

The Power of Positive Parenting

Children of all ages need a safe, secure and loving environment to do well. Positive parenting is an effective approach to raising children that emphasises the positive. It involves creating a family environment that is loving, supportive and predictable. This is important in raising healthy, well-adjusted children who have the skills and confidence they need to succeed at school and in their relationships with others. Positive parenting reduces the stress of parenting and makes parenting more rewarding and enjoyable. This tip sheet gives some suggestions about how to use positive parenting in raising children.

BEING A PARENT

It is extremely rewarding and enjoyable to be a parent, but it is not always easy. It can also be demanding, frustrating and exhausting. Parents have the important role of raising the next generation, yet most of us begin parenting unprepared for what lies ahead. We all learn through trial and error. There is no single right way to be a parent. Ultimately, it is up to you as a parent to decide which values, skills and behaviours you want to encourage in your child and to develop your own approach to parenting.

OUR HOPES AND DREAMS

In becoming a parent, we hope to do a good job. We also hope that being a parent will be a positive experience and that we will raise well-adjusted children. To do this we need to help them develop the skills they need to reach their potential. These skills include being able to communicate their needs, get on well with others, try to do their best, manage their emotions, and feel good about themselves as they grow up. Most parents would be very pleased with their efforts if their children developed these life skills, in a safe, secure, loving and low-conflict environment.

The good news is that, despite the challenges, most parents report that they are confident in their parenting role and find it rewarding and fulfilling.

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR: THE TOUGH PART OF PARENTING

Of all the tasks in raising children, probably the most challenging and stressful is dealing with children's behaviour. Some misbehaviour is normal and discipline problems are inevitable. However, if parents manage everyday behaviour problems well when children are young, more serious problems can be avoided.

WHAT IS POSITIVE PARENTING?

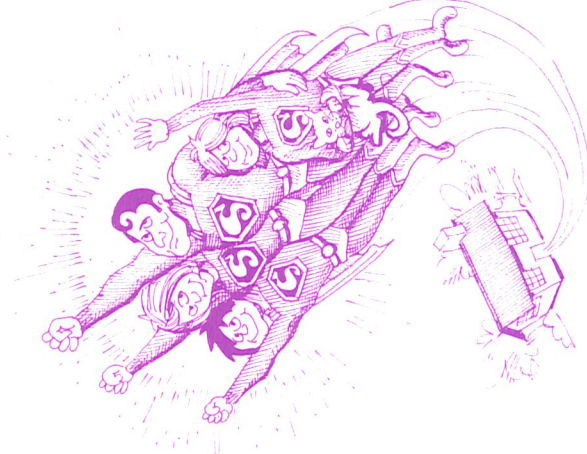
Positive parenting is an approach to being a parent that aims to promote children's

development and manage children's behaviour and emotions in a constructive and non-hurtful way. It is based on strong, nurturing relationships, good communication and positive attention to help children develop.

Positive parenting involves emphasising the positive and planning ahead to prevent problems. It also involves using everyday situations and creating opportunities to help children learn and to motivate them to do their best.

Children who grow up with positive parenting are likely to develop the skills they need to do well at schoolwork, build friendships, and feel good about themselves. They are also much less likely to develop behavioural or emotional problems when they get older.

Parents who learn to use positive parenting skills typically feel more confident and competent in managing daily parenting tasks, are less depressed, less stressed, and have less conflict with their partners over parenting issues.



There are five key aspects to positive parenting. Each one is discussed here in detail.

CREATING A SAFE, INTERESTING ENVIRONMENT

All children need to feel safe both at home and at school, and have the security of knowing they have a safe place to go after school. Children also need to be adequately supervised. This means knowing where your child is, who they are with and what they are doing at all times.

It is important for children to have an interesting environment that provides plenty of opportunities to explore, discover, experiment and develop their skills.

Having lots of interesting things to do will stimulate your child's curiosity as well as their language and intellectual development. It will also keep your child busy and active. If children have interesting things to do, they are less likely to become bored or to misbehave.

When children live in a safe, interesting environment it means that you can be more relaxed about parenting, and your child can keep busy and develop their skills without the risk of being hurt.

Here are some tips for teaching children about safety:

Teach Your Child Road Safety Rules

Up to about 9 years of age, children do not have the skills to be safe in traffic. Many children have difficulty judging speed and distance, and concentrate for only short periods. Work out the safest route to school, and make sure your child is supervised when they travel to and from school. Teach your child road safety rules and to look, listen, and think about traffic.

Provide Safety Equipment

Provide appropriate clothing and safety equipment for children's activities. For example, make sure your child wears a safety helmet while riding a bike,

necessary, so that your child gets into a predictable routine and is happy. Parents find it easier to relax and focus on work if they trust who is looking after their children.

Talk Back to Negative Thinking

Parenting is affected by emotions. It is harder to be calm and consistent with children when you are feeling stressed, angry, depressed or anxious. Our emotions are strongly influenced by the way we think about things. We can change the way we feel (and act) by challenging unhelpful ways of thinking.

Take notice of times you are feeling upset with your child. Identify what negative (unhelpful) things you are saying to yourself about the situation, particularly the reason you think the problem is happening, such as *He's doing that deliberately to upset me*. Blaming your child for the problem increases the chance that you will become angry and say or do something you will regret.

Try to change negative thoughts to helpful, more rational thoughts; for example, *Maybe he's bored when I'm on the phone. I must help him find something to do*.

Work as a Team

Parenting is easier when parents and carers work as a team and back each other up. Talk about daily experiences with your child to keep each other informed and involved.

Discuss who does what around the house and try to share the workload fairly.

So your child knows what to expect, reach agreement between carers on methods of discipline, and back each other up.

Help children learn to solve problems by using problem solving skills yourself.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Create a warm, loving, safe environment for your child.
- Use positive strategies to encourage your child's learning.
- Use assertive discipline to help your child take responsibility for their actions.
- Have reasonable expectations of both your child and yourself.
- Take care of yourself by looking after your own needs, balancing work and family responsibilities, challenging negative thinking, and working as a team.

recreation and time alone are being met. Being a good parent does not mean that your child should completely dominate your life. If your own needs as an adult are being met, it is much easier to be patient, consistent and available to your child. Here are some ideas to help you look after yourself:

Balance Work and Family

Have realistic expectations of yourself at work. Excessive workloads or high expectations of yourself at work can add extra stress. If your work is worrying you, leaving no family time, or causing stress on the family, try to reassess your priorities. Be prepared to reduce unnecessary or unreasonable commitments. This can apply to work, such as reducing work hours if possible, and also to family activities, such as limiting extra activities at busy times (e.g. not coaching football for a season). It also helps to develop good transition-time routines for before and after work. Things run more smoothly if everyone is prepared and knows what to expect.

Avoid conflict during the difficult time at the end of the day when parents arrive home from work. Get ready for a second shift (e.g. helping with homework, preparing dinner).

Encourage your child to be independent and help in getting ready. The more children can do for themselves the less stress and conflict there will be. Explain clearly what your child is expected to do. For example, for a morning routine, the steps for a young child might be: get out of bed, get dressed, have breakfast, pack bag for preschool or school, clean teeth, go to the toilet. You can use a list or drawings or photographs of each step.

Organise good, reliable childcare (e.g. before school or after school care) if

FOR FURTHER HELP If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet or contact:

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NOT TO BE REPRODUCED

individuals and develop at different rates. They need to be developmentally ready before they can learn new skills.

If you are unsure whether your child is ready to learn a new skill, seek advice. Problems may arise when parents expect too much too soon or expect their children to be perfect.

For example, parents who expect that their children will *always* be polite, happy and cooperative or *always* neat and helpful are setting themselves up for disappointment and conflict with their children. Do not expect your child to be perfect. All children make mistakes.

Here are some tips for checking that your expectations are reasonable:

Consider Your Expectations of Your Child

Ask yourself what rules or expectations you have. Too many rules can mean there are too many opportunities for children to break them.

Consider whether the rules are necessary. Sometimes problems can be solved by deciding a behaviour is not really a problem. Think about whether your child is old enough to understand or do as you expect.

Check What Other Parents Expect

Ask relatives, friends and other parents who have experience with children of the same age what they expect. Make up your mind for yourself.

Check What Your School Expects

Knowing what behaviour is expected at school is helpful. It is less confusing for children when similar behaviours are expected at home and at school.

Consider Your Expectations of Yourself

It is also important for parents to have realistic expectations of themselves. It is good to want to do your best as a parent, but having very high standards and trying to be *perfect* will only lead to stress and feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Do not be too hard on yourself. Everyone makes mistakes and learns through experience.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AS A PARENT

Parenting is easier when parents' personal needs for support, companionship, intimacy,

skateboard or horse, and that they know of safe places where they can ride.

► **Be Safety Conscious Near Schools**

It is often very busy around schools when parents are dropping children off and picking children up. The *Stop–Drop–Go* motto is a good one to remember. Make sure your child gets out on the footpath side of the car — never let your child out in an unsafe place. Try not to stay too long. Before leaving in the morning, confirm pick up arrangements for after school.

► **Teach Your Child About Personal Safety**

Teach your child about the danger of talking to strangers. Teach them never to go with or accept anything from someone they do not know.

Talk about what to do if children feel unsafe, such as when someone wants them to do something they are not comfortable with. Talk about how to find a dependable person to talk to, such as a trusted relative, neighbour, teacher or friend.

HAVING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Children also need a supportive, nurturing environment in which to learn and develop their skills. Parents need to be available to their children. This does not mean being with your child all the time, but it means being available when your child needs help, care or attention.

When your child approaches you, stop what you are doing and spend time with them if you can.

Help your child learn by encouraging them to try things for themselves. Encouragement and positive attention help motivate children to learn.

When you see your child doing something you like, pay attention. Show your child that you like what they are doing and they will be more likely to do it again.

Here are some tips for creating a positive learning environment for children:

► **Spend Time With Your Child**

While short, frequent amounts of quality time are important, children also need to feel valued and know their parents want to spend time with them. Make time for your child and be available to them when you are together.

► **Speak Nicely**

Speaking to children in a pleasant voice is very important. It conveys respect and teaches them how to speak politely to others.

► **Chat and Listen Often**

Ask your child about their day and listen to their stories. It is through conversations that children learn to express themselves and develop their ideas. Keeping communication open and honest builds close family relationships.

► **Share Your Own Experiences**

Children need practice at listening as well as talking. Share a highlight of your day or talk about things they may be interested in.

► **Be Affectionate**

It is important for children to know they are loved and cared for. Hugs, kisses and cuddles make children feel wanted and loved. Tune in to the level of physical affection your child is comfortable with and try to match it.

► **Use Descriptive Praise**

Children generally enjoy being praised. Use descriptive praise to encourage behaviour you like. For example, saying *Thank you for playing quietly while I was on the phone* lets your child know exactly what they did well, and that you appreciate their efforts. Praise works best when it is genuine and you mean what you say.

Some children can find praise embarrassing when others are present. At these times a wink, smile, or thumbs up sign can show you are pleased with what they are doing.

► **Give Your Child Attention**

There are many ways of giving attention, such as a smile, wink, high five, or just watching. Children love being watched as they do things. When your child is engaged in an activity that you are pleased with, watch and comment on what they are doing. You can do this during or at the end of an activity. Be careful not to take over or tell your child how to play.

Show an interest and talk about your child's discoveries or observations, especially when they want to share something with you.

► **Use Incidental Teaching**

When your child approaches you for information, help or attention, they are often motivated and ready to learn. You are in a position to teach your child something new — this is called incidental teaching.

Just telling your child the answer to a question does not help them develop their language or learn to think for themselves. Prompt your child to talk about it or find the answer, and see if you can help them learn more — *That is a hard puzzle isn't it?*

Where do you think that piece goes?

Why do you think it might fit in that part of the picture?

This should be fun and enjoyable so do not push the issue. If your child does not respond, provide the answer and wait for another teaching opportunity.

► **Get Involved in Your Child's School**

Get to know your child's teacher and work with them in helping your child learn. Go to parent–teacher meetings and take an interest in your child's progress. Talk about any concerns you may have.

Children like their parents to be involved at school. Volunteer your time if you can.

USING ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE

Assertive discipline involves being consistent, acting quickly when children misbehave, and teaching them to behave in an acceptable way. It involves staying calm and using fair, predictable consequences that match the problem behaviour. When children are misbehaving or upset, it is best to remain calm and avoid yelling, name calling, threatening or spanking.

You can value your child's individuality and still expect reasonable behaviour. Discipline helps children to accept necessary rules and limits and to develop self-control. Through discipline, children learn to consider others and to express their feelings in ways that respect the needs of others. Discipline also helps children to accept responsibility for their actions.

Discipline works best when children live in a predictable world and receive plenty of attention for good behaviour. It also works best when parents support each other and use the same approach.

Here are some tips for assertive discipline:

► **Prepare in Advance**

Sometimes problems can be avoided by thinking ahead and planning. To avoid any last minute rushing, be organised and get everything you need ready early.

► **Arrange Activities**

Make sure your child has something to do, such as by bringing activities with you for times when there is little for children to do.

► **Set Some Ground Rules**

Discuss two or three simple rules you would like your child to follow in a particular situation. Rules should tell your child what to do rather than what not to do. For example, good shopper rules might include staying close, using a pleasant voice, and keeping your hands to yourself.

► **Praise Good Behaviour**

When your child behaves well and follows the rules, congratulate and praise them. This is especially important when your child is learning something new.

► **Watch and Supervise**

Make sure you can see what your child is doing. This way, if a problem arises you can deal with it straight away.

► **Use Planned Ignoring for Minor Misbehaviour**

When minor misbehaviour seems to be an attempt to get attention, try not to attend to it. Provide attention when your child is doing something else.

► **Use Your Voice Effectively**

When disciplining your child, stay calm, get close, and use a firm voice. Raising your voice only teaches your child that you shout to get what you want.

► **Use Directed Discussion**

If your child misbehaves or forgets a rule, check if they know what the rule is. If not, remind them. Get them to practise what they should have done.

► **Give Clear, Calm Instructions**

Let your child know what you want them to do. Get close, say your child's name and tell them in a firm, pleasant voice what you want them to do.

Start instructions tell your child to start doing something, such as *Kristel, pack up your toys now, please*. Stop instructions are used when a child is misbehaving and you want them to stop. For example, *Kurt, stop pushing your sister. Keep your hands to yourself*.

Generally try to repeat a start instruction only once, and do not repeat a stop instruction at all. After you give an instruction, wait 5 seconds to see if your child does as you ask. If not, use a back-up consequence.

► **Take Away a Problem Activity**

If a toy or activity is causing a problem, remove it for a short time (5–30 minutes). Return the activity at the end of the time so your child can practise using it correctly.

► **Back Up Instructions With Quiet Time**

Quiet time is a brief, mild and effective way of helping children learn more acceptable behaviour. Use quiet time if your child does not do as you have asked. Quiet time involves removing your child from the activity in which a problem has occurred

and having them sit quietly on the edge of the activity for a short time.

When your child is in quiet time, do not give them any attention. This is a time for your child to be quiet, not a time to talk or attract attention. Once your child has remained quiet for the set time, they can rejoin the activity.

Quiet time is usually in the same room in which the problem occurred. A toddler's crib or playpen can be used as a quiet area for children as young as 18 months. Older children can sit on the floor or in a chair.

Short periods in quiet time are more effective than longer ones. One minute of quiet for 2-year-olds, 2 minutes for 3 to 5-year-olds and a maximum of 5 minutes can be used for children aged between 5 and 10 years.

► **Use Time-out for Serious Misbehaviour**

Time-out is a positive strategy to use instead of shouting at, threatening or spanking a child who has misbehaved. When it is used correctly, it is an effective way of helping children learn self-control and more acceptable behaviour.

The main advantage of time-out is that it requires you, the parent, to remain calm. If you get angry, you risk losing your temper, using harsh discipline, or hurting your child. Time-out gives everyone the chance to calm down. Use time-out when your child does not sit quietly in quiet time, or as a consequence for temper outbursts or serious misbehaviour like hurting others.

Time-out works in much the same way as quiet time except that your child is put in another room away from everyone else. Leave the door open, although you may choose to close it if your child does not stay in the room.

If your child's bedroom is full of toys and other interesting activities, consider using another room for time-out. Time-out should be in a room that is uninteresting, yet safe, with good lighting and ventilation. For example, child-proof your bathroom for time-out by removing or locking away anything that might be dangerous. As for quiet time, short periods in time-out are more effective than longer ones.

It is important that your child knows what to expect before you start using time-out. When no problems are occurring, explain which specific behaviours will earn time-out. Show your child what will happen by walking them through the steps of the time-out routine. Explain the rules of time-out. Check that your child understands they need

to be quiet for the set time before they can come out of time-out.

The guidelines for using time-out are similar to those for quiet time. When serious misbehaviour occurs, follow these steps:

- Act quickly when you see a problem behaviour occurring. Get close and gain your child's attention.
- Tell them what to stop doing — *Stella, stop pulling the baby's hair* — and what to do instead — *Be gentle*. Praise your child if they do as you ask.
- If your child does not stop the misbehaviour within 5 seconds, tell them what they have done wrong — *You have not done as I asked* — and the consequence — *Go to time-out now, please*. Be calm and firm. If necessary, take your child to time-out. Ignore any protests and do not lecture, argue or nag.

- Remind your child of the rules. As you put your child in time-out, remind them that they can come out when they have been quiet for the set time.
- Ignore misbehaviour in time-out. Some children may continue to misbehave in time-out, such as kicking, screaming or calling out. If you pay attention to this behaviour, time-out will not work. You must be prepared to persist with this strategy. Do not talk to your child or give them any attention until they have been quiet for the set time.
- If you used time-out because your child did not follow an instruction, after time-out repeat the initial instruction. Praise your child if they cooperate. If they still refuse, repeat time-out.

- When time-out is over, do not talk about the incident again. Encourage your child to get involved in an activity. Watch for your child behaving well and praise them.
- Keep track of time-out. You may find it helpful to write down each time you use time-out and how long it takes before your child is quiet for the set time. As your child learns the time-out routine, they should become quiet more quickly and time-out should be needed less often.

Creating a safe, interesting, positive environment reduces the likelihood of misbehaviour, and increases the likelihood that assertive discipline will be effective. If problems occur when you use time-out or things have not improved after 2 weeks, it is important to seek professional help.

HAVING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Parents' expectations of their children depend on what they consider normal for children at different ages. Children are