, we gather together before bedtime to share what made us happy that day" or "I try to build close relationships with my children by taking turns going out one-on-one with each child, for a drive, ice-cream, park, etc. It helps children feel loved and strengthens parent-child relationships..."). Good stories can be powerful teachers.

*[Click to advance slide and bring up next line]*

The "G" stands for "Give". This means we give parents an opportunity to express the principles in their own way (e.g. "How would you describe the principle in your own words?")

*[Click to advance slide and bring up next line]*

The "S" stands for "Share". We ask parents to think of and share their own experiences and examples that relate to the principle/information that was just learned.

This model of Present, Instance, Give, Share is a common method of effective instruction. There is a PIGS handout grid in your binder that you can use as well. I will try to model it throughout the training today.

### NOTES:



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

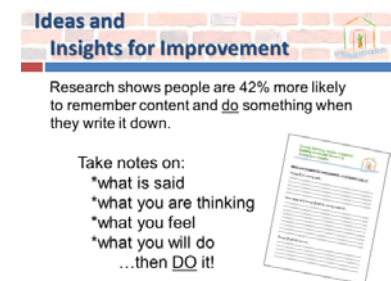
## Slides 14-15

## Binder Review

*Presenter – Take a moment to talk about binder organization and contents, including bookmarks, Text-tip cards, Ideas and Insights for Improvement form (one for them and one for parents they may teach), PowerPoint slides, summaries of protective factors, tools, and other resources.*

*[Click to advance to next slide]*

*Invite participants to take out one copy of the “ideas and insights” form and throughout the discussion, jot down ideas and notes. It may be helpful to review these at the very end of the training.*



## 6 Why Do Protective Factors Matter?

3 minutes

### Slide 16

### What Are Protective Factors?

I mentioned earlier that we would be focusing on the five protective factors today. So what are protective factors? Protective factors are attributes of families that serve as buffers, or literally “protectors”, that help them to succeed and thrive, even in the face of risks and challenges. Thinking in terms of protective factors presents a challenge. For many people, focusing on the negative comes naturally. When considering protective factors, instead of focusing on everything that is wrong, we have to think instead about helping things go RIGHT.



Numerous studies support the notion that protective factors serve to reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect; they create healthy environments that promote optimal development of children. Parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing their children are able to find resources, supports, or coping strategies to help them parent effectively despite risks.

I like to think of protective factors as things that can literally protect me. Most of us drove here today. What are some things you did that made it *more likely* that you would arrive here safely? (e.g. speed limit, seat belt, enough gas, tires inflated, hands at “10” and “2” positions, no texting). These things make it less likely you will have an accident. But it *doesn't* mean an accident won't happen. Similarly, when family protective factors are in place, it reduces the likelihood of abuse and neglect, but it doesn't mean abuse or neglect *won't* happen.

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 17 What Are Promotive Factors?

Promotive factors are intentional activities that promote and actively improve well-being. Examples might include exercise, healthy diet or things like playing with children, reading to them, or helping them manage their feelings.

Protective factors *and* promotive factors both increase the probability of positive, resilient, and healthy child outcomes, even in the face of risk and adversity.



## 7 The 5 Protective Factors

2 minutes

### Slide 18 The 5 Protective Factors

Strong families share some common characteristics that promote optimal child development and positive outcomes, as well as factors that protect against risk factors when families are going through struggles. A large body of research points to 5 protective factors that families have in common – factors that promote optimal development and protect against risk factors.



These five protective factors are important not only for families who may be in some way “at risk,” but they are important for the healthy development of *all* families.

The 5 Protective Factors are:

1. Concrete Support in Times of Need
2. Parental Resilience
3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
4. Social and Emotional Competence of Children
5. Social Connections

## 8 Concrete Support in Times of Need

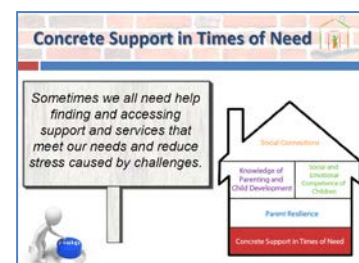
25 minutes

### Slide 19 Concrete Support in Times of Need

*Sometimes we all need help locating and accessing support and services that address our needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges.*

Let's start with the first factor in our house. Everyone needs a safe, stable home that is built on a strong foundation that can provide protection from the ground up.

At the base of any sizeable structure, you need concrete footings. Footings are generally wider than the foundation and assure that



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

the foundation (and the whole structure) will not settle and crack. The integrity of the structure depends on the strength and the sturdiness of those footings.

We begin with Concrete Support in Times of Need because meeting basic needs is essential for families to thrive. Without strong concrete footings, the structure may be built on a weak foundation.

## Slide 20 Tough to be a Good Parent During Tough Times

All of us will experience tough times during our lives. How many here have experienced any of these situations at some point? And it's difficult to be the best parent we can be when we are stressed out and don't know what to do or where to turn. Parents are more likely to take out their stresses on their children when they experience any number of these "tough times." We all need concrete supports during tough times.

**It's Tough to be a Good Parent During Tough Times**

□ EVERY family, at some point, needs help

- Serious illness?
- Job loss?
- Move?
- Birth of a child?
- Loss of a family member?
- Family member in prison?
- Divorce/separation?
- Short on money?
- Car broken down?



Concrete Support = We have access to what we need to handle challenges and be successful

## Slide 21 Concrete Support and Crises

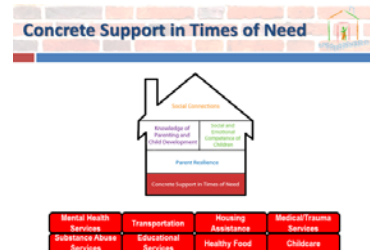
This graphic shows what life is like for many people experiencing a crisis. We have a level of organization that represents how we are dealing with life in general. Then we experience a crisis. There is often a period of disorganization after the crisis. (*Click to bring up the next graphic*)

Then there is a period of reorganization with possible levels of reorganization. Sometimes life is worse and will never be the same. Other times we come back to where we left off, and still other times we do better after a crisis. What might affect a parent's level of reorganization? (Point out that concrete supports often play a role)



## Slide 22 Concrete Support in Times of Need

Here are some examples of services and supports that may be useful during times of crisis, change, and stress. This is not a complete list. Can you think of other supports that are needed when families you work with experience stress?

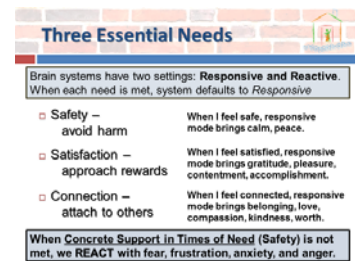


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## Slide 23      Three Essential Needs

Research shows that humans need three essential things. The first is the need to feel safe, so we avoid harmful things. The second is the need to feel satisfied; we all like to do things that feel good and make us happy. And third, we all have a deep need for connection, or a longing for belonging.



When I feel safe, the responsive mode brings peace and calm.

**Q. When you are not safe, how do you feel?** (e.g. fear, anxiety, worry)

When I feel satisfied, the responsive mode brings gratitude and happiness.

**Q. When you are not able to do fun things, how do you feel?** (e.g. depressed, angry, frustrated, jealous)

When I feel connected, the responsive mode brings feelings of belonging and love.

**Q. When you don't feel connected or supported, how do you feel?** (e.g. lonely, isolated, depressed)

We can see how all three of these interact with a simple example. Let's say you are on your way to eat lunch with some friends. On the drive to the restaurant you are hopefully focusing on your driving and getting their safely. You sit down and eat a great lunch, which is satisfying, and you enjoy the company of your friends, which meets the need for connection. All of us are constantly striving to meet these needs, even when we aren't really thinking about it.

Inside of our brains we have two basic settings: a responsive mode and a reactive mode. When our essential needs are met, most of us default to being responsive. For example, when I feel safe, I am more likely to feel calm and peaceful. When I feel satisfied, I feel more grateful and happy with life. And when I feel connected, I am more likely to respond to other positively, feel compassion for others, and be kind.

But what happens when our basic need for safety is not met, and we lose our job, or have an accident, or don't have transportation? Our brain often switches to the Reactive mode and it makes it much more difficult to connect with others or enjoy life, and we may turn to other things to temporarily meet our need for satisfaction and connection such as drugs, alcohol or risky sex. The point is that feeling supported and connected really is foundational in meeting our needs for safety.

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## Slide 24 Getting the Help They Need

Accessing services to minimize stress requires families to:

- Recognize they need support,
- Know what services are available and how to access them,
- Have some financial security; basic needs being met,
- Be resourceful with what they have,
- Be committed and persistent, and
- Advocate effectively for one's self, child, and/or other family member to receive necessary help



This is a lot for a family to do when things are going *well*! Obviously that is a lot to expect of a family that is struggling. Provide encouragement and talk about approaching their needs one step at a time.

## Slide 25 Locating Concrete Support

*When a family's basic needs (housing, food, clothing, and transportation) are not met, how is family interaction affected?*

- *How are basic needs related to strong footings in a building or house?*

It is tough to manage personal challenges if basic needs are not met. Studies show that in chaotic environments parents are often more likely to parent harshly, which makes the environment even more stressful for children. Families whose basic needs are met have more time and energy to focus on children's safety and well-being.



*[Example: Dr. Ben Carson was raised by his single African American mother who could not read. When she learned of her son's declining grades, she required him to read two books a week, though she could not even read the words off a cereal box. With the expectations his mother instilled in him, Carson went from being a failing student to a pioneering neurosurgeon, best known for separating conjoined cranial twins at Johns Hopkins for the first time in medical history (as reported on the Huffington Post, April 2, 2013)]*

Discussion Questions: [Allow time for a few responses]

[Click to advance slide and bring up each question]

- *Where do you go or what types of services do you seek when you are experiencing a problem or crisis?*
- *Are families aware of these types of services?*
- *Do you have a list of local resources you can provide to parents? Do you know the names of the people at these services?*

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## Slide 26 Concrete Support in Times of Need

The protective factor, Concrete Support in Times of Need, is simply about reaching out in times of need. Sometimes we all need help locating and accessing support and services that address our needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges. Helping families identify and access concrete supports needs to be done in a way that helps them build confidence and skills to get what they need in the future. Families need to know how to ask for help, they need to know and understand their rights, and many need help navigating complex service systems.



The key principles of our discussion are:

- Basic needs need to be met to support children's safety and well-being.
- Concrete support needs to be available to families when they need it.
- Families need help recognizing their strengths.
- Help build confidence and skills so parents know where to turn for help in the future.

### **\*\* Presenter: Review Binder Resources for Concrete Support in Times of Need**

Before we move to the next factor, let's spend some time reviewing some of the tools in your binder that may be helpful in your work with families.

*[Allow participants a few minutes to browse the resources]*



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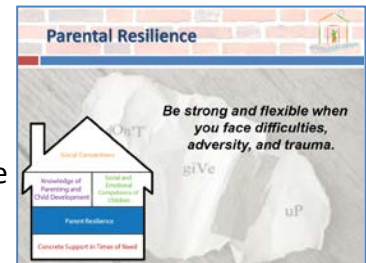
## 9 Parental Resilience

45 minutes

### Slide 27 Parental Resilience

*Be strong and flexible when encountering difficulties, adversity, and trauma.*

I suggested that Concrete Support acts as the footings for the structure. Parental Resilience represents the foundation. The entire structure needs solid footings, but it also requires a strong foundation that represents the state of mind, courage, and quality of character of parents. Parenting scholars often speak of the importance of parents caring for themselves, meaning that a parent must be healthy and functional in order to be a good parent.

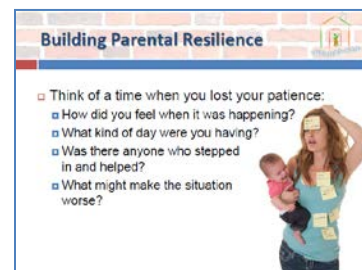


Parenting is a rewarding experience and children bring great joy, laughter, and life, but childrearing also brings many challenges. Parents are responsible for raising children to be happy, healthy, productive, and contributing members of society. Parents must possess or learn the skills necessary to simultaneously be a teacher, taxi driver, police officer, banker, chef, doctor, clown, receptionist, referee, cleaning service, nutritionist, toy maker, counselor, coach, and so on day after day. In other words, parenting is stressful! And one of the worst effects of stress can be a feeling of helplessness when we feel there is nothing we can do to fix things.

### Slide 28 Building Parental Resilience

Take a moment to think of a specific situation – either in your personal or professional life – when you felt like you were completely losing your patience with a child.

- How did you feel when it was happening?
- What kind of day were you having?
- How supported or how stressed were you feeling?
- What did you learn as a result of this situation?
- Was there anyone there that stepped in and helped?



At one time or another, all parents experience shopping with a young child who throws a tantrum in the middle of the store. As parents grow increasingly frustrated, the child's tantrum gets worse. We've all been there. Sometimes we all have moments when our responses to children are not as positive as we would like them to be.

Discussion Question: [Allow time for a few responses]

- *What might be some factors that make the situation worse?*
- *Is anyone familiar with the acronym "HALT"?*



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Slide 29

H.A.L.T.

HALT stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired. How well do we interact with others when we are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? How nice are we? For parents and children alike, if we are in a good mood, we communicate better and we are more sensitive to others than when we are feeling hungry, angry, lonely, or tired (HALT). After a long day of shopping, most of us feel tired, and we might be hungry as well as angry if we didn't buy everything we needed or wanted. Children feel the same way!



Oftentimes, the way we *respond* tends to be more important than the stressor itself in determining outcomes. For example, do you let it overwhelm you? Throw in the towel? Or do you face it head-on? A couple's chronic stress (i.e., conflict, finances, children, etc.) creates an emotional response that becomes a habit in the relationship and can adversely impact the health of each partner and the relationship. Elevated stress levels are known factors for increased hypertension, heart disease, and depression, and may also lead to sleep problems. Further, when individuals focus on feelings of anger or resentment, they experience a decrease in immune functioning (McCraty, Atkinson, & Tomasino, 2001).

During arguments or stressful situations, our bodies release certain stress hormones that cause us to either "flight" (e.g., walk away to avoid conflict) or "fight" (e.g., engage in unhealthy, possibly emotionally or physically abusive way).

[Presenter – Use Glitter Bottle to demonstrate stress response]

- 1) *Hold up glitter bottle without shaking it* – The bottle represents our brain and bodies when we are calm. During these times, we can listen and perceive and process information more clearly.
- 2) *Begin to swirl the glitter bottle* – But as we start to become frustrated our brains release stress hormones and they start to flood our bodies. As you can see, it is much more difficult to see through the bottle now. Similarly, stress hormones can hinder our ability to think clearly and process information before we speak, which puts us at risk of saying or doing things we might regret.
- 3) *Set the bottle down to allow glitter to settle* – After an argument is over, as we begin to calm down we are gradually able to see more clearly again.

**NOTES:**

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## Slide 30 Why Some Adapt to Stressors Better than Others

In the book, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, a highly acclaimed guide to stress (for humans), Dr. Robert Sapolsky speaks about the latest discoveries in the field of stress physiology. From this research we learn that chronic stress has become one of the leading proximal causes of death, leading to strokes and heart attacks as well as decreased immunity to insomnia, anxiety, depression, addiction, obesity, heart disease, and serious memory loss.



But there's good news too. He has discovered the ways certain people adapted to the pressure and live well. According to Sapolsky, these people tend to have the following in common:

1. An outlet for frustration
2. A sense of predictability
3. A feeling of control
4. An optimistic outlook
5. Social support

No one can eliminate parents' stress, but how parents *cope* with stress can be managed. Parents who are resilient are better able to cope with stress and difficulties. They are able to identify and access outside supports, build trusting relationships, maintain a positive attitude, are less likely to take out frustration and anger at their children, and seek help when needed.

## Slide 31 How Do You Best Manage Stress?

Managing stress helps us feel better, which helps us act better, which helps others treat us better, which makes us feel better!

**\*\* Note to facilitator:** Refer to Principles of Parenting guidesheet, "Taking Care of the Parent: Replacing Stress with Peace."

Have participants review the guidesheet for a few minutes, especially the suggestions for dealing with stress. **\*\***

Say: I especially like #12 (from the guidesheet):

[Advance slide to bring up quote]

"Some researchers now tell us that the healthiest people are not necessarily those who had perfect childhoods but those who have made peace with their childhoods."

Discussion Question: [Allow time for a few responses]

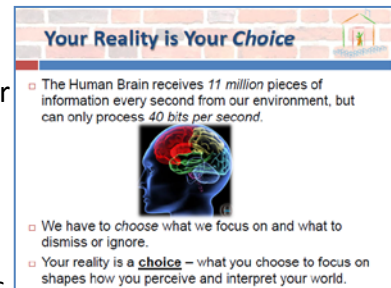
- What do you think about that quote?



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## Slide 32 Your Reality is Your Choice

Did you know that our brains are bombarded with 11 million pieces of information every second, but can only process 40 bits per second? The rest of the information is either processed by our unconscious brain or eliminated as “spam”. So our brains have to actively decide what to toss out and what to listen to and absorb. We can choose either to hear negative, flawed, or irrelevant information or absorb information that will help us accomplish our goals. But because the amount we focus on is limited, there is a trade-off; the more negative information we take in, the less positive signal we can hear, and vice versa.



This is important because the better your brain is at using its energy to focus on the positives, the greater your chances at happiness in relationships, including parent-child relationships! But it takes a change in mindset.

## Slide 33 Rethinking STRESS

Most of us are well aware of the fact that stress can be harmful for our bodies. But thinking only about the negative effects of stress can be STRESSFUL! And makes things worse.



## Slide 34 Rethinking and Reframing STRESS

Research also shows that stress CAN have positive effects on the brain and the body – if it is managed correctly. For example, it can create:

- Greater mental toughness,
- Deeper relationships,
- Increased awareness,
- New perspectives,
- A better appreciation of life,
- Heightened sense of meaning, and
- Strengthened priorities



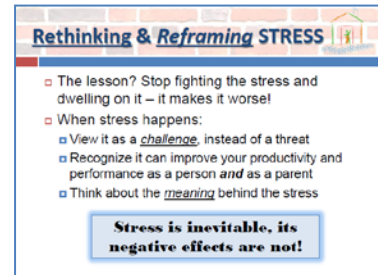
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## Slide 35 Rethinking and Reframing STRESS

When viewed as a threat – your brain will be continually looking for escape routes and you will miss seeing those signs and seizing those resources that could help you succeed.

Think about the meaning behind the stress. After all, you wouldn't be stressed about something if it didn't mean something to you. You may be stressed about your children because you love them and you want them to behave and grow up to be kind, loving, successful people. If I tell you that a child flunked their spelling test, you probably won't be stressed. If I told you your child flunked the spelling test, now it has more meaning and you may experience more stress.

Stress can be hurtful or helpful, but often it depends on our perspective.



**Rethinking & Reframing STRESS**

- The lesson? Stop fighting the stress and dwelling on it – it makes it worse!
- When stress happens:
  - View it as a *challenge*, instead of a threat
  - Recognize it can improve your productivity and performance as a person *and* as a parent
  - Think about the *meaning* behind the stress

**Stress is inevitable, its negative effects are not!**

## Slide 36 Why we React to Stress the Way We Do

Just as rain creates pathways on a new fresh pile of dirt, as it trickles down to the ground, babies are born with approximately 86 billion neurons (brain cells) that make connections in response to their environment. Warm responses from parents (touch, soothing, soft tones, reading) create connections that are positive, which helps the baby feel secure and connected to caregivers. However, when babies are exposed to yelling, harsh tones, shaking, and other factors, it creates fear, anxiety, and detachment. As children grow up they are wired to REACT instead of RESPOND to stressors.



**Why we react (instead of respond) to stress the way we do**

Born with 60-100 billion brain cells called neurons!

What happens when it rains on a fresh pile of dirt?

## Slide 37 Police Car Drawing

Explain instructions on slide and provide paper.

After 30 seconds, share picture with others in group and facilitator observes some of the drawings.

After the next 30 seconds of quickly drawing more details, ask to see more drawings of cars. Notice any words, symbols, and other details and point them out. Point out the fact that no two pictures are alike, they are all unique, yet for all their individuality, they likely have one thing in common: All of them are likely drawn from the side view rather than from above or the front or back.

WHY? We all have seen a police car from the front or back, and maybe pictures from above (some of you have seen them from the inside!). So why did none of you think of drawing the police car from a different angle? When we try to solve a problem when we are stressed, we often see things from only one narrow perspective. When we take a step back and try to see things from multiple perspectives, and even ask others about their perspectives, then we may be better able to manage stress and think of multiple ways to tackle challenges.



**Police Car Drawing**

On a sheet of paper, you will take 30 seconds and draw a picture of a police car.

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## Slide 38 Training Your Brain to see Multiple Perspectives

Training your brain to attach more positives to each situation as a parent or caregiver will improve your brain's flexibility and significantly increase your ability to find and pursue the best action and response to stressful personal and parenting situations.

Negative Phrases (examples) +1

"Ugh, a lot of work" "Messy" "Pain in the butt" "Not fun"

Positive Phrases (examples) +3

"Chance to feel productive" "Opportunity to win points with spouse" "Way of showing love"  
"Warm water feels good" "Chance to do something mindless for a moment" "Make the kitchen look great"

(After 30 seconds, stop) Tally up your points. How did you do? How many points? Read off some descriptors for the group out loud.

You might be wondering why you count the negative descriptors. After all, if we are looking to change our perspective and manage stress, isn't it counterproductive to include them? Wouldn't it make sense that including the negative words would make it easier for our brain to construct a reality around the negatives? Research shows that while listing too many negatives is detrimental, including some can actually be helpful. *IT DEPENDS ON THE RATIO!*

Our brains are wired to naturally seek and find negatives. We as human beings are already good at that. Our primitive brains (amygdala) had to respond to threats faster than to emotions like happiness or gratitude. Retraining our brains to find the positive descriptors is where the work begins. Scientists have found that a 3:1 ratio is best for our relationships because negatives far "outweigh" the positives.

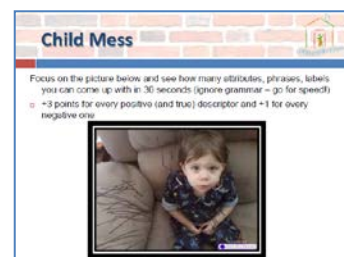
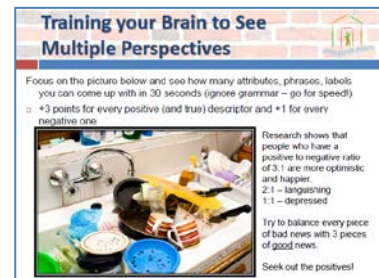
## Slide 39 Child's Mess

Let's try it again. Same rules, different picture. (Time the group for 30 seconds) How many did you come up with this time?

**Say:** Seeing things from another's perspective requires a separate part of the brain – empathy, compassion, creates understanding, seeing things from another's shoes. It's important to point out that there really is a mess here – seeing things from different perspectives doesn't mean there are not consequences or change the fact there is a disaster.

So it's not that we don't see the negative stressful reality here, but it's that we also see we have the ability to DO something about it – choose how we act instead of react.

From a child's perspective, what were they thinking? (fun, great time)





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## Slide 40 We Can Learn to See Different Perspectives

Take a look at these pictures. On the left, what do you see? (Point out that there is a picture of an old man and woman but also a picture of two people sitting down, one playing a guitar and a woman in a doorway). The other picture is a young woman looking away and an older woman looking down. We can learn to see different perspectives but it can take time and effort.

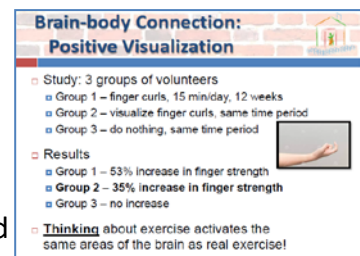


## Slide 41 Brain-body Connection: Positive Visualization

Here's an example of a study showing the power of the mind and positive visualization.

Cleveland Clinic Foundation funded the study:

"One group of healthy volunteers spent fifteen minutes a day practicing "finger abductions" which are basically like a biceps curl but with one finger. A second group of healthy volunteers was asked to practice visualizing doing finger abductions for that same time period, and the rest did nothing. After twelve weeks, the people who worked out their fingers every day showed, on average, a 53 percent increase in finger strength. The control group, unsurprisingly, showed no change. But the fascinating thing was that the people in group 2, who literally did not move a finger (except in their brains), showed a 35 percent increase in strength. Incredibly, mentally practicing an action increased physical strength."



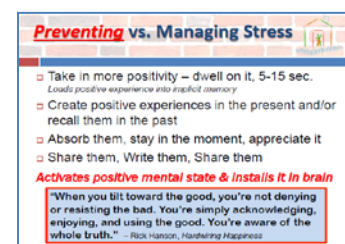
**Brain-body Connection: Positive Visualization**

- Study: 3 groups of volunteers
  - Group 1 – finger curls, 15 min/day, 12 weeks
  - Group 2 – visualize finger curls, same time period
  - Group 3 – do nothing, same time period
- Results
  - Group 1 – 53% increase in finger strength
  - Group 2 – 35% increase in finger strength
  - Group 3 – no increase
- Thinking about exercise activates the same areas of the brain as real exercise!

IF TIME – similar study at Ohio University – wrapped a single wrist of two sets of study participants in a cast – immobilizing their muscles for 4 weeks. One group was instructed to sit still and intensely imagine exercising (devote all of their mental energy towards imagining flexing their arm muscles) for 11 minutes, five days a week. The other group was given no instruction. After 4 weeks, the mental exercisers were two times stronger than the other group. The researchers found that their mental exercises created stronger neuromuscular pathways. <http://www.breitbart.com/news/mind-over-matter-the-brain-alone-can-tone-muscle/>

## Slide 42 Preventing vs. Managing Stress

We have talked about ways to *Manage* stress and we have discussed how powerful our brains can be and the influence they can have on our bodies and behavior. But the study of stress has shifted some in recent years. It still remains a fact that we will all experience stress, research now shows that we can actually perceive potential stressors as *less* stressful when our brains are positive! This is, in a way, preventing stress, or put another way, responding to stress rather than reacting to stress. We can train our brains to view things that may be stressful as less stressful over time. We can train our brains to take in the good and scan our environment for positives.



**Preventing vs. Managing Stress**

- Take in more positivity – dwell on it, 5-15 sec.  
*Loads positive experience into explicit memory*
- Create positive experiences in the present and/or recall them in the past
- Absorb them, stay in the moment, appreciate it
- Share them, Write them, Share them

**Activates positive mental state & installs it in brain**

"When you tilt toward the good, you're not denying or resisting the bad. You're simply acknowledging, enjoying, and using the good. You're aware of the whole truth." – Rick Hanson, *Hardwiring Happiness*

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Research shows that when we choose to take in more positivity, dwell on it, enjoy it for 5-15 seconds, it begins to rewire the brain and we remember it longer. If we do this ONE time, it makes it more likely that you will see positives in the future. We can also do this by purposefully creating positive experiences. Parents can do this all the time with their children. They can get on the floor and play and laugh with them. Then, in the moment, while parents are enjoying themselves, taking just a few seconds to dwell on how much fun this is, appreciate it, and absorb it, it will help keep the positive memories in our brains longer. When we do this over time, and share the good times with others, or write them down, we cement them in our brains longer. This all means that when we are feeling positive and focus on positivity, we can't, at the same time feel negativity. As a result, we begin to perceive things as less stressful and we begin to see other perspectives.

## Slides 43-44 Raising Positivity = Happiness Advantage

When our brain is positive, it:

- Performs better than if it was negative, neutral, or stressed,
- Intelligence, creativity, and energy all rise,
- The brain is 31% more productive, and
- The dopamine rush makes a person happy and turns on all learning centers of the brain, which allows us to adapt to our environments and see different perspectives.

Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking “if my kids would just listen I would be happy” or “when they can do things for themselves I will be happy”. However, this thinking is backwards! When we are happy, we tend to be better parents. To help rewire your brains for more positivity, try each of these activities 2 minutes a day for 21 days.

- 3 gratitudes. (Email someone a sincere thanks each day).
- 3 good things (write them down and write why they happened)
- Give 3 *extra* smiles.
- Journal about 1 positive experience in the past 24 hours.
- Exercise or meditate.
- Perform random acts of kindness.

## Slide 45 Previous Thinking on Happiness

For decades the prevalent way of thinking about happiness was that happiness was the end reward for doing our best. It's what we felt after accomplishing everything we wanted to. For example, if we worked hard, we would be successful, and *then* we would be happy. But new research suggests it works the other way around. We become more successful when we are happier and more positive.

**Raising Positivity = Happiness Advantage**

- When brain is positive:
  - Performs better than negative, neutral, or stressed brain
  - Intelligence rises, creativity rises, energy rises
  - Brain is 31% more productive
  - Dopamine rush makes you happy and turns on all learning centers in the brain, allowing you to adapt to the world and see different perspectives

**Raising Positivity = Happiness Advantage**

- Perform each of the following, 2 min/day for 21 days to rewire your brain for more positivity
  - **3 gratitudes** – *rewires the brain to focus on positives*
  - **3 extra smiles** – *releases dopamine, improves mood, encourages*
  - **Journaling** about 1 positive experience over the last 24 hours – *allows your brain to retain it and remember it*
  - **Exercise** – *releases your brain to your environment*
  - **Meditation** – *allows our brains to slow down and focus on the task at hand*
  - **Random Acts of Kindness** – *doing good deeds to bring joy*

**Previous Thinking**

Happiness is the reward we get for doing our best

- Work hard at our job = Successful = Happiness
- Work hard at being a parent = Successful = Happiness
- Work hard at our marriage = Successful = Happiness

“New research in psychology and neuroscience shows that it works the other way around: We become more successful *when* we are happier and more positive.” –Shawn Achor, *Happiness Advantage*, p. 15

Happiness → Better Parent → Positive Outcomes



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 46 Tying it All Together

What have we learned? What are you committed to do? How does it all relate to parenting and stress? Visualization does NOT take the place of action. Visualization is not the MEANS to your goals; it is the accelerant that gets us on the right trajectory toward reaching our goals of better parenting and managing stress.

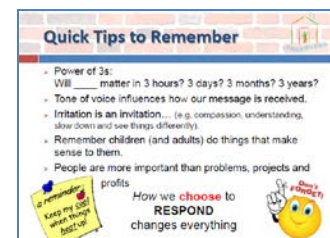


When we are better able to focus more of our brain and resources on success rather than failure, we are more likely to act in helpful ways rather than *react* in unhelpful ways. Imagine a better outcome and plan ways to make it happen.

## Slide 47 Quick Tips to Remember

As we wrap up this section, here are a few tips that may be helpful:

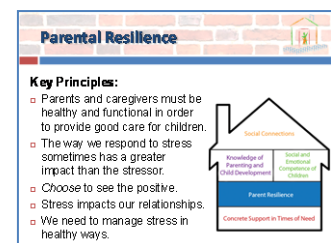
- Power of 3's: Sometimes we get bogged down in the moment, get stressed, and think an issue at hand is worse than it is. It may help to ask yourself whether it will matter over time.
- Tone: When we use a sarcastic, humiliating, or degrading tone of voice with children, remember they have already shut down, they have stopped listening. When you come from a place of anger, children will hear that. If you come from a place of love and openness, they will hear that. When we use a soft tone of voice, we are modeling for them. It's showing them a great way to speak to people, to peers, to teachers, and to others in their lives.
- We may need to pause and remember that irritations are an invitation to see things differently.
- We all do things for reasons that make sense to us. Try to see things from a child's eyes.
- Above all, remember that people are more important than problems.



## Slide 48 Parental Resilience

The protective factor, Parental Resilience, emphasizes the importance of focusing on strengths and being flexible when we experience difficulties, adversity, and trauma. The key principles of this discussion are:

- Parents must be healthy and functional in order to provide good care for their children.
- The way we respond to stress sometimes has a greater impact than the stressor.
- Choose to see the positive.
- Stress impacts our relationships.
- We need to manage stress in healthy ways.



### \*\* Presenter: Review Binder Resources for Parental Resilience

Before we move to the next factor, let's spend some time reviewing some of the tools in your binder that may be helpful in your work with families.

*[Allow participants a few minutes to browse the resources]*

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

**BREAK 15 minutes**

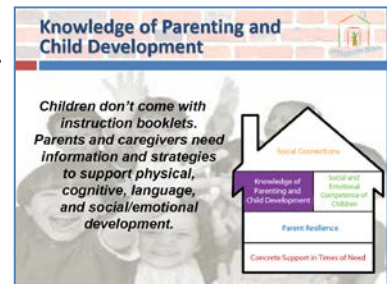
## 10 Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

**45 minutes**

### Slide 49 Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

The next part of our housing structure that helps keep things stable and safe is knowledge of parenting and child development.

*Children don't come with instruction booklets – parents need information and strategies to support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.*



### Slide 50 Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

It is said that parenting is part natural and part learned. It also involves a lot of trial and error. A good understanding of parenting and child development can help change parents' attitudes and behaviors, promote protective factors, and lead to positive outcomes for parents and children.

We will split these up a bit and first discuss child development.



### Slide 51 Knowledge of Child Development

Several risk factors for child abuse and neglect are related to a lack of knowledge related to children. These include the following:

- Unrealistic expectations for a child's capabilities

Sometimes parents expect children to behave like little adults, but young children lack the cognitive and emotional skills necessary to know right from wrong. If parents do not know when most children reach certain milestones, they might develop inappropriate expectations about children's abilities and behaviors, which leads to frustration. This lack of knowledge could put children at higher risk for child abuse and neglect. In contrast, parents who have a better understanding of children's abilities at different ages can better understand and care for their children, and they will be more patient and nurturing.



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

- Lack of knowledge about normal child development

Information about child development needs to be accurate and timely – it needs to correspond with children’s ages and abilities. Infants are at high risk of abuse because they cannot say what they are feeling. Crying is their way of asking for help. They may be hungry, tired, sick, too hot or too cold, bored, lonely, in pain, or need a diaper change. Paying attention to babies’ cues can help. Parents need to get to know their babies well and take time to notice things that make the baby cry less or more.

- Children’s different temperaments

Children’s temperaments explain a lot about how they react to their environment. For example, some children are more open to new people and situations, but others are slower to warm up. Some prefer to be very active and involved with things going on around them, but others like to watch before engaging. Some cope with change well, while others struggle to adjust. Parents have different opinions about challenging behaviors – some are more patient and tolerant of certain behaviors that others view as oppositional and defiant. Regardless of children’s temperaments, parents need to show love and understanding so children feel accepted and free to become comfortable in a way that matches their temperament. Doing so will improve children’s outcomes.

- Children’s circumstances

Parents also need to consider children’s circumstances – what is happening that might lead a child to act out? Sometimes children get in trouble because they are bored and need help finding something interesting to do; other times they are upset and need help calming down. In these instances, it is helpful for parents to take a moment to talk with children to learn what is going on. This can help alleviate both the child’s and the parent’s frustration

- Recognizing and attending to the special needs of children

Some children have special needs, which can be very stressful for parents. Having a better understanding of a child’s special needs and taking a break occasionally both are important for parents to learn.

So what can you do to help parents in these areas of child development? We have included several tools and guidesheets in your binder related to child development. One in particular that we would like to look over now is called “See the World Through My Eyes” [located inside the back binder cover].

*[Allow participants a few minutes to browse through the guide or get into small groups to discuss the resource and what they find useful]*

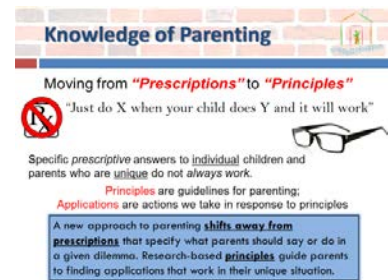
**NOTES:**

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 52 Knowledge of Parenting

Too often books and parenting programs suggest, with good intentions, prescriptive words, phrases, or specific actions that parents should say or do when parenting (*if glasses are available, put the glasses on and continue talking*). For example, if your child is acting up or was just mean to a sibling or friend, then you should say X and do Y! But prescriptions often set parents up for frustration and failure because a parent may try X and Y and come back and say it didn't work. "Well apparently you didn't do it right!" might be the reply of a well-intentioned parenting professional.

A new approach to parenting is to teach principles that parents can apply in their own unique situation with unique children and circumstances.



## Slide 53 Knowledge of Parenting

Let's turn now to the other part of this protective factor – knowledge of parenting. Parenting scholars have conducted several decades of research on parenting to identify some "best practices" when it comes to parenting, or certain things parents say and do that result in better outcomes for children. Most scholars agree that the following are fundamental to healthy parenting:

- 1) a supportive, nurturing component that includes warmth, positivity, affection, and involvement, and
- 2) a guiding component that includes structure, discipline, supervision, and setting limits.

In others words, some have said that a parent's job is to help their children get what they want, in a way that parents feel good about. Or put another way, respecting children's preferences while still setting limits.

Let's take a moment to think about how people learn to parent.

### NOTES:

Discussion Questions: [Allow time for a few responses]

- *How did you learn how to parent?*

There are numerous books, web sites, parenting classes, television shows, fact sheets, and magazines with all kinds of advice about parenting. But, a lot of our knowledge of parenting



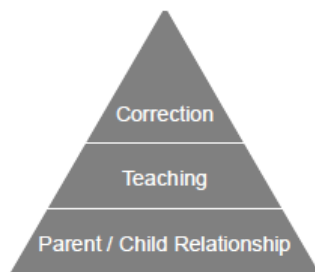
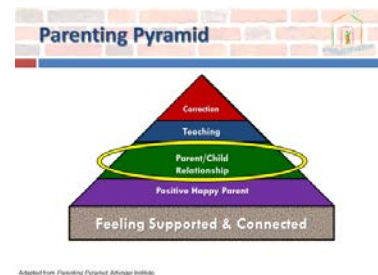
# Strong Parents, Stable Children

comes from the way we were raised. This might be beneficial for parents who were raised in positive, nurturing homes, but those who lacked good role models might not parent very well. Thus parents who experienced harsh discipline during childhood may need to learn different techniques and alternative ways to respond to their children so they don't fall back on the way they were parented. They need to learn how to use firm but gentle discipline without yelling, arguing, or using physical punishment.

All parents *can* learn new and effective ways to support their children's development, but not every parent is ready or willing to learn new strategies. Parents must *choose* to participate and make a commitment to learn new skills. It may help to point out some specific ways that being involved is beneficial for their children's development.

## Slide 54 Parenting Pyramid

Many parents get caught in the trap of spending too much threatening and disciplining their children and correcting them when things go wrong. They spend money and time learning from books about ways to punish their children or learning about natural and logical consequences for misbehavior. While disciplining and correcting children is an important part of parenting, the parenting pyramid, developed by the Arbinger Institute (see [www.Arbinger.com](http://www.Arbinger.com)) is a model that focuses primarily on helping things go *right*, rather than spending most of the time figuring out what to do when children misbehave.



[Advance to next level of pyramid] This next level shows that the effectiveness of parents' correction of children, no matter what method is used, will always depend on the effectiveness of the prior *teaching* of them. This is because the better parents teach their children, the less correction is needed, and when it is needed, it will be a natural extension of their teaching. Rather than seeing children as ungrateful, disobedient burdens who require correction, parents can view them instead as children who have not learned yet. In other words, the pyramid suggests that parents should spend more time teaching than correcting.

[Example: We want to teach our children that rules are important. One rule might be no hitting. Young children have a tough time controlling their feelings. When they don't get what they want and get upset,



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

*they may hit. Parents can help by talking quietly and holding or rocking a child until they calm down. They can remind them that hitting hurts others and then teach better ways to act when frustrated.]*

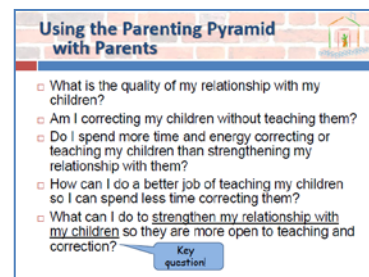
However, no matter how much time a parent spends teaching, the fact is that children are less likely to learn from parents that they do not like [advance to next level of pyramid]. The third layer of the pyramid suggests that parents should spend more time developing a strong and loving relationship with their children, if their teaching and disciplining is not working. In summary, the effectiveness of parents' correction will depend on the quality of their teaching, and the quality of their teaching will depend on the quality of their relationship with their child(ren).

The next two levels of the pyramid actually review things we just discussed about being a positive happy parent and having concrete supports in place during times of need. But we'll focus right now on the importance of the parent-child relationship (click to advance the yellow circle).

## Slide 55 Using the Parenting Pyramid with Parents

As you think about parenting your own kids or as you work with parents, it may be helpful to review the principles of the parenting pyramid and think about the following questions:

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

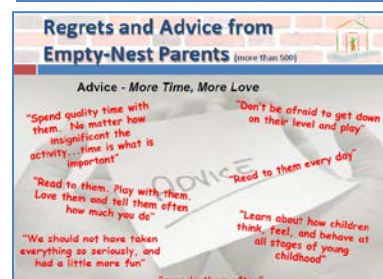
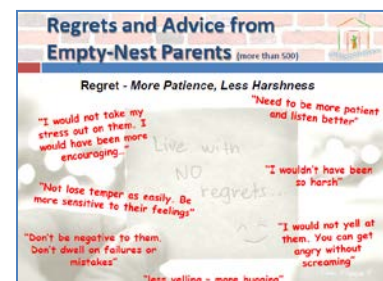


## Slides 56-57 Regrets and Advice from Empty-nest Parents

In one study of empty-nest parents, they were asked to give advice to parents who still have children at home. They were also asked about what advice they would give parents, now that they have raised children and no longer have them in their home.

[Review some of the comments from parents and emphasize that many parents regret being so harsh and wished they had been more patient]

When it comes to advice, what sticks out to you? What might we learn from parents who have "been in our shoes?"



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## Slide 58

### Make Time for Nine

As we wrap up our discussion of the importance of knowledge of parenting and child development, I want to introduce you to the concept of “Make Time for Nine.” This concept aims at strengthening the bottom level of the pyramid between parents and children – or helping things go right. These are simple things you can share with parents that can make a world of difference. Let’s take a look at each of these 9’s.



- First, research shows that children need 8-12 meaningful (safe) touches every day to feel connected to a parent. These can be as simple as straightening a child’s shirt collar, a hug, or even playful wrestling with a child. If a child is going through a tough time, they could use even more meaningful touches. We are wired to connect with each other and meaningful touch helps with attachment, trust, healing, and health. [Example: preterm newborns who received just three 15-minute sessions of touch therapy each day for 5-10 days gained 47 percent more weight than premature infants who only received standard medical treatment]
- 9 minutes that matter – the first 3 minutes after children wake up; the first 3 minutes after coming home from school, child care, etc.; the last 3 minutes of the day – before they go to bed (reading, song, snuggle, words, calm). If parents work during these times, make the first and last minutes with the child count. Make those moments special and help children feel loved. These moments can be easily rushed by parents who are busy, running late, tired, or distracted. Children of all ages need parents to slow down, look them in the eyes, and talk with them or ask questions. But they are important moments for children and they often reach out for connection during these 9 minutes.
- 9 minutes of conversation – depending on age, children need at least 9 total minutes of “face time” with a parent (eye-to-eye). It may be 9 minutes straight, or a minute here and there. Infants especially need to look into their parents’ eyes and connect so attachments can be strengthened. It is important for parents to understand that even babies need to be talked to – it doesn’t matter what we say. Teenagers also need a good 9 minutes of interaction with a parent, to keep the lines of communication open.

#### NOTES:



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*[Example of first 3 minutes waking up and falling asleep:]  
A friend who listened to Chris Gardner's story ("Pursuit of Happyness," Will Smith and son Jaden) shared this with me. His son, Chris Jr. was only 2 years old when his father was homeless and he was asked what he remembers (born in 1981) and he says he doesn't remember much but the one thing he recalls is that his dad's face was the last thing he saw before he went to bed, and the first thing he saw when he woke up.]*

Let's take a few minutes to look at the bookmark and text-tips cards that were included in the front of your binder. The bookmark can be given to parents as a reminder of the Make Time for 9 concept. The text-tip cards can also be given to parents. They can sign up for free parenting tip texts that come about two days per week. These are simple thoughts and ideas that parents can implement, with the majority of the texts about information from today's training.

## **Slide 59      Build Your Relationship Daily**

The Stop, Slow, Go let them know is a simple concept that parents can remember each day.

First, parents can STOP or Catch themselves ONE time per day from saying something in a Tone they will regret, or an unkind word, or discipline in a harsh way

SLOW – down and try to see things from your child's perspective, THINK through a response rather than react, Slow the hectic pace of life, whether it's rushing dinner, rushing the morning, rushing bedtime. Slow down and enjoy the moment.

GO – let them know. Go and let them know how much you care for them, appreciate them, do something kind, in their love language, note, text, treat, time with a book or kicking a ball, tell them, snuggle, apologize. All of these are small and simple ways to let them know you care for and appreciate them.

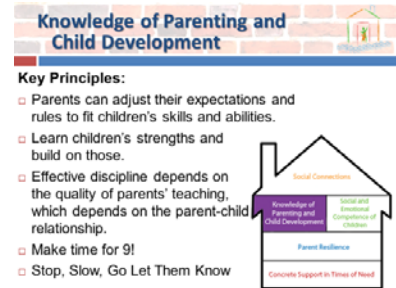


# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 60 Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

The protective factor, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, emphasizes the importance of learning as much as we can about children's typical development and parenting strategies that work in different situations. No parent has all the answers. We need to seek out information, resources, and support in order to raise our children well. Key principles that apply to this are:

- Understand that many factors influence children's skills and abilities as they grow. Parents need to adjust their expectations and rules accordingly.
- Learn children's strengths and build on those
- Effective discipline depends on the quality of parents' teaching, and the quality of their teaching depends on the quality of the parent-child relationship.
- Make time for 9!



## **\*\* Presenter: Review Binder Resources for Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**

Before we move to the next factor, let's spend some time reviewing some of the tools in your binder that may be helpful in your work with families.

*[Allow participants a few minutes to browse the resources]*

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

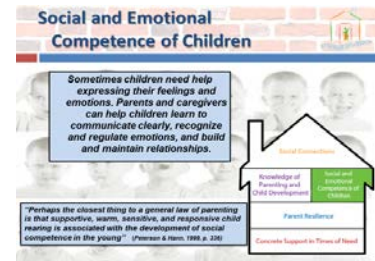
## 11 Social and Emotional Competence of Children

45 minutes

### Slide 61 Social and Emotional Competence of Children

The next portion of the house that is critical for parents and children is social and emotional competence of children.

*Sometimes children need help expressing their feelings and emotions. Parents can help children learn to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate emotions, and build and maintain relationships.*



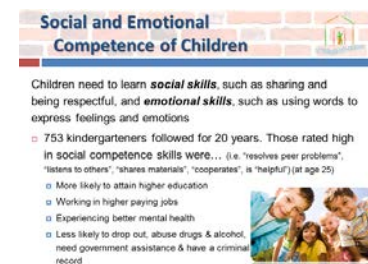
### Slide 62 Social and Emotional Competence of Children

There are many things parents can do that help their children socially and emotionally.

First, parents serve as primary models for their children. When children have a warm, trusting relationship with kind and loving parents they feel safe, and they develop a positive bond, which leads to being more willing to talk with their parents about their thoughts, feelings, worries, and pressures. Sometimes the best parental teaching is done by listening. When parents invest time with their children and truly listen, children feel important and loved. Additionally, parents can observe and learn about their child's strengths and weaknesses in order to better guide them.

If you think back to the parenting pyramid, much of what we are talking about here is aimed at building the parent-child relationship.

These social and emotional skills are crucial to learn at an early age. (Describe the study on the slide and emphasize that if children do not learn these skills in kindergarten does NOT mean they are doomed in life. They can be learned along the way).

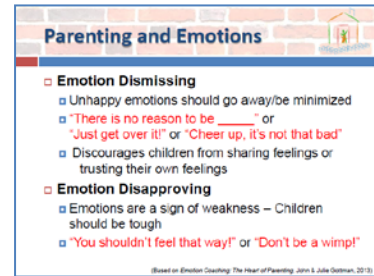


### NOTES:

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## Slide 63 Parenting and Emotions

Some research shows there are different ways parents respond to their children's emotions. Many parents frequently use this approach with their kids, not realizing that there is a better way to manage emotions. Emotion dismissing parents are usually not cruel or mean-spirited people. They are often loving, warm and concerned, but are uncomfortable with intense emotions. They prefer the neutral state and like others to be calm and reasonable. They dislike anger, rage, sadness, despair, fear, or anxiety. They are also uncomfortable with intense positive emotions like affection, pride, excitement, and joy.

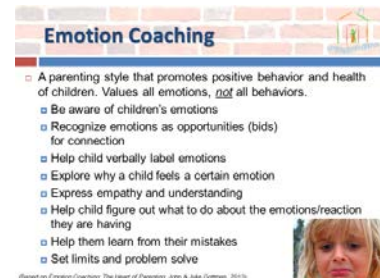


Emotion disapproving parents may feel that when their child shows emotions, it is a sign of weakness.

## Slide 64 Emotion Coaching

Emotion coaching is a parenting style that promotes positive behavior and children's health. It values all emotions, not all behaviors. It is not a skill that can be developed over night. It's a process that develops over time with child. It includes:

- Being aware of children's emotions,
- Recognizing emotions as opportunities (or bids) for connection,
- Helping children verbally label their emotions,
- Exploring why children feel a certain emotion,
- Expressing empathy and understanding,
- Helping children figure out how to handle their emotions/reactions, and
- Setting limits and problem solving.



## Slide 65 Emotional Mirror

Another way of promoting the social and emotional competence of children is by responding appropriately to their emotions, *especially their strong emotions*.

\*Principle – children need an environment where they feel safe expressing their emotions.\* They become more resilient and are better able to soothe themselves.



Research shows that when children (and adults) are experiencing a strong emotion (fear, anger, sadness, stress, etc.) it is very difficult to learn anything or listen to anyone. Have you seen this in children's meltdowns? In the heat of the moment many parents are worked up as well and they try to work things out with a child who is an emotional mess. During these times it might be best to first deal with the emotion and show compassion by holding up an "emotional

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

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mirror". This means we simply reflect what we see in children's tone and body language. Rather than ignore, minimize or deny negative emotions, it is more important for parents to allow their children to express them and then to affirm those feelings. "You look angry", "You are disappointed", and "That is a pretty strong word" are just three ways to affirm a child's emotion. When a child is emotional, it is an ideal time for bonding. Labeling an emotion is also a powerful way for young children to better understand what they are feeling, and learn to control their emotions as they get older.

After the affirmation, parents should explore the feelings and help children manage them. Parents may say something like "Can you tell me more about that?" or "There might be another way of looking at this. Should we think about it together?" If a child is upset or experiencing a strong emotion, it may be best to simply soothe and hold the child until they are ready to talk.

*[Presenter: Share a personal experience.]*

*Example – A parent picked up their angry and frustrated daughter from dance. She climbed in the back seat and slammed the door. She then said, "I hate dance, Dad, I don't like my teacher or the girls in there and I'm never going back. I quit!"*

*How might some parents respond? (allow time for responses)*

*The way a parent responds to this can invite a child to express her emotions further, or close things off. A parent might say, "Wow, honey, it sounds like you had a really rough day at dance. What happened?"*

*The child proceeded to tell the parent how some girls were laughing at her and when she went to say something to the girls, her teacher got mad at her. The parent's soft response let the daughter know she was cared for and the parent was not going to preach and criticize.]*

**\*Principle\*** Feelings must be dealt with before behavior can be improved. Preaching and criticizing create distance and resentment. Parents should respond to children's feelings, not their behavior. A child's feelings should be taken seriously, even though the situation may not be serious. When children feel understood, their frustration and hurt diminish.

*[If needed/time: Example: When conversations with children get heated, children often give parents "hooks". Hooks are anything a child says or does that immediately causes our heart rates to jump! It can be a facial expression such as rolling the eyes, a sarcastic remark, a complaint, or anything else they have said or done that makes your blood boil. As children get older they get better at giving parents "hooks". However, it is best to not take the hook and give*

**NOTES:**

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

*the child time to “cool down” in their room alone. Later, when you and your child are calm, a helpful discussion can take place.]*

## Slide 66 Messages of Love

Every child (and adult) needs to be reminded often that people and love and value him or her. Often we get busy and forget to send messages of love to our children. Or we send messages poorly, or we send only angry messages.

At other times we may send a love message but our child doesn't get it. They may not understand that specific language (message) of love. There are at least three “languages” of love:

- Show Me
- Tell Me
- Touch Me

A “show me” child may want a parent to do things for him/her, such as buy her a gift, read with him, take her out for an ice cream, wrestle on the floor, or fix his bike (e.g. time and gifts)

A “tell me” child wants to hear words like “I love you” or “I love to be with you.”

A “touch me” child may want a parent to hug them, hold their hand, snuggle, or rock them.



Sometimes parents send a message of love but it doesn't get through because the child doesn't want to hear “I love you” but wants you to fix their bike or play ball. One way parents can effectively send a message of love is to notice what the child asks for. Does he/she want time, attention, a listening ear, a ball, markers and paper to create things, or lunch in the park?

Another way is to notice how the child sends messages of love to you and others. Does she tell you, hug you, write you notes, clean up the house? Observing these can help parents know how to be effective at sending love messages to a specific child. Parents may even think about coming up with code words or special handshakes to demonstrate love, that make the child feel special.

*\*\*Refer to the guidesheet in your binders called “Sending Messages of Love” to learn more. It can be copied and shared.*

To develop good social and emotional skills, children also need caregivers who are sensitive, affectionate, observant, emotionally available, and able to consistently respond to children's needs. Such care gives rise to the development of a secure attachment between the child and the adult. Young children with secure attachments develop a sense of trust, feel safe, gain self-

## NOTES:

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

confidence and are able to explore their environments because they feel they have a secure base.

## Slide 67 Bids for Connection

The way parents respond to older children is also important to children's social and emotional development. Children of all ages reach out for attention and affection to build positive bonds. This is often referred to as making bids.

Researcher and author John Gottman describes bids as attempts to create a connection between two people. Their purpose is to keep the relationship moving forward in a positive direction.

We all make bids – to our partners, colleagues, and others.

Children constantly make bids for connection to their parents and caregivers – for attention, affection, reassurance, and help. How parents and caregivers respond to these bids has a big influence on children. It affects their sense of self, feelings about their parents, and whether or not they will continue making bids in the future.

Sometimes misbehavior is a bid for connection, especially if other bids have gone unnoticed or were not successful. Children love when parents watch them perform, try something new, and provide encouragement. Responding positively when children bid for attention or affection provides children assurance that parents care for them. Think back to our discussion about "Make Time for 9," children make numerous bids for connection, and many of them occur during these segments of 9 minutes.

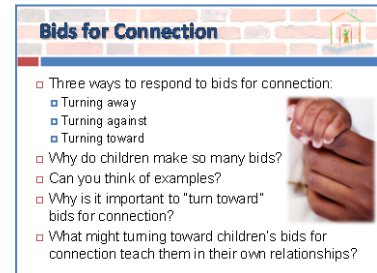
There are three ways to respond to a person's bid for connection:

- Turning away
- Turning against
- Turning toward

*Example: (Share the following, or think of your own example) When a young child first jumped off the diving board with a lifejacket, he really wanted his dad to watch. He called out to his dad over and over. He wanted to connect. After he jumped in and came up out of the water where did he immediately look? What was the parent's reaction? If you were that child, how would you want your parent to react?*

*The father went crazy cheering for him! What would have happened if he was on his phone when he came up out of the water? Or not looking? Or said something mean, like "It's about time you jump in, you little baby!"*

*Questions: Why do children do that constantly?*



## NOTES:



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

*Can you think of examples from your own children or with parents you have worked with?*

*Why is it important to “turn toward” bids for connection?*

*How can you help other parents “turn toward” bids?*

This principle applies to children (and adults) of all ages; babies crying, children wanting to hold a parent’s hand, a teenager showing off their new shoes, etc. When parents respond positively and consistently, children are more likely to respond positively to parents, siblings, friends, and others when they have seen it modeled. And when children have strong secure attachments with parents they have better outcomes when they experience stress and trauma. Those with insecure attachments are more likely to have long-term adverse outcomes, including cognitive problems, behavioral problems, psychopathology, and relationship challenges.

## Slide 68 Granting in Fantasy What Can’t be Granted in Reality

There is one final principle to discuss, related to social and emotional competence – granting in fantasy what you cannot grant in reality. This is related to holding up an emotional mirror. Sometimes children want things that parents simply cannot give them—whether it is a blanket we forgot to bring in the car, or to stay up all night watching movies. In these moments parents may feel stuck.



When a child keeps whining that they want their blanket, but it was accidentally left home, a parent may try to reason or be rational with a child, and say something over and over such as, “I don’t have your blanket! Stop asking for it! I can’t get it for you!” Instead, a parent might try “granting in fantasy what they can’t grant in reality” by saying something like, “You really love your blanket. You miss it and you are very sad. You would love to snuggle with it right now. If I could race back to our house in a rocket, I would grab your blanket and zoom back.”

It doesn’t bring the blanket back, but it shows the child you hear and understand them and see why they are so upset. Sometimes the gift of understanding is one of the most precious gifts we can give a child. A parent may not be able to get what their child wants, but they can offer the next best thing—a parent’s comfort and compassion.

Once a child realizes that getting something is not possible, they are not interested in parents’ excuses, arguments or diversions. But a parent’s validation can help them feel understood.

Each of these principles help children develop trust, attachment, and self-regulating behaviors and help them interact positively with others, and communicate their emotions effectively.

**\*Application for Professionals Who Work with Parents\***

## NOTES:

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

We have discussed several principles related to the social and emotional competence of children. But let's pause for a moment to think about what you might do to help parents show more compassion, understanding, and turn toward their children's bids for connection.

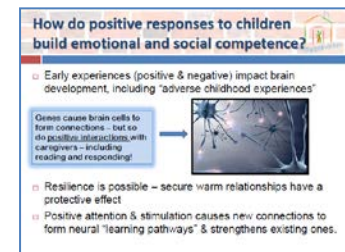
One of the most influential things you can do when you interact with a parent is to MODEL the principles we just discussed. When parents see you turning toward their bid for connection, or when you hold up the emotional mirror to them, then they will be much more likely to show understanding and love to their children.

When parents experience it, they are better able to understand it and implement it.

## Slide 69 How do Positive Responses to Children Build Emotional and Social Competence?

Early experiences (both positive and negative) can have a decisive impact on early brain development. Poverty influences these early experiences.

A lack of resources can also affect the stress levels experienced by parents and other caregivers. However, many children are resilient. Many factors appear to affect children's capacity to thrive in circumstances where others do not, but strong, secure relationships with consistent caregivers appear to be the most important. Research suggests that these secure, warm relationships have a protective effect, helping to buffer children from later stress. By the same token, children who are deprived of such relationships early in life are especially vulnerable to stress as they move through childhood, and may experience developmental delays.



Scientists have long believed that reading with children creates a context in which learning can occur. Today, however, they have evidence that reading is one of the experiences that actually influences the way young brains develop--that is, the way the brain's circuitry is "wired."<sup>1</sup> But how does this work? At birth children have most of the brain cells, or neurons, they will need for a lifetime of learning, but these brain cells are not yet linked with the complex networks that are needed for mature thought processes to take place. In the early years, young children's brain cells form connection--synapses--very rapidly.

What causes brain cells to form connections? Genes control some of the process, but experience is also a crucial ingredient. Every time a caregiver or volunteer interacts with an infant or toddler, connections are formed. Positive interactions with nurturing caregivers--like the attention children receive when they are read to--profoundly stimulate young brains. This stimulation causes new connections to form neural pathways (we might think of as "learning pathways") and strengthens existing ones.

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 70 Children with Special Needs

One final thought about these principles. Parenting is more difficult when children have delays in social and emotional development. These children may be at greater risk of maltreatment because of the added stress that often arises.

Discussion Questions: [Allow time for a few responses]

- *If you have a child with special needs, what do you need from others to support his/her social/emotional development?*
- *If you work with families who have children with special needs, how do you support their needs?*

Example: Listen to parents' worries and concerns, learn how the parent-child relationship is affected, and focus on the positive (hold up the emotional mirror)

Discussion Questions: [Allow time for a few responses]

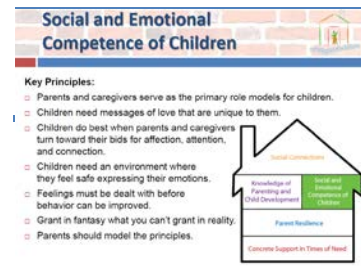
- *Can you think of some ways you could integrate this in your interactions with parents?*  
Example: One way to integrate this into your interactions with parents is to model and demonstrate each type of response and talk about how it feels to have someone turn toward, away, or against us when we say something.



## Slide 71 Social and Emotional Competence of Children

The protective factor, Social and Emotional Competence of Children, helps us think about ways we can encourage children to put their emotions into words. Key principles include:

- Parents serve as the primary role models for children
- Children need messages of love that are unique for them
- Children do best when parents turn toward their bids for affection, attention, and connection
- Children need an environment where they feel safe expressing their emotions
- Feelings must be dealt with (emotional mirror before behavior can be improved)
- Grant in fantasy what you can't grant in reality
- Model the principles for parents



**\*\* Presenter: Review Binder Resources for Social and Emotional Competence of Children**

Before we move to the next factor, let's spend some time reviewing some of the tools in your binder that may be helpful in your interactions with families.

*[Allow participants a few minutes to browse the resources]*

# Strong Parents, Stable Children

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## 12 Social Connections

25 minutes

### Slide 72 Social Connections

The same way that several trusses of a roof work together to provide support for the roof and shingles. Social connections provide support when we need someone to lean on.

Build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.



### Slide 73 What is the #1 Predictor of How Long and how Well You Will Live?

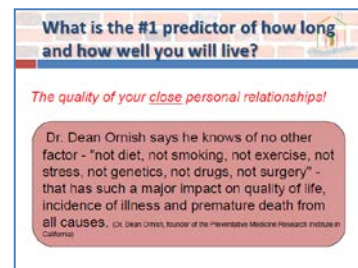
“Loneliness raises blood pressure to the point where the risk of heart attack and stroke is doubled.”

Sociologist James House – U. of Michigan – emotional isolation is a more dangerous health risk than smoking or high blood pressure. Stress in our relationships affects immune system, digestive system, metabolism and our ability to heal – researchers used vacuum pumps to produce small blisters on the hands of women volunteers, and then had them fight with their husbands. The nastier the fight, the longer it took for the women’s skin to heal.

Marital distress is related to anxiety and depression. In fact it raises the risk for depression 10 fold!

But there is positive news, too. Hundreds of studies show that positive loving connections with others protect us from stress and help us cope better with life’s challenges and traumas. Simply holding the hand of a loving partner can affect us. Shock experiment – holding hands those with spouses with strong emotional connections – reported less pain with the shocks compared to people holding the hand of a stranger and even cohabitation! It acted as a buffer against shock, stress, and pain.

When love doesn’t work, we hurt. We say “hurt feelings” and this is true. Brain imaging studies show that rejection and exclusion trigger the same circuits in the same part of the brain as physical pain! In fact, this part of the brain turns on anytime we are emotionally separated from those who are close to us. (oxytocin, vasopressin – cuddle hormones – calm happy chemicals like dopamine, turn off stress hormones like cortisol)



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slides 74-75 Benefits of Social Connections

Research shows a strong correlation between social support and happiness. This correlation is even higher than the connection between smoking and cancer. Social support also affects our health, and high levels of social support are as predictive of living a long time as regular exercise. Oxytocin is released, which reduces anxiety and depression, which improves our heart and immune systems. Research also shows those who receive emotional support during the first 6 months after suffering a heart attack are 3 times more likely to survive.

[Advance to next slide]

Children's safety depends on strong families, and strong families depend on good connections with other families, local organizations, and community institutions. Parents who are isolated and have few connections are at greater risk of abusing and neglecting their children than those who have a network of family, close friends, neighbors, and others.

When parents have good social connections, their children are also more likely to have access to caring adults in their family and community. Children also learn about building and maintaining friendships by watching their parents and caregivers interact with others. As children grow older, their friendships and peer networks will serve as another important social connection.


**Benefits of Social Connections**  
(one of our 3 basic needs)

- Strong connection between perceived social support and happiness (.70 correlation)
- Social support affects health – high levels are as predictive of living a long time as regular exercise (low levels are as damaging as high blood pressure)
- Oxytocin is released, reducing anxiety, depression, improving heart & immune systems
- People receiving emotional support during 6 months after heart attack were 3x more likely to survive



**Benefits of Social Connections**

- When parents have good connections, children have access to more caring adults.
- Children learn about building and maintaining friendships by watching how adults interact.
- Children's safety depends on *strong* families; *strong* families depend on *strong* connections.




## Slide 76 Quality Connections vs. Quantity Connections

- How many “friends” do you have on Facebook or other forms of social media?
- How much support do you feel from them?
- Research shows it is not how *many* people an individual knows, but the quality of the relationships people have and the support they feel.

**Quality Connections vs. Quantity Connections**

- How many “friends” do you have on Facebook or other forms of social media?
- How much support do you feel from them? 😊
- Research shows it is not how *many* people an individual knows, but the quality of the relationships people have and the support they feel.



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 77 Social Support – Reaching Out

Most of the research focuses on the importance of *receiving* social support. But more recent research shows the importance of *giving* social support as well.

**Social Support – Reaching Out**

- Most research focuses on what people *receive*.
- Benefits of providing social support to others:
  - Giving* feels better, does more for you, and has more benefits in the long run than *getting* support.
- How much love and support do you *give* your parents? Family? Friends? Co-workers?

**"we need to stop wasting mental energy lamenting how little social support we receive from managers, coworkers, and friends, and instead channel our brains' resources toward giving more social support"** (Larson, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025)

## Slide 78 Opportunities to Reach Out

Many of you have a list or resources you give to parents when they need help with their concrete supports. But how many of you have a list of ways parents can turn outward and reach out to serve others? I challenge you to create a list of volunteer opportunities in your area.

**Opportunities to Reach Out**

- Many professionals have a list of resources to give parents when they need help
- Fewer professionals have a list of ways for parents to turn outward and serve others



## Slide 79 Ways to Build Connections

Volunteering is a great way to meet people and create social connections. Martin Seligman, a prominent positive psychologist, identified service (i.e., dedicating part of our lives to improving the world around us) as one key kind of happiness. Giving back and serving in their communities helps people feel better about themselves. Service opportunities often include other people, so it also helps us build social connections. Another helpful way people can volunteer is to offer transportation to church, community centers, or other resources if friends or neighbors lack transportation.

In addition to volunteering, there are many other ways to help people build social connections. Think about the other types of social opportunities that exist in your community – faith-based groups, classes to learn new skills, places that offer babysitting to give parents an evening out, etc. In recent years, a growing number of “mommy blogs” and Internet sites have also helped encourage social connections.

**Ways to Build Connections**

- Giving back by volunteering and serving in one's community helps people feel better about themselves and they can connect with others.
- What are some other ways families can build connections in your community?



### NOTES:



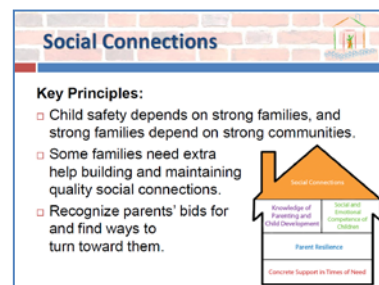
# Strong Parents, Stable Children

It is important to remember the principle of “bids for connection” as a parent or in relation to your work with parents. How might that apply with regard to Social Connections? As parents we can make bids for connections with others, including other parents, and organizations. If you work with parents it is important to be aware of their bids for connecting with you. Often these may be subtle. When parents reach out, we can all turn toward, rather than away or against.

## Slide 80 Social Connections

The protective factor, Social Connections, emphasizes that people need people. Parents need others they can turn to when they need advice, support, and guidance.

- Child safety depends on strong families, and strong families depend on strong communities.
- Some families need extra help building and maintaining quality social connections.
- Recognize parents’ bids for connecting with you and others and find ways to turn toward them.



## \*\* Presenter: Review Binder Resources for Social Connections

Before we conclude, let’s spend some time reviewing some of the tools in your binder that may be helpful in your interactions with families.

*[Allow participants a few minutes to browse the resources]*

## Slide 81 Ideas and Insights for Improvement

We have covered a lot of information today. I am curious how you plan to apply what you have learned – in your personal lives or in your work.

What have you learned today?

What have you committed to do with the information and resources you have learned about today?

*[Allow time for a few responses]*

**Ideas and Insights for Improvement**

- What have you learned?
- What have you committed to do with what you have learned?
- Willing to share?



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

## Slide 82 Summary – Five Protective Factors

Let's take a moment to review the five protective factors:

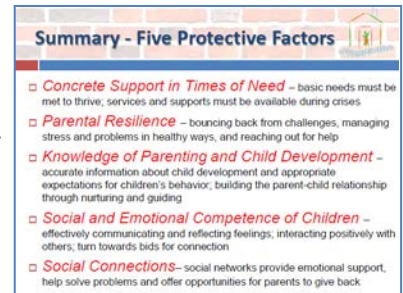
**Concrete Support in Times of Need** – A family's basic needs must be met for them to thrive. They need access to a variety of services and supports during crises.

**Parental Resilience** – This is about bouncing back from challenges and being able to manage stress and problems in healthy ways. This includes being willing to reach for help when it is needed.

**Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development** – Parents and caregivers need accurate, timely information about child development. They need to understand the importance of having appropriate expectations for children's behavior. Parent-child relationships are built through nurturing and guiding.

**Social and Emotional Competence of Children** – Parents and caregivers can help children by effectively communicating and reflecting feelings. Children sometimes need help interacting positively with others. Parents and caregivers need to notice and turn towards bids for connection.

**Social Connections** – Finally, social networks provide emotional support, they help with problem solving, and they offer opportunities for families to give back.

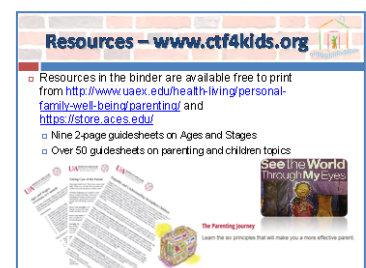


## 13 Other Resources and Conclusion

10 minutes

### Slides 83-84 Resources

The resources are all available online at [ctf4kids.org](http://ctf4kids.org) and the resources from Arkansas are available free online. The booklet in the back, "See the World Through My Eyes" is available for purchase from the Arkansas Extension website for \$5 each.



# Strong Parents, Stable Children

**Slide 85**      **Resources** Here are some additional resources available online. Please visit the websites for more information.

