

# Tips for Parenting

## Be available for your children

- Notice times when your kids are most likely to talk--for example, at bedtime, before dinner, in the car--and be available.
- Start the conversation; it lets your kids know you care about what's happening in their lives.
- Find time each week for a one-on-one activity with each child, and avoid scheduling other activities during that time.
- Learn about your children's interests--for example, favorite music and activities--and show interest in them.
- Initiate conversations by sharing what you have been thinking about rather than beginning a conversation with a question.

## Let your kids know you're listening

- When your children are talking about concerns, stop whatever you are doing and listen.
- Express interest in what they are saying without being intrusive.
- Listen to their point of view, even if it's difficult to hear.
- Let them complete their point before you respond.
- Repeat what you heard them say to ensure that you understand them correctly.

## Respond in a way your children will hear

- Soften strong reactions; kids will tune you out if you appear angry or defensive.
- Express your opinion without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it's okay to disagree.
- Resist arguing about who is right. Instead say, "I know you disagree with me, but this is what I think."
- Focus on your child's feelings rather than your own during your conversation.

## Remember:

- Ask your children what they may want or need from you in a conversation, such as advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings, or help solving a problem.
- Kids learn by imitating. Most often, they will follow your lead in how they deal with anger, solve problems, and work through difficult feelings.
- Talk to your children--don't lecture, criticize, threaten, or say hurtful things.
- Kids learn from their own choices. As long as the consequences are not dangerous, don't feel you have to step in.
- Realize your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk, and they may share the rest of the story.

## Parenting is hard work

Listening and talking is the key to a healthy connection between you and your children. But parenting is hard work and maintaining a good connection with teens can be challenging, especially since parents are dealing with many other pressures. If you are having problems over an extended period of time, you might want to consider consulting with a mental health professional to find out how they can help.

- Open and honest communication will create a lifelong closeness with your child.

- Routines and responsibilities will let your child know what to expect. When a rule is broken, a natural consequence needs to follow.
- As you teach your child how to be independent, you also need to teach how to be safe.
- Learning how to be a good friend is an important skill you can teach your child.
- Your little one is starting to explore the world outside your home. This is exciting, but can be scary!

When children do something against the rules, explain simply and in a few words:

- That what they did was wrong
- What will happen if the behavior continues Consequences need to be logical, meaningful, and simple. For example:
  - If your child rides a bike without a helmet, the bike is off limits for a day or two.
  - When your child won't share a toy, that toy can't be used for the rest of the day.

## Create and Keep Routines

Teach about rules by setting up daily routines. Children do best when they know what to expect.

### In the morning:

- Use the bathroom
- Get dressed
- Have breakfast

### At bedtime:

- Take a bath
- Brush teeth
- Read a story

Schedule specific times for TV, video games, and use of the computer. When you know what your child is watching, you can avoid violence and other unacceptable content. Limit "total screen time" to no more than 2 hours a day.

### Read at bedtime. This helps your child:

- Settle down after a busy day
- Learn how to read

Have meals together as much as possible. This is a great way to spend time together and share family traditions, while also teaching good eating habits and table manners.

### Ask your child:

- "What was the best part of today?"
- "What was the hardest part of today?"

Let your child know that it's OK to have and talk about negative feelings. Share the best and hard parts of your day. This teaches your child that we all have ups and downs.

## Assign Responsibility

When young children copy everyday household tasks, they are really learning how to contribute. With your support, tasks will soon be done with few reminders. As children grow older, they can begin to take on real responsibilities, such as:

- Setting the table
- Putting away their toys
- Feeding the pets
- Placing dirty clothes in a basket

Watch your child's self-esteem grow when given the chance to help out.

## Teach Simple Rules about Safety with Adults

Keeping children safe is an important job for parents. You want your child to respect and trust others, but you also need to teach your child to be careful. Following are some simple rules and ways that you can start a conversation with your child about different safety issues.

- "If you're not sure, ask me."
- "If an adult asks you to do something that you're not sure is OK, always ask me first. I won't get mad at you for asking."
- "No secrets."
- "No one should ever tell you to keep a secret from me—one that might make me mad if I found out. Adults should never expect you to do this."
- "Certain body parts are private."
- "No adults (except parents, doctors, and nurses) should touch you where you normally wear a bathing suit."
- "If we get separated, find a security guard or police officer."
- "This is a very busy place. If you can't find me, find a security guard or police officer, or ask someone to help you find one. That person will help you find me."
- When you take your child to a crowded place, look around and point out the person who is there to help if you do become separated.

## Help Your Child Become a Good Friend

Four- to six-year-olds are learning what it means to be a friend. They will have fun times as well as arguments and hurt feelings. It can be tempting for parents to try to solve these problems themselves or by talking with the other child's parent. Instead, guide your child to solve problems. With your help, your child can learn how to solve social problems.

1. Help your child understand the other child's point of view. "I guess Suzie wants a turn too."
2. Teach your child the following:
  - Stay calm
  - Do not hit, grab, or shove
3. Use words:
  - "I get upset when you talk to me like that."
  - "I'm sad you don't want to play with me."
  - "I'm angry you took the ball from me."
4. Stand close by and watch as the children solve their problem. Being close by puts the children on their best behavior. This is how they begin to develop the confidence and skills to communicate honestly, calmly, and politely with others.