

YOUNG CHILD PARENTING TIPS

1 BOOSTING YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

Kids start developing their sense of self as babies when they see themselves through their parents' eyes. Your tone of voice, your body language, and your every expression are absorbed by your kids. Your words and actions as a parent affect their developing self-esteem more than anything else. Praising accomplishments, however small, will make them feel proud; letting kids do things independently will make them feel capable and strong. By contrast, belittling comments or comparing a child unfavorably with another will make kids feel worthless. Avoid making loaded statements or using words as weapons. Comments like "What a stupid thing to do!" or "You act more like a baby than your little brother!" cause damage just as physical blows do. Choose your words carefully and be compassionate. Let your kids know that everyone makes mistakes and that you still love them, even when you don't love their behavior.

2 CATCH KIDS BEING GOOD

Have you ever stopped to think about how many times you react negatively to your kids on a given day? You may find yourself criticizing far more often than complimenting. How would you feel about a boss who treated you with that much negative guidance, even if it was well-intentioned? The more effective approach is to catch kids doing something right: "You made your bed without being asked — that's terrific!" or "I was watching you play with your sister and you were very patient." These statements will do more to encourage good behavior over the long run than repeated scoldings. Make a point of finding something to praise every day. Be generous with rewards — your love, hugs, and compliments can work wonders and are often reward enough. Soon you will find you are "growing" more of the behavior you would like to see.

3 SET LIMITS AND BE CONSISTENT WITH YOUR DISCIPLINE

Discipline is necessary in every household. The goal of discipline is to help kids choose acceptable behaviors and learn self-control. They may test the limits you establish for them, but they need those limits to grow into responsible adults. Establishing house rules helps kids understand your expectations and develop self-control. Some rules might include: no TV until homework is done, and no hitting, name-calling, or hurtful teasing allowed. You might want to have a system in place: one warning, followed by consequences such as a "time out" or loss of privileges. A common mistake parents make is failure to follow through with the consequences. You can't discipline kids for talking back one day and ignore it the next. Being consistent teaches what you expect.

4 MAKE TIME FOR YOUR KIDS

It's often difficult for parents and kids to get together for a family meal, let alone spend quality time together. But there is probably nothing kids would like more. Get up 10 minutes earlier in the morning so you can eat breakfast with your child or leave the dishes in the sink and take a walk after dinner. Kids who aren't getting the attention they want from their parents often act out or misbehave because they're sure to be noticed that way. Many parents find it rewarding to schedule together time with their kids. Create a "special night" each week to be together and let your kids help decide how to spend the time. Look for other ways to connect — put a note or something special in your kid's lunchbox.

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5 MAKE COMMUNICATION A PRIORITY

You can't expect kids to do everything simply because you, as a parent, "say so." They want and deserve explanations as much as adults do. If we don't take time to explain, kids will begin to wonder about our values and motives and whether they have any basis. Parents who reason with their kids allow them to understand and learn in a nonjudgmental way. Make your expectations clear. If there is a problem, describe it, express your feelings, and invite your child to work on a solution with you. Be sure to include consequences. Make suggestions and offer choices. Be open to your child's suggestions as well. Negotiate. Kids who participate in decisions are more motivated to carry them out.

6 BE FLEXIBLE AND WILLING TO ADJUST YOUR PARENTING STYLE

If you often feel "let down" by your child's behavior, perhaps you have unrealistic expectations. Parents who think in "shoulds" (for example, "My kid should be potty-trained by now") might find it helpful to read up on the matter or to talk to other parents or child development specialists. Kids' environments have an effect on their behavior, so you might be able to change that behavior by changing the environment. If you find yourself constantly saying "no" to your 2-year-old, look for ways to alter your surroundings so that fewer things are off-limits. This will cause less frustration for both of you.

7 KNOW YOUR OWN NEEDS AND LIMITATIONS AS A PARENT

Face it — you are an imperfect parent. You have strengths and weaknesses as a family leader. Recognize your abilities — "I am loving and dedicated." Vow to work on your weaknesses — "I need to be more consistent with discipline." Try to have realistic expectations for yourself, your spouse, and your kids. You don't have to have all the answers — be forgiving of yourself. And try to make parenting a manageable job. Focus on the areas that need the most attention rather than trying to address everything all at once. Admit it when you're burned out. Take time out from parenting to do things that will make you happy as a person (or as a couple). Focusing on your needs does not make you selfish. It simply means you care about your own well-being, which is another important value to model for your children.

8 BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

Walk the walk. Don't just tell your child what you want them to do. Show them. Human is a special species in part because we can learn by imitation. We are programmed to copy other's actions to understand them and to incorporate them into our own. Children, in particular, watch everything their parents do very carefully. So, be the person you want your child to be — respect your child, show them positive behavior and attitude, have empathy towards your child's emotion — and your child will follow suit.

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SHOW YOUR LOVE

There is no such thing as loving your child too much. Loving them cannot spoil them. Only what you choose to do (or give) in the name of love can — things like material-indulgence, leniency, low expectation, and over-protection. When these things are given in place of real love, that's when you'll have a spoiled child. Loving your child can be as simple as giving them hugs, spending time with them and listening to their issues seriously every day. Showing these acts of love can trigger the release of feel-good hormones such as oxytocin. These neurochemicals can bring us a deep sense of calm, emotional warmth and contentment, from these the child will develop resilience and not to mention a closer relationship with you.

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HELP FOSTER YOUR CHILD'S INDEPENDENCE

Children at this age want to — and need to! — make significant decisions. Instead of closely supervising your child's every action, focus more on guiding decision-making and creating room for reflection and mistakes. Your child is not trying to make you angry or drive you crazy. By working together and becoming a team, you can support their natural and healthy developmental drives for independence.

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VIEW MISBEHAVIOR AS A SIGN YOUR CHILD HAS A PROBLEM

When children have frequent emotional outbursts, it can be a sign that they haven't yet developed the skills they need to cope with feelings like frustration, anxiety and anger. Other children may seem to struggle more with boundaries and following rules. They may be defiant, or ignore instructions or try to talk their way out of things that aren't optional. You may notice patterns of behavior that seem to crop up at certain times of the day (like bedtime) during certain tasks (like during homework) or with certain people. You also might notice that your child acts out particularly when they're at home but not when they're at school or vice versa. Tantrums and other kinds of acting out are often a normal and even healthy part of childhood. They are a sign that a child is becoming more independent — indications that a child is testing boundaries, developing skills and opinions, and exploring the world around them.

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LET GO OF THE GUILT

Much of the guilt that parents feel can't be tied to specific actions or issues, it's just a vague sense that you're doing everything just a little bit wrong, or that you're just slightly inadequate for the tasks set before you. A lot of guilt stems from expectations and the need to accept and let go should be put on the top priority list. Being present with your child/children with conscious efforts of knowing at the end of the day you are doing the very best you can is crucial.

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SEEK SUPPORT

No matter how much you love being a parent, there can be days when you're overwhelmed by the demands of life, such as your job, and your family, but you feel the need to keep going rather than admit you might need to talk to someone about your anxiety. Or perhaps you're a new parent and you're worried that you don't quite have the hang of this "parenting" thing and are embarrassed to ask for help. This hesitation to ask for help — whether it's simple advice or support from other parents in your community — can build up to have negative effects on both your well-being and your relationship with your kids. There might come a time that you realize you need to ask for help, for both your own happiness and that of your children.

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SWITCH GEARS SLOWLY

Use a visual schedule. This makes it clear what a child can expect and what is coming up next. It can be helpful to put the activities that are most challenging for the child closer to the beginning of the day when they are less tired. You can also use a timer or a countdown system. For some children, having their special blanket, doll, or stuffed animal with them can smooth transitions. This is especially true in the case of a child transitioning from one location to another such as from home to school. Allow for extra time. If you're rushing, your child will pick up on your energy and become even more agitated. By not leaving things until the last minute, you will give your child extra time to adjust. You will also be calmer, which will help them stay calm. Maintain consistency. As much as possible, try to stick with the schedule and routines that you have laid out.

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UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE WORD DISCIPLINE

"It's all about teaching and education, not punishment, threats, and training. Think of yourself as a teacher and show your child you respect them by explaining why the limit needs to be set. Help them understand it's for their own good and the benefits to them. Respect is a gateway to your child's cooperation!" -Tom Limbert, Parenting Coach and Author of "Dad's Playbook: Wisdom for Fathers from the Greatest Coaches of All Time"