BOYS TOWN
Center for
Behavioral Health

KidT.I.P.S.

Tough Issues, Proven Solutions

A publication for parents on the emotional, social and behavioral development of children.

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From the Experts at Boys Town

Boys Town has been caring for children and supporting families for more than 100 years, so we understand the needs of parents and the best strategies for meeting the challenges they face, like teaching children how to consistently follow instructions, work hard in school, get along with others, and make good decisions. We pride ourselves on not only doing research on parenting, but also putting that research into action. You can be confident that our strategies give parents real-world solutions that work.

What to Do If Your Child Is Being Bullied

It's difficult for parents when they discover their child is being bullied. It's even more distressing when they learn it's been going on for some time.

The good news is that although most children in the United States experience bullying, the majority of them find ways to deal with it. Unfortunately, though, some children get stuck as targets of bullying for months or even years. These children need support from schools and parents so they can get "unstuck."

Most children will not tell an adult they are being bullied because they often feel embarrassed. They also fear that telling adults may make the problem worse. That's why it's important for parents to keep their antennae up when their children talk about how they are treated by kids their own age or older.

Some telltale signs of a child who is being bullied include appearing more lonely or sad, suddenly disliking or refusing to go to school, not talking anymore about friends he or she mentioned in the past or playing alone often.

Here are some steps you can take if you suspect your child is being repeatedly or continually bullied:

- **Talk with your child to find out for certain if her or she is being bullied, and if so, the extent of it.** It's unlikely that he or she will tell you much the first time you ask about bullying. Remember, your child doesn't know what you are going to do with the information. At first, your child may tell you only a little about what is happening to see how you respond.
- **React with compassion.** When you react with empathy and appreciation for how difficult it is to be disliked or bullied by a peer, you invite your child to become part of the solution.
- **Assure your child that you are there to help him or her figure out how to handle the problem** and to make sure he or she is safe and protected. Let your child know you are going to do whatever you can to help out in a way that will not be embarrassing to him or her.

- **Once trust is established, gather all the information** about who is involved, how the bullying is happening, what form it is taking (physical, relational, cyber) and where it is taking place. Also find out who was present (peers, teachers, bus driver, etc.) and what they did in response to the bullying.
- **After talking with your child, share the important information with your child's teachers and school administrators** to alert them that your child is being bullied. Letting children know that adults are paying attention to them and their peers' behavior in places where bullying typically occurs helps them feel more comfortable at school and can prevent further bullying from occurring.
- **Observe whether there is anything about your child or what he or she is doing that might be attracting bullies.** Some things might be obvious but there are others we don't really like to talk about with kids because it's uncomfortable for parents. So if it's an obvious problem — personal hygiene, crying a lot during school, overreacting to other children by saying mean things or refusing to play, or failing to wait a turn during games — teach and practice new, appropriate skills with your child and reward the use of these skills. This can essentially remove the target from your child's back.
- **Teach your child how to strengthen his or her reputation and relationships with peers.** Research shows that having just one friend or making one new friend can help protect children from further bullying and reduce the negative consequences that come from victimization.
- **Build on your child's strengths.** Peers gravitate toward children who get positive attention from their peers and excel at activities. A good way to help children build up their standing with peers is to put them in situations where they can do well and peers can see the positive things about them. The key here is to help your child identify his or her strengths and talents, and discuss ways to highlight and use them with others.

Most children will not tell an adult they are being bullied because they often feel embarrassed.

Bullying can cause long-term emotional harm to children. No child should find themselves all alone when navigating the dangerous and destructive waters of bullying. All adults — parents, teachers, administrators and others — must work together as champions for all children, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Additional Resources

- → **cyberbullying.org**
- → **stopbullying.gov**
- → **empowerment.unl.edu**
- → **Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative**

When Your Child Is the Bully

When parents find out their child is a bully, it can be alarming and confusing. Parents can easily get hung up on the small details of the situation. But the main thing they must do is provide their child with clear, concise descriptions of appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors and teach him or her how to use the appropriate ones.

Bullying is not an easy phenomenon to understand. It's defined as a behavior where one person of greater power (size, social standing, ability, etc.) tries to intimidate or demean another individual of lesser power, usually to achieve social gains (increasing or maintaining popularity or authority.)

Even the most kind and compassionate children can engage in bullying behaviors. In early and middle childhood, physical bullying such as pushing, and ostracism and name-calling, are the most common types. In adolescence, these behaviors include spreading false information about others, bullying on social media platforms and socially excluding victims.

If your child is bullying others, it's important to take a firm stand against his or her behaviors and teach appropriate replacement behaviors. Permissive parenting practices can not only lead to more bullying, but also can create a greater risk of psychological maladjustment and poor-quality relationships over a child's life.

Effectively Responding to Your Child's Bullying Behaviors

The following steps can serve as starting points in addressing your child's bullying behaviors:

1. Be Clear: As you find out more information about the situation, explain to your child that his or her behaviors do not align with your or your family's expectations. Specifically describe the inappropriate behaviors to your child. For example, say, "You shared personal information about someone without their permission or knowledge" rather than "You spread rumors." Also, make sure your child knows exactly what was inappropriate about his or her behavior.

2. **Be Factual:** In a neutral and calm tone of voice, discuss the information you have gathered about your child's bullying behaviors with your child. It may be impossible to have all of the facts and details, and you're likely to hear different or competing stories of what happened. So rely on what you know, and don't try to "trap" your child in order to get him or her to tell you the truth. Just share the information you have and let your child respond.
3. **Be Calm:** Model appropriate behavior while talking to your child by maintaining self-control. If your child responds by becoming angry or defensive, or refuses to talk with you, stop the discussion and give him or her time to calm down. Let your child know there will be consequences for his or her inappropriate behavior, and continue your discussion only when your child demonstrates a calm demeanor.
4. **Be Consistent:** If you have not done so in the past, set or review with your child your family's standards for treating others with respect and dignity, and not threatening their safety. Then explain the consequences for failing to meet those standards and have your child earn those consequences for his or her bullying behavior. Consistently give your child consequences for similar behaviors in the future.
5. **Be Firm:** Your child may be upset about receiving consequences for his or her bullying behaviors. But make sure you follow through on the consequences, and do not try to "save" your child by decreasing them or making them easier. For example, if your child bullied someone through social media, the logical consequence would be taking away his or her access to technology for a significant amount of time. You can praise your child for saying he or she knows why the bullying behavior was wrong, but you still give the consequence.

Once your child understands that bullying is wrong and that there are consequences for bullying others, and accepts those consequences, you can start teaching him or her appropriate ways to treat people. One way to do this is by modeling how to compliment others, provide positive feedback and build relationships based upon mutual trust and loyalty.

While it may sound strange, bullying is a social event that some children actually use to develop relationships. Many children and adolescents bully others because they have discovered they can gain at least temporary social approval and have friendships with others who also engage in bullying.

As a parent, your task is to teach your child how to develop relationships in ways that are healthy, respectful and not hurtful.

Additional Resources

- **cyberbullying.org**
- **stopbullying.gov**
- **empowerment.unl.edu**
- **Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative**

ADHD: Frequently Asked Questions

ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder) is a neuro-genetic disorder that causes difficulties and deficits in self-control, or the ability to stop and think before acting.

Deficits in several areas, including sustained attention and resistance to distraction, the ability to regulate one's activity level (hyperactivity) and the ability to stop one's immediate response to an event or situation (impulsivity), cause difficulties with self-control.

What are the signs and symptoms of ADHD?

Children with ADHD typically exhibit behavioral symptoms that impact their school and family functioning and peer relations. These include:

- Hyperactive and Impulsive Behavior: The child often makes snap decisions, does the first thing that comes to mind, exhibits frequent interruptions, and has difficulties waiting his or her turn and remaining seated or still.
- Inattentiveness: The child may have difficulties resisting distractions, staying on task and paying attention. The child also may daydream, have a hard time following through on tasks and assignments, and make frequent, careless mistakes, such as losing and misplacing items.

When does a child with ADHD begin to exhibit symptoms?

Symptoms of ADHD typically become more apparent when a child enters into a structured educational setting, especially for the subtypes associated with hyperactive and impulsive behavior. Individuals who have predominantly inattentive ADHD may appear to develop attention problems in middle or later childhood. The vast majority of those with the disorder have some symptoms before age 13, so the disorder is believed to be one of childhood onset.

What common mistakes do parents make when reading the symptoms?

Children with ADHD often struggle because they have difficulty stopping an immediate emotional reaction to an event. As a result, parents and other caregivers

may overinterpret angry outbursts or excessive emotional reactions. It is important to remember that children with ADHD may need assistance in learning to deal with their emotions.

Because many children with ADHD are impulsive, and therefore act without thinking, parents and other caregivers sometimes use frequent punishment to address misbehaviors. This is often ineffective, as punishment alone may work only for a short period of time. Therefore, it is important to use proactive strategies to address behavior, including:

- Providing frequent reminders of rules and expectations
- Giving frequent praise and acknowledgement for acceptable and desirable behaviors

What are some ways to manage ADHD?

There are many treatment components that can help manage ADHD. They include:

- Educating a child's family and staff at his or her school about the nature of the disorder and its management.
- Using a combination of stimulant medication and behavior modification to manage symptoms of ADHD. Parent training in child behavior management methods and behavior modification also can improve management of ADHD symptoms.
- Maintaining behavior modification treatment over long periods of time in order to sustain the initial treatment progress.

The vast majority of those with ADHD have some symptoms before age 13.

What should I do if I think my child has ADHD?

If you are noticing that your child is exhibiting symptoms that interfere with his or her academic development, friendships or family functions, schedule an appointment with your pediatrician. If your pediatrician thinks your child may have symptoms of ADHD, consider obtaining a referral to a psychologist so your child can receive a thorough assessment prior to initiating any treatment.

Additional Resource

→ ***Taking Charge of ADHD, Third Edition: The Complete, Authoritative Guide for Parents*** by Russell A. Barkley

Autism Spectrum Disorder: Frequently Asked Questions

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that can impact social skills, communication, learning and behavior. It is considered a developmental disorder because symptoms typically manifest within the first few years of life, although it can be diagnosed at any age.

ASD is considered a spectrum disorder due to the wide variation in presentation and severity of symptoms across individuals. The term "neurodiversity" is often used to describe the individual differences in brain function, perception and behavior commonly associated with ASD.

What are the signs and symptoms of ASD?

The diagnostic characteristics of ASD are impairments in social communication and interaction, and the presence of restricted repetitive behavior. Examples may include the following:

Social communication and interaction:

- Limited use of gestures
- Delayed speech or no social babbling/chatting
- Odd sounds or unusual tone of voice
- Difficulty using eye contact, gestures and sounds or words at the same time
- Little or no pretending or imitating of other people
- Difficulty with back-and-forth conversation
- Limited sharing of enjoyment with others

Restricted repetitive behavior:

- Unusual ways of moving hands, fingers or whole body
- Development of rituals such as lining objects up or repeating things over and over
- Very focused or fixated on specific objects or topics
- Difficulty with changes in routine
- Unusual sensory interests
- Over- or under-reaction to certain sounds, textures or other sensory input

How is Asperger's different from ASD?

Asperger syndrome or Asperger's was a previously used diagnosis related to autism. This classification, along with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, are no longer used, and instead are now included under the umbrella diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder for diagnostic purposes.

How common is ASD?

Most recent estimates suggest that 1 in 44 children have a diagnosis of ASD. Males are four times more likely to be diagnosed than females.

What should I do if I think my child has ASD?

If you are concerned that your child is exhibiting symptoms of ASD, schedule an appointment with your pediatrician. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children be screened for ASD at 18 and 24 months of age. If your child screens positive, they should be referred for both an educational evaluation and comprehensive diagnostic evaluation.

What is the difference between an educational evaluation and diagnostic evaluation?

An educational verification is a process conducted by a school district to determine if a student has a disability and to plan appropriate services to address the student's individual needs. The verification will reflect assessments done by a multidisciplinary team using educational criteria. If the child is under 3, this will be completed by early intervention. If they are over age 3, it will be completed by the local school district.

A diagnostic evaluation is usually completed by a physician or clinical psychologist using a medical model and diagnostic criteria. Both evaluations are important in order to provide the most comprehensive treatment recommendations for your child.

What treatments and interventions are available for ASD?

Interventions seek to reduce symptoms that interfere with daily functioning and quality of life, and encourage the development of new skills. Although treatment recommendations vary widely across individuals, a combination of the following may be recommended:

- Behavior Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Interventions
- Parent Training
- Social skills training
- Speech and language therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- School Interventions

Additional Resources

→ **Autism Speaks: autismspeaks.org**

→ **Autism Navigator autismnavigator.com**

The Basics of Child Development

Every child is different and every child develops at his or her own rate. As a parent, knowing the basic areas of child development and key development timeframes can help you monitor your child's progress and watch for areas of concern.

Areas of Development

The primary areas of child development are:

- Physical
- Cognitive/Brain
- Speech/Language
- Social
- Emotional
- Identity
- Moral
- Sexual
- Spiritual

Important facts to keep in mind for each area include:

- **Development in each area occurs within timeframes that are considered typical or normal.** The timeframes may range from a few months to several months.
- **Development in some areas (for example, physical and cognitive/brain development) isn't fully achieved until early adulthood.** In other areas, development continues throughout a person's life.
- **Development is an individual process.** Rates of development vary (early, late), and not every child achieves the same level of development in each area.
- **Multiple factors influence development.** These include genetics, environment, experiences and mental health, and they can interact and have independent influences. For example, a boy with a genetic predisposition to reach puberty later will not develop earlier in this area because he lives in a healthy, loving and supportive environment. However, that same boy, living in an unhealthy environment where he is malnourished, may reach puberty even later.
- **As a child develops, his or her learning history impacts development.** An obvious example is a child who learns how to talk in the language that is spoken around him or her as a toddler. A less obvious, yet similar, example is a child who develops emotion regulation skills that he or she learns or sees being used as a child. Just as toddlers have the capacity to develop/learn

language skills, they also have the capacity to develop/learn healthy emotion regulation skills.

Key Developmental Milestones and Timeframes

- SITTING WITHOUT SUPPORT: 7-9 months
- CRAWLING: 7-9 months
- WALKING: 10-18 months
- BABBLING: 4-6 months
- TALKING: Single words by 1 year; two- to three-word phrases by 2 years; 1,000-word vocabulary by 3 years
- PUBERTY: Girls, by seventh grade (age 12); Boys, by eighth grade (age 13)
- SOCIAL: Interactive play by 4 years.
- Middle school youth want to be the "same" as their peers; fitting in, looking, sounding and acting like peers is very important to them. By high school, a child's individual identity emerges. For tweens and teens, peers are becoming or are more important than parents/family.

Monitoring and Correcting Delays

Delays in one area in early childhood can cause other challenges and problems in a child's development. For example, a child who is not developing speech/language skills is at high risk for developing behavior problems.

If your child is not hitting the early childhood milestones, reach out to your local school administrator and request an early childhood evaluation. School personnel are prepared and eager to help at no cost to you. If your child is eligible for services and younger than 3 years, services are provided free of charge in your home. If your child is 3 or older, he or she can receive services in a preschool setting, with free transportation provided.

The best way to correct (remediate) early developmental delays is to catch them early and arrange for the child to receive necessary services.

Taking the Bite Out of Anger

Teaching your kids the right skills for coping with different emotional and behavioral issues is the key to preventing small problems from turning into major disruptive issues. When children — from toddlers to teens – learn, practice and master the right set of skills, they are better prepared to navigate the many challenges that are a natural part of growing up.

The following sections present language you can use with your child or teen to explore skills that can be helpful when he or she is struggling with anger or frustration.

What to Say to Children

Everyone feels angry sometimes. It can be helpful to know how your body feels when you are angry or frustrated. For example, does your heart speed up, do you begin to feel hot or do you clench your jaw or fists? You may even feel like yelling, hitting or running away.

It is important to calm your body down so you don't do these things. Try to calm down by relaxing your body. For example, if you have clenched fists, open your hands. Imagine your body becoming soft and relaxed, like a spaghetti noodle. Take a few deep breaths. Count to 20. Take a break from what you are doing. If you can't take a break from what you are doing, continue to take deep, slow breaths and count up to 20 and back down to zero. When you are ready, it may feel good to do something that you usually enjoy, like drawing, painting or playing outside.

Skills:

- Identify how your body feels when you are angry.
- Use a calming strategy to relax (deep breathing, counting to 20, taking a break).
- Do an enjoyable activity.

What to Say to Teens

Everyone feels angry sometimes. It can be helpful to become aware of your anger cues. For example, does your heart speed up, do you begin to feel hot or do you clench your jaw or fists? It's natural to have an urge to act or lash out, but it is important to remember that having that urge and actually following through on it are two different things.

First, recognize the reason for your anger or frustration. If you are in a situation where it's appropriate to take a break, then take a moment to walk away from the situation and cool down. You may take a few deep breaths, count to 100 or take a walk around the block before returning to the situation where you felt angry.

For example, if you are becoming frustrated with your math homework, it may help to take a brief break and return when you feel calmer. It is important that you eventually return to the activity and try to complete it.

If you are in a situation where it's not possible to walk away or take a break (e.g., in a classroom, when your parents are talking to you or at work), then try taking a mental break. Take a few deep, controlled breaths and visualize a calming image (e.g., waves crashing on the beach, wind blowing through a meadow, recalling a fun memory).

You also can calm your emotions by activating your "thinking" brain. For example, count backward from 100 by threes, or say the alphabet backward. As soon as you are able, bring your attention back to the person or situation you are dealing with.

If the source of your anger is another person, then it's important to remember to respond appropriately even when you are angry so you don't cause more problems for yourself later. For example, rather than yelling or storming out of a room, ask to take a break from the conversation. Or, just listen and say "Okay," and then ask to continue the conversation later when you are calmer and have had time to think about what you want to say and how to do it without getting angry or frustrated.

Skills:

- Identify your anger cues.
- Recognize the source of your anger.

- If possible, take a break and walk away from the situation to cool down before returning to work through things.
- Use a calming strategy that is appropriate for the situation (deep breathing, counting to 100, using visualization, going for a walk).

With the right skills, a clear understanding of how to appropriately address anger and frustration, and your encouragement, your child can develop a plan for preventing problems and effectively resolving them when they do occur.

Additional Resources

→ ***Show Me Your Mad Face*** by Connie J. Schnoes, Ph.D.

Helping Children **Cope with Grief**

Everyone responds to death and loss in their own way. If your family is experiencing a loss, how your children respond or behave may depend on their age, and how you respond can help them manage grief appropriately. We can't take their pain away, but we can provide healthy ways to cope. Some ways to help make that happen include:

- **Keep schedules and routines as predictable as possible.** Children thrive on routine and the more you can keep things as normal as possible, the easier it is for your child to cope. It is important for your child to understand that there's room to grieve, but there's also room to live their lives.
- **Encourage children to express their feelings.** Some children might act out in anger and may be upset at the person who has died or any person around them. Some children might withdraw and cry, while others may act as if nothing ever happened. It's hard to know how a child might respond, but it is important to help them acknowledge and express their feelings. Start a conversation by reading

developmentally appropriate books about death and grief. For an older child or adolescent who may not want to talk, allow them to grieve and let them know you're there to talk if they need to. Encourage them to share their feelings with others and respect their need for space.

- **Talk about the loved one.** It's okay to talk about the person or beloved family member, including a pet. Resist the urge to remove pictures or items immediately. Look at old pictures, tell stories, or draw pictures since many young children are not yet able to express their feelings in words. This teaches children that it's okay to remember their loved one and sharing stories is a natural part of grieving.
- **Be direct but keep it minimal.** Your child may have questions about death or the afterlife. Do your best to answer honestly but keep it simple. Too much information can be overwhelming for any child. It is also important to avoid euphemisms as this can be more confusing for a child. Avoid phrases such as a loved one "went to sleep" as this creates more confusion and fear about their own behaviors. For young children who cannot grasp the permanence of death, they might think a loved one may "wake up."
- **Take care of yourself.** It's easy to forget about your own grief when you are worried about your children. Children imitate and learn how to manage their grief by watching their

parents. It is important to show your children that feeling sad or upset is normal. But we want to show them effective ways to deal with that sadness instead of lashing out or withdrawing from daily living. Hiding your own grief can make children feel confused or bad about their own emotions. They may also worry about losing you. Give them reassurance that you're grieving too but show them that you're coping in a healthy way.

- **Get professional help. Grieving takes time.** If you or your child has difficulty overcoming feelings of grief after six months or symptoms are getting in the way of moving forward, it might be time to seek professional help. Contact your child's pediatrician or contact a therapist for more support.

Skills to Help Your Kids Manage

Mood Changes

Sometime in a child's life, he or she will feel sad. This could be the result of a move that takes a child away from friends, the death of a relative, the loss of a pet or some other event that triggers a sense of loss or unhappiness.

Like any other emotion, the best way parents can help their child through a time of sadness is by teaching skills. Skills help a child identify situations when sadness is becoming disruptive or overpowering and then take appropriate action to deal with it. Learning and gathering the right sets of skills helps children navigate the many challenges that are a natural part of growing up.

The following sections present language you can use with your child or teen to explore skills that can be helpful when he or she is struggling with sadness.

What to Say to Children

First, try to identify what is making you feel sad. Does it make sense that you feel sad? For example, did a friend move away or did you lose a favorite toy? If so, remind yourself that sadness is normal and it's okay to feel sad or even to cry.

Many kids find it helpful to talk to a parent or loved one about their sad feelings. If you are ready to try to feel better, you can do that or do an activity you usually enjoy, such as playing your favorite game, spending time with your friends or family, playing outside or reading your favorite book. You may also try to distract yourself by playing with your pet, building something with LEGOS® or playing a new computer game.

Skills:

- Try to identify what is making you feel sad.
- Remind yourself sadness is normal and it's okay to feel sad and cry.
- Talk to a parent or loved one.
- Engage in an enjoyable activity.
- Try distracting yourself.

What to Say to Teens

First, try to identify the source of your sadness. Does it make sense that you feel sad? For example, did you experience a break-up or a disappointment at school? If so, remind yourself that it is okay and perfectly natural to feel sad or down.

You may find it helpful to talk to someone about how you are feeling or even allow yourself to cry. Many teens also find it helpful to journal about how they are feeling.

To help yourself feel better, try doing an activity you usually enjoy (even if you don't feel like doing it), such as working on an art project, playing a game, watching a funny TV show or going outside to get some fresh air. You may try making a list of the things you are grateful for or things that are going well.

Try to spend time with friends and family, as isolating yourself can make you feel worse. Remind yourself that no feeling lasts forever and this will pass.

Skills:

- Try to identify what is making you feel sad.
- Remind yourself that sadness is normal and it's okay to feel sad or down.
- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
- Journal about how you are feeling.
- Engage in an enjoyable activity.
- Make a gratitude list.
- Spend time with friends and family.

With the right skills, a clear understanding of how to appropriately address sadness, and your encouragement, your child can effectively resolve problems when they do occur.

When Your Teen is **Stressed**

Teens have a lot going on in their lives — school, jobs, friendships, fitting in, dating, thinking about their future and a whole lot more. So it's not unusual for them to feel stressed out from time to time. Learning and gathering the right set of skills can help your teen navigate the many challenges that are a natural part of growing up.

The following sections present language you can use with your teen to explore skills that can be helpful when he or she is struggling with stress.

What to Say to Teens

Everyone feels stressed sometimes. Stress can be a cue that you have too much on your plate or that you are having difficulty managing your responsibilities.

First, identify the source of your stress. For example, are you having trouble managing your time? Do you need to prioritize differently? Do you need to strengthen your organizational skills? It can be helpful to identify tasks that are "must do's" and tasks that are "want to do's."

It also might be helpful to create a daily and/or weekly schedule to identify when tasks need to be completed and to stay organized. Make sure you give yourself enough time to complete each task as well as transition between them. For example, if school ends at 3:30 p.m., it would be unrealistic for you to try to start your homework at 3:30 p.m. A more realistic plan would be to start your homework at 4 or 4:30 p.m. so you have enough time to get home and grab a snack before starting.

It's also a good idea to dedicate some time to keeping your materials and space organized. Having good organizational skills can save you time and prevent or reduce stress in the long run.

Evaluate what is on your schedule. Which activities are most important and align with your long-term goals? Are there unnecessary or insignificant activities or responsibilities you can eliminate to make time for others that are more beneficial?

Finally, it may be useful to ask for help from trusted adults or peers when you are feeling overwhelmed. Make sure you schedule leisure time for yourself as well! It is important to engage in daily activities that are relaxing, such as reading, yoga or watching your favorite YouTuber.

Skills:

- Identify the source of your stress.
- Evaluate your schedule and make a realistic plan.
- Ask for help with organization when you're feeling overwhelmed.
- Make sure you schedule leisure/fun time for yourself.

With the right skills, a clear understanding of how to appropriately address stress and your encouragement, your teen can develop a plan for preventing problems and effectively resolving them when they do occur.

When Your Child is Worried

Most of the time, children and teens are carefree and laid back. They seldom worry about things, and if they do, it isn't long before the reason for their concern (a big test?) passes and they're on to the next activity or event. It's normal for children and teens to experience this kind of "temporary" worry.

But there may be occasions when children get hung up on something that takes their attention away from family, friends and school and causes them to feel anxious or even fearful. In these situations, it's important for them to have a set of skills that can help them cope with worrisome feelings, move past them and get on with their lives.

The following sections present language you can use to help your child or teen when he or she feels worried.

What to Say to Children

First, identify what is making you feel worried. Then, decide whether you are in actual danger or just feeling anxious. If you are not in real danger, take a deep breath and relax your body; imagine your body becoming like a spaghetti noodle. Talk to someone you trust about what is causing your worry. Tell yourself that you can do this!

You might also try thinking about a time when you were brave or imagine yourself as a superhero. Or try to distract yourself by doing artwork, playing a card/board game, watching a favorite TV show or doing something else you enjoy.

Tools:

- Try to identify what is making you feel worried.
- Practice deep breathing to relax your body.

- Talk to someone.
- Think about a time when you were brave or imagine you are a superhero.
- Try doing something you enjoy.

What to Say to Teens

First, try to identify the source of your worry. Identify whether you are safe or in a dangerous situation.

If you are in a dangerous situation, the first thing to do is seek safety immediately. If you are not in a dangerous situation but still feel anxious, follow these steps:

1. Determine if you need to solve a problem. For example, if you are worried about an upcoming test, you could make a study plan. Or, if you are worried about trying something new, you could make a plan to learn more information about what you'd like to do.
2. If you do not need to solve a problem, or if you took steps to solve the problem and still feel worried, try one of these strategies to get through the moment:
   - Do something you normally enjoy doing even though you feel worried (watching a funny online video, talking to a friend, going for a walk or exercising).
   - Try a self-soothing activity (download and listen to a meditation app, listen to music, take a bubble bath or shower, play with your pet, look at pleasant photos, try yoga).
   - Seek support from a trusted friend or adult.

Tools:

- Try to identify the source of your anxiety.
- Use problem-solving (if needed).
- Engage in an enjoyable activity.
- Try a self-soothing activity.
- Talk to a trusted friend or adult.

With the right skills, a clear understanding of how to appropriately address anxiety and worry, and your encouragement, your child can develop a plan for preventing problems and effectively resolving them when they do occur.

Additional Resources

- ***Freeing Your Child from Anxiety: Powerful, Practical Solutions to Overcome Your Child's Fears, Worries, and Phobias*** by Tamar Ellsas Chansky, Ph.D.
- ***What to Do When You Worry Too Much*** by Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

Helping Your Child Manage Anxiety

Anxiety is an irrational fear that something bad could happen, even when it is unlikely. This is different from being afraid in situations where there is actual danger.

It's not unusual for children of all ages to experience anxiety. Sometimes, anxiety can actually be helpful and improve performance in high-stress situations. But when anxiety results from an irrational fear, it can cause a child to have repeated thoughts about that fear and to avoid uncomfortable and stressful situations.

The extent to which anxiety impacts someone's life varies tremendously from person to person. Some people occasionally avoid uncomfortable and stressful situations, and it doesn't interfere with their activities. However, for others, a pattern of avoidance may become problematic and negatively affect relationships, school and work attendance and performance, and independence.

If your child experiences anxiety and reports physical discomfort, you should first have him or her evaluated by his or her primary care physician. Common physical symptoms of anxiety include stomach pain, shortness of breath and increased heart rate, all of which could be signs of a medical condition.

Strategies to Manage Symptoms

Once your child's physician addresses any medical considerations, behavioral health experts can recommend individualized, evidence-based strategies that can help you and your child manage anxiety symptoms.

Here are few of those strategies:

- **Praise your child when he or she demonstrates courage and sticks to daily routines while experiencing anxiety.**
- **Tell your child that you expect him or her to continue daily activities, such as attending school and participating in extracurricular activities, even when he or she is experiencing anxiety.** Allowing your child to avoid a situation that he or she fears may unintentionally send the message that the situation really is unsafe and should be avoided.

- **Have your child repeatedly practice dealing with the situation that makes him or her anxious.** This exercise is referred to as "exposure" in the research, and can be one of the most effective, powerful ways for children to manage anxiety. Such exercises are often most effective when children start them on a small scale and gradually build on their successes, and when they are connected to some type of reward.

  For example, if your child fears being home alone, have him or her practice being alone in a preferred room of your home for one minute a day when a caregiver is home. Your child can then gradually start spending longer amounts of time alone in other areas of your home, being on different levels of the home than a caregiver and practicing when it's dark outside. (Your encouragement is important, because kids often will be hesitant to participate in these exercises on their own.)
- **If your child misses planned school or extracurricular activities due to anxiety, have him or her rest for the day with no access to electronics, friends or activities.**
- **Avoid initiating conversations about anxiety** or repeatedly checking on your child for anxiety symptoms.
- **Establish a 10-minute "worry time" each day when you and your child can discuss his or her anxiety.** During this time, listen and be supportive.
- **Help your child focus on practicing good health habits,** such as getting enough sleep and following a healthy diet.
- **Don't discuss your own anxiety with your child.**
- **Demonstrate courage to your child by identifying something that worries you and letting your child see that you can successfully face that fear.**
- **Be honest.** Bad things do occasionally happen, and children may face a worrisome or dangerous situation. Let your child know that these situations are rare and that you will do everything possible to protect him or her from danger.
- **Help your child become more aware of what causes his or her anxiety** and discuss what he or she does as a result of that anxiety and whether it is helpful or not.
- **Help your child identify what motivates him or her to persevere during anxious times** and focus on strengthening that motivation.
- **Develop strategies your child can use to physically calm down,** such as relaxation and meditation exercises, and practice these techniques every day. (Online videos or apps may be helpful in getting started.)

Teaching your child to manage anxiety takes effort and your support. While anxiety symptoms may not completely disappear, learning strategies to manage anxiety can limit the negative effects of anxiety on your child's daily routines.

Additional Resources

- ***Freeing Your Child from Anxiety,*** by Tamar Chansky, Ph.D.
- ***What to Do When You Worry Too Much,*** by Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

Managing Pain

When your child is experiencing pain, you will do everything possible to find out what's causing the pain and help. Your efforts usually start with taking your child to his or her primary care physician for a medical evaluation.

Your child's physician first needs to evaluate and treat the medical concerns. However, there may be times when a behavioral health expert can assist you in treating your child's pain.

The strategies a behavioral health provider can recommend will be specific to your child and your circumstances. Here are three sets of those strategies; parenting strategies to help your child manage pain, teaching your child how to monitor and manage pain and strategies for working with your child's school.

Helping Your Child Manage Pain

- **Follow your physician's recommendations on recovery periods from illnesses and invasive medical procedures.** Ensure that your child is able to resume normal activities before he or she returns to a typical routine.
- **Monitor your child to make sure he or she takes the medication that is prescribed by a physician** (both prescription and over-the-counter medicine).
- **Praise your child when he or she behaves well and fulfills daily responsibilities,** even when he or she still might be experiencing some pain.
- **If your child misses school or extracurricular activities because of pain, have him or her rest for the entire day,** with no access to electronics, friends or activities.
- **When your child tells you he or she is experiencing pain, remain calm and briefly discuss what he or she is feeling.** Then take appropriate action rather than repeatedly checking on your child about the pain.
- **Focus on healthy habits**, such as ensuring your child gets plenty of sleep and is eating a healthy diet.

- **Look into treatment interventions** like biofeedback and neurofeedback.

Strategies for Your Child to Manage Pain

- **Complete a daily pain log to track activities and pain levels over time.** Use a 1-10 pain scale (with 1 being little or no pain and 10 being unbearable pain) to assess how you are feeling at certain times of the day or during certain activities.
- **Increase your awareness of stress,** what causes it and how to properly manage it.
- **Stick to typical daily routines and responsibilities, even if it means taking an occasional break.** For example, if your pain intensifies at school and makes it difficult to remain in class, rest in the nurse's office for 10 minutes and then return to class.
- **Identify what is important to you and what motivates you to persevere** even when you don't feel well. Stay focused on these values.
- **Develop a positive "can do" attitude about the pain,** so that it doesn't keep you from doing what is important to you.
- **Develop strategies for physically calming your body, such as relaxation and meditation exercises.** Use online videos or apps to learn these strategies, and practice them every day so you can use them when you need them.
- **Practice how to effectively describe your condition and how it affects you,** and how to advocate for yourself.

Strategies to Address Pain at School

- **Explain your child's condition to and share your concerns** about his or her health with relevant school staff.
- **Provide school staff with the recovery plan** prescribed by your child's physician.
- **Provide the school nurse with any medication** your child needs to take during the school day.
- **Require your child to promptly complete assignments and homework** he or she misses because of school absences.
- **Develop a 504 Accommodation Plan with school staff.** This plan allows your child to have accommodations in place at school to ensure his or her medical concerns don't negatively affect their academic progress. You may need to provide documentation from his or her primary care physician about your child's medical condition.

Dealing with your Teen's **Moodiness**

You've noticed that your teen has become increasingly moody lately, often snapping at siblings and spending long periods of time in his bedroom. He also refuses to participate in family activities, which is unusual for him. Should you be concerned?

Moodiness affects all of us, but can occur even more frequently with teenagers. It is normal for teenagers' moods to change quickly and often. Your teenager may have strong reactions to your rules and expectations, or his or her mood may shift before a high-pressure situation, like a sports event or a test. These changes are normal – they're not bipolar disorder!

Signs of Moodiness

Watch how your teen bounces back from low or angry moods. If he or she is occasionally moody but continues with usual routines, then there is less cause for worry. But if your teenager's moodiness becomes more frequent or ongoing, or if you notice behavior that is out of the ordinary, there may be reasons for concern. Watch out for behaviors like:

- Excessive irritability, anger or crying
- Isolation from family and peers for extended periods of time

- Changes in hygiene habits, like not showering or brushing teeth
- A drop in grades (or attendance) at school
- Significant changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Refusal to attend school or participate in extracurricular activities

What You Can Do

If you notice any of these things happening, consider speaking with your teen's friends and teachers to see if they notice the same changes you do. Talking with your teen is another way to understand what may be happening. To do this, consider:

- **Setting up "traditions."** Try to find consistent times to do something you both enjoy, like making breakfast on Saturday mornings or eating out on Friday evenings. Spending time together creates opportunities for you to hear about your teen's life and get a sense for how he or she is feeling. Prioritizing these activities and scheduling them in advance will help you both stick to the plan. People thrive on predictability, and – though your teen may not show it – he or she may appreciate the chance to check in with you on a regular basis.
- **Keeping conversations light.** Don't worry about having serious conversations every time you and your teen are together. Keeping conversations positive and short will help your teen remember that it's easy to talk to you, and that will encourage him or her to start more serious conversations later. It's completely okay if your teen doesn't talk much; sitting in silence doesn't mean something is wrong! You may feel pressure to fill silences with questions, but be careful; too many questions can make your teen feel frustrated and less likely to open up.

- **Refraining from making judgments.** It's natural to want to make judgments; we are constantly deciding what we like and what we don't like. You will have opinions about what your teen tells you, and that's okay. But always sharing your thoughts with your teen may not have the effect you intend. Your teen may have a strong emotional reaction to what you say, and that could decrease the likelihood that he or she will want to share similar things in the future. One way to keep your judgments in check is to notice when you have them. Listening with curiosity, keeping track of your own emotions and thinking before you speak will increase the chances that you'll say what you mean to your teen.

If your teen's moodiness persists, or if he or she refuses to talk to you, you may want to schedule a visit with a school counselor or seek other professional help.

Helping Your Child Go Public with Good Behavior

When it comes to teaching appropriate public behavior, there is no better opportunity than when you and your young child are actually out in public.

Unfortunately, many parents avoid going out with their children simply because their behaviors away from home are so embarrassing, challenging or disruptive. This limits the opportunities young children have to learn appropriate social behavior.

So instead of avoiding social situations, we encourage you to seek them out. But do it on your terms and in short time spans. By controlling where and when you go out and for how long, you can maintain control and let your child improve at his or her own pace.

Here are some tips...

- **Practice**
  Before venturing out, practice the skills and behaviors you want to see your child use in public. At home, you can "play" going to the store, library or restaurant with your child. Praise him or her for following the rules and for good "listening." Once your child has mastered this "game" at home, move to a location close to home, keep the stay brief and reward positive behaviors. By staying close to home, you can return quickly if things do not go well.
- **Set Your Child Up for Success**
  One way to do this is to make sure the environment is right. A formal restaurant, a

lengthy religious service or a wedding are NOT the best environments in which to teach skills and have your child practice them. Expecting "good" behavior in those settings is a recipe for problems. Better settings for success might include the park, the mall or the grocery store.

- **Plan Ahead**
  Make sure your child is fed, has used the bathroom and has items he or she can turn to for entertainment. Expecting a young child to sit quietly and wait patiently with nothing to do is not reasonable. Think about it: How patiently do YOU wait in traffic or at a doctor's appointment?
- **Go Small**
  Start with brief trips to stores, restaurants and so forth. Have your child stay by your side, wait or sit quietly for brief periods of time. Convenience stores and fast food restaurants are excellent places to practice these skills. Once your child has learned to follow a few basic rules in those locations, you can lengthen the trip or extend your time out in public.
- **Be Patient**
  Your child is naturally going to be excited about being in new places, and learning to behave in new ways will take time. Slowly shape the behavior you want to see in your child through praise and firm correction, and remember that Rome wasn't built in a day.

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake for Meltdowns: How to Handle the Most Exasperating Behavior of Your 2- to 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal

Self-Harm Behavior:

Knowing What to Look For and What to Do

Self-harm occurs when a person intentionally hurts himself or herself. In children, this behavior may first occur during the transition from childhood to adolescence. Around this time, adolescents begin to think more about their feelings, pay more attention to how their peers respond to them and worry about whether they are fitting in. When things aren't going well in these areas, children may resort to self-harm (usually cutting) to express frustration, anger or other emotions.

When parents discover their adolescent is self-harming, they become deeply concerned and often wonder if their child is thinking of suicide. But self-harm and suicide are two distinct concerns, and self-harm does not always imply a child is considering suicide.

As a parent, it's important that you can identify the signs that your child might be engaging in self-harm behaviors and learn strategies that can help you address or prevent these behaviors.

Why Do Children Hurt Themselves?

Understandably, parents want to understand why their son or daughter is self-harming. Here are three of the most common reasons why children and adolescents hurt themselves:

- **Belonging.** Children who engage in self-harm may feel a sense of belonging when they are with peers who also self-harm. For example, these boys and girls may talk about cutting or take pictures of their cuts and share them through social media. This shared interest can create a sense of acceptance that they find appealing.
- **Emotional pain.** Some adolescents may self-harm to manage or express emotional pain. Research has found that adolescents who self-harm to manage emotional pain report that they feel better after cutting. Those who self-harm for this reason may hide it because they don't want anyone to know they are doing it.

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What Are the Signs of Self-Harm?

Signs of self-harm may include isolation, staying up much later than the rest of the family, taking long showers, frequent disappearance of sharp objects or other objects that can be used for cutting, wearing long sleeves all year long and wearing several bracelets at once. Other behaviors include not wanting to show one's skin, telling others about self-harming and sharing pictures of cuts or wounds through social media.

The two main kinds of self-harm behaviors are direct and indirect. Direct behaviors include cutting with sharp objects (razors, knives or scissors), burning with a lighter or hair straightener, hitting, scratching, etc. Indirect behaviors include risky sexual behavior, unhealthy eating habits that can lead to an eating disorder, alcohol and drug use, etc.

How Can Parents Address Self-Harm Behaviors?

- **Have open discussions.** Self-harm can be difficult to discuss. Once you've discovered your child is doing it, you should avoid lecturing or asking "interrogation"-like questions. While you may be experiencing strong emotions, expressing them in an angry or accusatory way can overwhelm your child and possibly make matters much worse. Using a neutral, caring tone of voice to talk with your child and find out why the self-harm behaviors are happening is usually a great first step toward developing a solution.
- **Maintain routines, rules and expectations.** Allowing your child special concessions may inadvertently teach him or her that self-harming is an effective strategy for getting needs met or avoiding rules and expectations. Keeping routines and expectations consistent demonstrates that you believe your child can fulfill expectations and manage disappointment.
- **Avoid talk of suicide.** While talking with your child, it is important to avoid suicide terminology and to not assume he or she is having suicidal thoughts. That being said, ensure your child is safe and take him or her to the emergency room if you have any concerns about serious self-harm.

Managing Behavior and Moving Forward

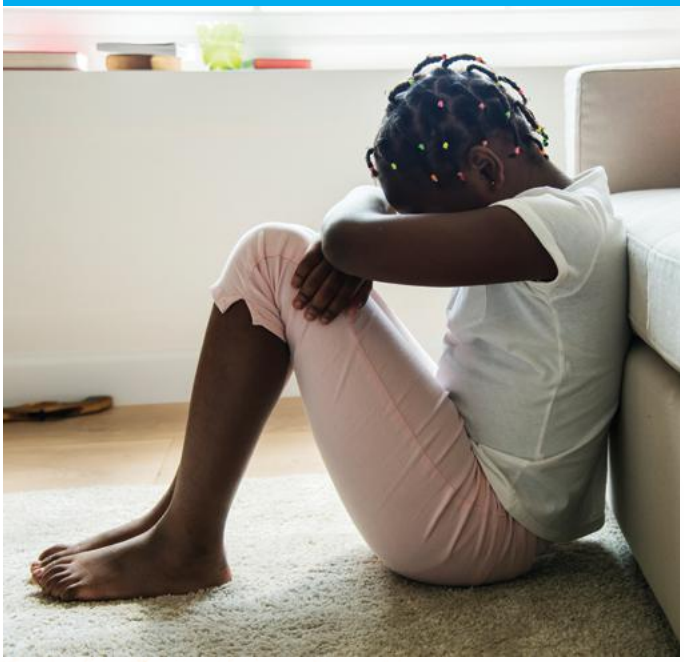
- **Maintain balance.** It is important to maintain a balance between being concerned and overreacting. Every adolescent needs privacy and benefits from opportunities to earn their parents' trust. Requiring body checks and other invasive strategies may further complicate your relationship with him or her.
- **Monitor access to sharp objects.** Have your adolescent check out and turn in sharp objects such as knives or razors after using them.
- **Reward good behavior.** Reward your child when he or she uses effective coping strategies. Your praise and recognition encourages your child's improvement and involvement in daily life activities.

Self-harm often occurs within the context of other concerns such as depression, anxiety, risk-taking, eating disorders or oppositional behavior. If these concerns are interfering with your child's relationships, interest in activities and academic performance, talk with your child's primary care physician about a referral for behavioral health services.

Additional Resource

→ ***Stopping the Pain: A Workbook for Teens Who Cut and Self Injure*** by Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Developing Skills to Manage Strong Emotions



It is normal to experience strong emotions; everyone feels fearful, sad, angry and overwhelmed sometimes. Most adults have the maturity and life skills to deal with these emotions in healthy ways. But children haven't yet developed this ability, and parents have to step in to help their younger kids or teenagers express and cope with their feelings.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when teaching your child how to effectively manage strong emotions:

Choose Some Strategies

There is no one "right" strategy for managing emotions because different things work for different people. The key is to help your child figure out which strategy will work for them in a particular situation. The best way to choose a strategy is to determine, both from observing your child and discussing the problem together, what he or she needs right now.

- **If your child needs to release emotion:** This is a situation where so much anger or sadness or worry has built up in your child that he or she needs to do something to let off some steam. Two kinds of strategies work best here: a physical release and a nonphysical release. A physical release can come from exercising, tearing up paper, punching a pillow or even just breathing in and out slowly. Nonphysical releases can involve journaling, talking to a friend or creating art or music.
- **If your child needs to make emotions visible or concrete:** Unlike a physical wound, emotional pain can be hard to see or explain, and it's sometimes difficult for kids to express just how badly they're feeling inside. When this happens, they need to somehow "convert" their emotions into something visible or tangible. Having your child draw, paint or scribble (especially with colors that match his or her mood), write poetry or use metaphorical language, or put Band-Aids on their body to symbolize the pain can be effective ways to do this.
- **If your child needs to regain a sense of control:** When a problem or a difficult situation has sent your child's emotions into a frenzy,

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both you and your child might feel like life is spinning out of control. The best approach in these situations is to help your child focus on things he or she does have control over. These might include activities your child is good at or that keep him or her busy, like tackling a to-do list, cleaning or organizing clothes. Just accomplishing some simple tasks can give children a sense of empowerment that can help them push through times of feeling helpless and out of control.

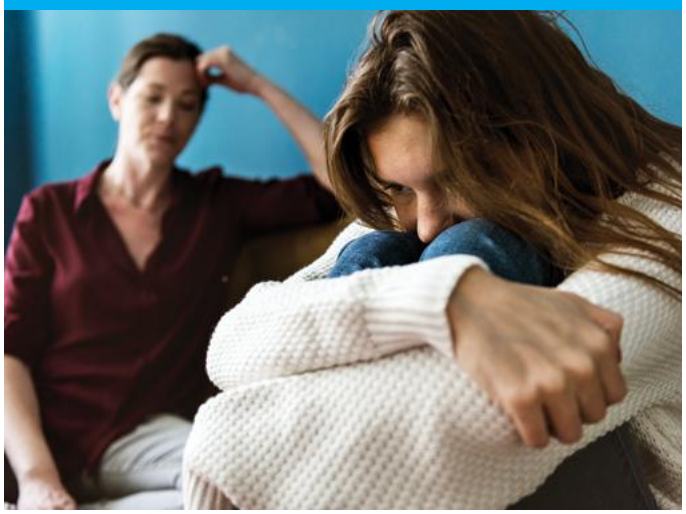
- **If your child needs to take a break:** Sometimes, feelings just become too much, and your child might just need to step back. One option is to have your child do soothing or relaxing activities like taking a hot shower, lighting a scented candle, taking a short nap or focusing on deep breathing. Another option is to use distractions like watching a movie, playing a game, reading a book, surfing the Internet, listening to music or shooting some hoops.
- **If your child needs to feel something:** Some kids get so overwhelmed with a challenge or problem that they start feeling nothing. Their bodies shut down their emotional pain receptors, and everything goes a bit numb for them. In these situations, guide your child toward activities that can help create physical sensations. These might include holding an ice cube, splashing cold water on his or her face, lightly snapping a rubber band on the wrist, tensing and relaxing muscles, or watching something really funny.

Practice!

Learning to manage strong emotions is like learning anything else: To get good at it, you have to practice. Consider teaching and having your child try strategies like deep breathing or tensing and relaxing muscles when he or she is calm. Practicing during a neutral time increases the chances that your child will remember to use a strategy in the heat of an emotional moment.

- **Talk about what strategies your kids have tried.** Engage in brief, informal conversations about what techniques your child has tried in the past and how they worked or did not work. These conversations can happen at any time (in the car, sitting in a waiting room, during and/or between the activities of the day). Remind your child that the tools he or she uses won't work 100% of the time, and encourage him or her to keep trying. This is a good opportunity to normalize your child's feelings and let him or her know that everyone experiences strong emotions.
- **Model healthy habits.** Kids watch what their parents do, and they learn a lot from seeing how their parents manage strong emotions effectively. Verbalize the strategies that you use – like how you stay organized and manage stress – to highlight what works. If you are having trouble managing your own stress or responsibilities, it may help to seek assistance so you can learn more effective ways to cope and manage.

Adolescent Substance Use:
Warning Signs and Strategies



Navigating through adolescence is challenging, both for parents and their teens. Recognizing potential dangers and talking about them as a family is one way to head off problems, especially those that pose negative physical and emotional consequences that can threaten a family's stability and well-being.

One of those dangers is substance use. To be fully informed and better equipped to deal with this issue, parents have to learn as much as they can, especially when it comes to identifying the signs and symptoms of drug use.

Possible Warning Signs

While the following list includes behaviors that a typical developing teen might display, they also could be tip-offs to possible substance use:

- Drastic changes in mood for no apparent reason
- Abnormal sustained fatigue or bursts of energy
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Decline in personal hygiene
- Withdrawal from family activities
- Refusal to follow house rules (especially if this has not been a problem)
- New friends or a loss of interest in activities the teen has liked in the past
- Decline in school performance and/or attendance
- Loss of a job or being written up for irresponsible behaviors at work
- Aggressive behavior
- Unaccounted blocks of time
- Lying about whereabouts or events
- Losing money or possessions without explanation
- Possession of drug paraphernalia or materials with drug references
- Getting in trouble with the law

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Tips and Tools for Prevention

Adolescents say their reasons for turning to drugs include trying to fit in, doing what other kids are doing, boredom, curiosity, escaping pain and the thrill of taking a risk. Talking with your adolescent early – before he or she gets involved with drugs – about positive ways to deal with these challenges or difficulties not only opens the lines of communication but also gives your child skills for solving problems and making better decisions. Here are some parenting tips for doing that:

- **Get involved and stay involved with your adolescent.** That can include enjoying activities together whenever possible and just talking.
- **Know what your adolescent is doing** by having frequent conversations.
- **Get to know your child's friends and the parents of their friends,** and don't be afraid to check in with those parents.
- **Explain to your teen the specific behavioral expectations you have for him or her.** Talk with your teen often to reinforce those expectations.
- **Set house rules,** explain them and enforce them consistently and fairly.
- **Be a parent, not a pal.**
- **Talk with your adolescent about risky or dangerous situations** and the best ways to handle them.
- **Stay informed** about current trends for teens.
- **Constantly show your adolescent you care by:**
  - Saying "I love you."
  - Balancing correction and praise for negative and positive behaviors.
  - Listening to what they have to say without interrupting and giving them your full attention during a conversation.

Getting Help:

If you feel your adolescent child and/or your family needs help with a substance use problem, please contact the **Boys Town National Hotline®** at **1-800-448-3000.** Trained Crisis Counselors are on duty 24/7 and can usually provide referrals to professional help in your area.

What is a Tic?

A tic is a sudden, rapid, recurrent, nonrhythmic, motor movement or vocalization (APA 2013). Tics wax and wane and vary in frequency and intensity across time. Tics tend to worsen during times of stress and can increase based on certain environments and interactions. Tics are involuntary but can usually be suppressed. Tics can be **motor** (movements) or **vocal** (produce a sound).

Examples of common motor and vocal tics

MOTOR (movements)	**VOCAL** (produce a sound)
• eye blinking • facial grimacing • jaw movements • head bobbing/jerking • shoulder shrugging • neck stretching • arm jerking ▸ *Can also include more complex combinations of movements such as hopping, twirling, or jumping.*	• sniffing • throat clearing • grunting • hooting • shouting ▸ *Can also include more complex vocal tics such as words or phrases that may or may not be recognizable but that consistently occur out of context.*

What is Tourette's?

Tourette's Disorder (TD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects children, adolescents and adults. TD is one type of Tic Disorder. Tourette's Disorder is diagnosed when a person demonstrates both motor and vocal tics before age 18 and for a period of more than 1 year. Most people with TD have multiple types of tics.

Are tics common?

Tics occur in as many as 1 in 5 school-aged children at some time but may not persist. Tourette's Disorder (TD) and other Tic Disorders combined are estimated to occur in more than 1 in 50 school-aged children in the United States. TD occurs in 1 in 160 (0.6%) school-aged children, although it is estimated that 50% are going undiagnosed. The reported prevalence for those who have been diagnosed with Tourette's is lower than the true number, most likely because tics often go unrecognized. TD affects all races, ethnic groups and ages, but is 3-4 times more common in boys than in girls.

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What is the typical course?

Tics typically start in young children (4-8 years old) and will often start with motor tics, then vocal. Tics typically start in the head and face, and then in the body/limbs. Most often, tics start as simple tics and then develop into more complex tics. The peak severity for tics is early to mid-teens (11-14). Tics resolve in about 1/3 of cases as children grow into adulthood. Tics become substantially less severe in another 1/3 of cases, and in the remainder of cases, TD is lifelong.

What causes tics?

The causes of TD and other Tic Disorders remain unknown. These conditions tend to occur in families, and numerous studies have confirmed that genetics are involved. Environmental, developmental, or other factors may also contribute to these disorders but, at present, no specific agent or event has been identified. Researchers are continuing to search for the genes and other factors underlying the development of Tic Disorders.

Who diagnoses and treats Tourette's Disorder?

Most commonly TD is treated by both medical doctors (which include neurologists and psychiatrists) and allied professionals (which include psychologists, social workers, counselors and occupational therapists). It is recommended that your first point of contact be your physician, who should be able to make referrals if appropriate.

Do people with Tourette's Disorder experience issues in addition to tics?

86% of individuals with Tourette's Disorder experience co-occurring conditions, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety, learning difficulties, and more.

Additional Resources

→ ***https://tourette.org/find-a-provider/***

Debunking Myths about Tics:

Myth: Everyone with Tourette's blurts out obscenities.

FACT: While frequently portrayed in the media as a common symptom of TD, this only affects 10%-15% of individuals with Tourette's. For those who do experience inappropriate vocal tics (e.g., swear words, ethnic slurs, or other socially unacceptable words or phrases), they are completely involuntary and repetitive.

Myth: Everyone who has tics also has TD.

FACT: Not everyone who has tics has Tourette's Disorder. Tic conditions vary widely in duration (few weeks to lifelong), frequency, severity, and number of tics (one to multiple). For tics that are present for less than a year, a person may have a diagnosis of "chronic motor or vocal tic disorder."

Myth: People with TD can control their movements and sounds if they really want to.

FACT: The physical and vocal tics associated with TD are thought to be the result of altered brain structure and function and are thus involuntary (like a sneeze) or uncontrollable. Some individuals can temporarily interrupt the expression of their tics, but this is unusual and not lasting. With behavioral therapy, some people can learn to manage their tics, but successful response to behavior therapy does not mean the tics were a behavioral issue rather than a neurological problem.

Myth: Tics only occur in children.

FACT: : Although TD and tics are more frequently seen in children, these conditions occur in all age groups. Indeed, while childhood tics can decline as an individual gets older, many adults live their entire life with persistent tics which can range from mild to severe.

Myth: People with TD can't lead "typical" lives.

FACT: While TD can have a profoundly negative impact on the lifestyle of some individuals, others can lead rich and fulfilling lives. Many people with TD are high-achievers and find that their tics tend to subside when they are concentrating hard on a task.

Taming Your Child's AGGRESSION

Some aggressive behavior is a typical part of child development, especially between the ages of 3 and 9.

Children will often use aggressive actions to communicate strong feelings they can't adequately convey due to their limited verbal and reasoning skills. Understanding how to respond to and minimize your child's aggression can teach him or her how to communicate positively and help prevent future outbursts.

Aggressive Behaviors

Aggressive behaviors can change as a child grows and develops. Some common aggressive behaviors a child may display include:

- Biting or pinching
- Playing rough with others
- Screaming and yelling
- Hitting others or self
- Throwing objects

Responding to Aggression

For parents who are seeing frequent aggression in their child, Boys Town parenting experts recommend:

Step 1:

Observing. Watch your child during aggressive outbursts and see if there is a pattern of behavior that occurs before his or her actions.

Step 2:

Heading off aggression. Reduce your child's aggression by setting expectations for appropriate behavior, providing clear and consistent consequences, and praising nonaggressive behaviors.

Step 3:

Responding. If your child becomes aggressive, it is important to stop the behavior, give consequences and follow through on them.

Step 4:

Recognizing and praising good behavior. Reward and praise your child when he or she uses words rather than aggressive actions when frustrated. It is important that you help your child identify triggers that lead to his or her aggressive behaviors and prompt him or her to calm down and cool down when upset. These strategies help build awareness and improve your child's ability to regulate his or her emotions and reduce aggression.

Minimizing Misbehavior

As much as possible, parents are encouraged to stay consistent in their discipline when addressing their child's aggressive behavior. A few techniques you can use when responding to aggressive behavior include:

- **Keeping yourself cool and calm**
- **Minimizing "high risk" situations** that can lead your child to use aggressive behaviors
- **Avoiding negotiation** (don't argue or explain too much)
- **Teaching alternative positive behaviors**
- **Setting clear expectations** for your child's behavior

When to Seek Help:

If your child has frequent daily outbursts for several days or weeks, or is causing physical injury to himself or herself or others, contact your pediatrician.

Additional Resources

- ***Show Me Your Mad Face: Teaching Children to Feel Angry Without Losing Control*** by Connie J. Schnoes, Ph.D.
- ***What to Do When Your Temper Flares: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Anger*** by Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

Helping Your Child Settle Arguments and Disputes

Children fight and argue. Some do it more often or more subtly, but most children, at one time or another, will attempt to exert their influence over others and an argument will ensue.

Disagreements are a normal part of behavior and can show that your child is an independent thinker and a self-motivated person – both qualities you want your child to have! However, when these disagreements escalate into fighting, the result can be troubling for everyone involved.

As a parent, one of your goals is to teach your child appropriate conflict-resolution skills. These skills will be very valuable as he or she negotiates life in the context of a social world. Therefore, every argument your child is involved in can be seen as an opportunity for him or her to practice conflict resolution.

Here are some tips to help your child settle arguments and disputes in a constructive manner and minimize arguments and fighting.

- Model appropriate conflict-resolution skills. One of the biggest ways children learn how to handle social situations is by observing the adults in their lives. If a child sees his father yell and become aggressive when handling a

conflict, then the child will learn that yelling and being aggressive are the normal ways to handle frustration. On the other hand, if a father models appropriate skills when addressing a conflict, the child will learn and be more likely to imitate that behavior.

Modeling appropriate behavior is especially important when you have to stop your children from fighting. It doesn't make sense for you to get emotional and scream at your child if you are trying to teach him or her how to remain calm and resolve an issue without fighting! So take a deep breath and remember these situations are teaching opportunities for you and learning opportunities for your child.

- **Communicate your expectations clearly.** Let your child know at an early age that you will not tolerate arguing and fighting.
- **Teach relaxation skills to help your child calm down when he or she feels like getting angry.** When a person reacts emotionally rather than calmly and thoughtfully, regretful behaviors are often the result. By learning to take some deep breaths or slowly counting to 10 in order to head off an explosion, children are more likely to use appropriate behaviors instead of arguing and fighting.
- **Discuss and practice ways to resolve disputes productively.** For example, if your child will not share a toy with another child, discuss how they can take turns. You also can role-play various options for solving a conflict, such as using the skills of compromising or asking for help.
- **Avoid always trying to be the judge, arbitrator or referee.** If your children fight a lot, you will drive yourself crazy trying to determine who started every fight and why it happened. Instead of taking sides, it is more helpful to give consequences to everyone involved (it takes at least two to fight) and then have them work on appropriate negotiation skills.
- **Give positive feedback when you see your child attempting to use a new skill.** Let your child know you are watching and that you appreciate the effort he or she is making to try to avoid arguments and fights.

- **Give logical consequences when your child gets into a fight.** Make sure he or she knows that fighting will automatically produce certain consequences, and then follow through with giving them, when necessary. For example, if your children are fighting over a video game, the game gets turned off.

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
- ***Parenting the Strong-Willed Child: The Clinically Proven Five-Week Program for Parents of Two- to Six-Year-Olds*** by Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long

Giving **Clear Instructions** to Children

Does getting your child to do something feel like an impossible task? One of the reasons may be the way you're giving an instruction.

Children are not necessarily receptive to the types of verbal instruction we use with our spouse, colleagues or other adults. Instructions for children must be given so they can clearly understand what you want them to do.

Here are some helpful hints on how to give kids instructions that will make you and your child more successful.

- Get your child's attention – Make sure you have your child's attention before giving an instruction. You should be within three feet of your child so you can talk in a normal or calm voice. This helps your child know that you are talking to him or her. You can get your child's attention by calling his or her name, making eye contact or turning the lights off and back on.
- Be clear and concise – Instructions should be short and to the point, the fewer words the better. A good guide is to use one word for each year of your child's age. For example, an instruction for a 2-year-old might be "Shoes on." For a 5-year-old, it might be "Go get your

shoes on." If you use too many words, it makes it difficult for the child to know what is expected. Also, avoid using vague words in your instructions.

- **Give one instruction at a time** – Do not give your child a long list of instructions. When you give more than one instruction at one time, your child may forget, not understand or feel overwhelmed.
- **Be realistic** – Give your child instructions you know he or she can follow. For example, do not expect your 3-year-old to get completely dressed by himself or herself.
- **Be positive** – Let your child know what you want him or her to do rather than not to do. When you only describe a negative behavior like "Don't run," you still leave many other options available (skipping, hopping, etc.). Instead, telling your child "Walk, please" eliminates any other options.
- **Don't ask, tell** – Do not ask your child to do something. Instead, tell your child in a firm but pleasant voice what you want him or her to do. Do not say "Will you go brush your teeth?" This implies that your child has a choice. Instead, say "Go brush your teeth."
- **Reward compliance** – Praise your child when he or she does a good job following an instruction. The more praise you give, the more likely your child is to follow your instructions in the future.

Additional Resources

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- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
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Examples of Clear Instructions:

"John, give me the truck."

"Lindsey, go wash your hands."

"Dylan, look at the book."

"Taylor, put three blocks in the bucket."

"Jessie, walk next to me."

Examples of Poor Instructions:

"Be careful." *(Too vague)*

"Can you put your toys away?" *(Don't ask, tell)*

"Go upstairs, wash your face, brush your teeth and go to bed." *(Too many instructions)*

"Okay, I think it is time for you to go to bed." *(Too many words)*

"Don't run in here." *(Negative and too vague)*

"Stop horsing around!" *(Negative and too vague)*

Teaching Conversation Skills

Teaching your children good conversation skills is one of the most helpful and beneficial things you can do for them.

Here are some practical, easy-to-use skills you can teach your child and practice together as a family:

To contribute to a conversation:

- Look at the person who is talking.
- Wait for a time when no one else is talking.
- Make a short, appropriate comment that is related to the topic that is being discussed.

- Choose words that will not offend or confuse others.
- After you've spoken, give other people a chance to talk.

To keep a conversation going:

- Maintain a relaxed but attentive posture.
- Nod your head to show you understand and to give ongoing encouragement to the person who is speaking.
- Ask follow-up questions that are related to what another person just said.
- Avoid fidgeting, looking away or yawning.
- Don't interrupt when another person is speaking.
- Take turns speaking during the conversation.
- Check to see if others understand what you have said.

To close a conversation:

- Change topics only when everyone appears to be finished talking about a particular issue.
- Change to a topic that somehow relates to the previous one.
- Give everyone a chance to talk about the new topic.
- Wait for a comfortable break in the conversation to leave.

Teaching your children good conversation skills is one of the most helpful and beneficial things you can do for them.

Additional Resources

- ***Making Friends Is an Art!*** by Julia Cook
- ***Why Don't they Like me?*** by Susan Sheridan, Ph.D.
- ***Helping the Child who Doesn't Fit in*** by Stephen Nowicki Jr., Ph.D. and Marshall Duke, Ph.D.
- ***Teaching Your Child the Language of Social Success*** by Marshall Duke, Ph.D., Stephen Nowicki, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Martin, M.Ed.

Discussing **Difficult Topics** with Your Child

Your child may ask difficult questions about topics, ranging from violence to drugs, divorce and death. As parents, it may be difficult to find the right words to respond to your child's questions in an age-appropriate way. Here are a few things to consider when difficult questions and topics arise:

- **Be careful about the types of conversations you have around your child.** While you may not think your child is listening and paying attention, they may be taking in the entire conversation (and ask you about it at a random time when you are least expecting it).
- **Start by listening.** Ask your child what they know about the question or topic, and really listen to what they are saying and try to understand why they are asking the question.
- **It's okay to take some time to plan a response.** Feel free to tell your child that you need to think about it first or you need to find the answer yourself, and then you can talk about it in a little while. This can g you a little time to formulate your thoughts, gather information and decide how you want to respond.
- **Be honest with your child, even when it may be uncomfortable.** Your child may have already

heard others talking about the topic and have some knowledge on it (which may or may not be accurate). You want your child to trust that you will provide accurate and honest information so your child comes to you first when they have questions or want to understand something.

- **Reassure your child that you (and other trusted adults) will do everything possible to make sure that they stay safe.** For example, your child may hear about a natural disaster, such as a tornado, or a crime, such as a shooting, and worry that they are in danger. Explain to your child that it's adults' jobs to keep kids safe. You might consider providing examples to help your child understand what you mean. For example, parents lock house doors and seek shelter during tornado watches. Bad things occasionally happen, and fortunately, these situations are rare.
- **Share family values and beliefs in these conversations.** You can explain your values and beliefs to your child in kid-friendly terms. You can also acknowledge that other people and families may have different values and beliefs, though one set of values and beliefs isn't necessarily right or wrong.

- **Follow your child's lead in terms of how much information to provide.** If your child is able to formulate the question, they know enough about the topic and understand it well enough to be asking the question. Try to provide a brief and direct response that's age-appropriate.
- **In the future, you might consider casually bringing up the topic again and asking your child if they have any more questions.** This would send the message that you care, remember and are willing to continue the conversation.

Getting Your Child to Listen

Poor listening, or "noncompliance," is one of the most common concerns expressed by parents of toddlers and school-aged children.

When children are having fun, they want to keep having fun. If a parent makes a request that ends or prevents fun, children may respond with behaviors ranging from whining to complaining to hurricane-force tantrums. Parents often say they need to repeat requests, threaten or raise their voice to get their child to do what they have asked. Behold, a few simple changes in the way you teach your child to listen can make a big difference!

Sending Signals

You are the message-sender, the traffic light for your child. Real traffic lights go predictably from green to yellow to red. Imagine if traffic lights changed at random. You wouldn't know when you were supposed to stop! As a parent, the more predictable your signals are, the more predictable your child's behavior will be.

When you make a request, your light is GREEN and children are given the signal to "GO" and complete a task. If they listen, then make their efforts pay off by providing praise, attention, smiles, etc. This will get them GO-ing, and they will eventually learn that the sooner they follow your request, the sooner they can get back to playing and having fun.

If your child doesn't listen (or comply), then your light goes to YELLOW, warning of an upcoming consequence: "If you don't do this, then (consequence) will happen." By predictably showing your children that not listening the first time brings a warning and not just a repeated instruction or nagging, you make it more likely that your child's behaviors will become more compliant and predictable.

If you give one request and one warning and your child still doesn't listen, then your light should go to RED, meaning you give a negative consequence like Time-Out or losing a privilege. Once you give the consequence, go back to green and repeat the instruction (the task still needs to get done!).

Too Much Green or Flashing Yellow. . .

Some parents make numerous requests followed by numerous warnings, with consequences occurring unpredictably, late or never. Once a child figures out

that a parent's light will stay green or yellow for a long period of time and may never turn red, there is little reason to "GO" on green. When the signals aren't predictable, it encourages children to ignore their parents, become defiant or escalate misbehaviors with the hope of changing their parents' minds.

Red!

Sometimes a parent can carry predictability and authority too far. Jumping right from making a request that was not followed to a harsh punishment may result in better listening – but only temporarily. Usually when this happens, a child is responding out of fear and may resent the parent because the punishment feels so unfair. Giving a warning allows children to think about their choices, knowing that a specific consequence will happen in response to whatever choice they make.

Teaching Your Child to Listen

Teaching your child to listen is a process that relies heavily on communication and consistency. The Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health offers the following tips to help you successfully teach your child the importance of listening, the first time:

1. **Stay calm** – Be calm and firm at the same time. Use a neutral tone of voice instead of yelling.
2. **Be direct** – A direct command leaves no question in the child's mind what he or she is being told to do. The choices are clear. For example, say "Sit in the chair, please" and "Pick up your toys" instead of "Could you please sit down now?" and "Mommy likes it when you pick up your toys."
3. **State commands positively** – Tell your child what to "GO" do instead of what not to do. Whenever possible, avoid the use of "No," "Don't," "Stop," "Quit it," etc. For example, say "Keep your feet on the ground" instead of "Stop climbing on the furniture."
4. **Give one command at a time** – Children have a hard time remembering more than one thing at a time. For example, say "Put your toys in the bin" instead of "Put your toys away, wash your hands and come to dinner."
5. **Give age-appropriate instructions** – The instructions you give should be for things your child is developmentally/physically able to do. Remember that many tasks actually have multiple steps. Children may need you to help them break down the instruction into smaller chunks. For example, say "Put the clothes that are on the floor in the hamper" instead of "Clean your room."
6. **Give brief rationales** – For example, say "We are going to the store, so put on your coat." A longer rationale is not needed and only creates confusion.
7. **Be physically present** – Instead of yelling across the room or house, get directly in front of your child, make eye contact and give your instruction with gestures (i.e., show them what you want).
8. **Ask the child to repeat the instruction** – This ensures that your child heard what you said.
9. **Reward compliance** – Immediately acknowledge when your child completes a task by giving praise, attention and affection.
10. **Make sure you mean it** – Never give an instruction that you don't expect your child to complete. Use Time-Out or guided compliance (gently guide the child through the task) as needed.

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
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Teaching Children the Art of Making New Friends

As each new school year begins, your child will be excited about meeting new teachers, reuniting with old friends and possibly forming some new friendships.

Making new friends can sometimes be a daunting prospect for both kids and parents. Here are some helpful hints for how you can make the adventure of widening your child's social circle a little easier and a lot more pleasant.

What You Can Teach YOUR CHILD to Do

1. **Friends are a gift we give to ourselves, but our choices can sometimes lead to trouble.** Choose friends who have interests that are similar to yours. Healthy friendships should make you feel good and proud, not leave you feeling small.
2. **Focus on peers who have the characteristics of a good friend.** Keeping in line with these positive traits will have a positive influence on your conduct and, ultimately, your reputation. And the better your reputation, the more choices you'll have for friends.
3. **Be interested, rather than interesting.** People like knowing that you legitimately care. It's better to show interest than to be the show.
4. **Shift your focus from worrying about what others think to making them feel comfortable.** This can reduce anxiousness and help them engage with ease.
5. **Use effective social skills.** Make eye contact, ask open-ended questions, stay on topic, take turns talking, try not to interrupt and make comments that show you're listening.
6. **Practice using your social skills.** Don't just be around people; interact with them. The more you practice, the more at ease you will feel.
7. **Set healthy boundaries with friends.** It's okay to say "No" when you feel overextended or when you don't agree with their choices.
8. **Notice others' cues.** If they're looking away, then it may be time for a new topic or for a conversation to end. Other cues include extended silence, tone and rate of speech.

9. **Praise others and make positive comments** to put them at ease and invite conversation.
10. **Last, but never least – be yourself.** People can tell if you're genuine. Being something you're not wastes energy that can be used for more important things, like having fun.

What YOU Can Do

It's easy for us as parents to get caught up in our children's social lives. Sometimes, kids get their feelings hurt, feel rejected or align themselves with peers who leave us feeling uneasy. It's also difficult to watch our kids make mistakes, and with so much social media out there, it's easy to be in on every detail of what they're involved in. Here are some tips to help you guide your child toward positive friendships without interfering too much:

1. **Model appropriate and healthy social skills**; your kids are watching.
2. **Talk about family values** and equip your child with support systems.
3. **Be open and honest with your child** if you have concerns about his or her friends. Demonstrating overt dislike for them may only make them more interesting to your child.
4. **Let your child learn from experiencing the ups and downs of relationships.** While this sometimes means heartache, it also allows for healthy growing opportunities. It's better for your kids to make mistakes while they're still flying with a net (you) than when they're on their own.
5. **Never address your child's social skill deficits publicly** as this can create anxiety and self-consciousness. The best way to provide feedback is by "catching" your child doing well.

Having said all that, it's important that you get to know your child's friends and, if possible, their parents. The key to teaching your child how to develop positive relationships is finding the balance between being aware of what's going on and resisting the urge to be too involved in your child's social life.

Model appropriate and healthy social skills; your kids are watching.

Additional Resources

- ***Making Friends Is an Art!*** by Julia Cook
- ***Why Don't they Like me?*** by Susan Sheridan, Ph.D.
- ***Helping the Child who Doesn't Fit in*** by Stephen Nowicki, Jr., Ph.D. and Marshall Duke, Ph.D.
- ***Teaching Your Child the Language of Social Success*** by Marshall Duke, Ph.D., Stephen Nowicki, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Martin, M.Ed.

Kid T.I.P.S.

Tough Issues, Proven Solutions

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

STOP the Whining!

Imagine a finely manicured hand with clear polish on the nails. Now, imagine those nails scraping slowly down a chalkboard. Hear it? That's the same sound most parents hear when their young child starts to whine.

Whining often accompanies or precedes tantrum behavior, but not always. Children whine for all kinds of reasons, usually because they are upset about something, or because, in the past, whining has helped them get something they wanted. They also are more likely to whine if they are sick or fatigued.

Regardless, whining is annoying and unnecessary, which is something young children have yet to learn. The good news is that you can MANAGE whining fairly easily and effectively with your child by following these tips:

- **Point out to your child that he or she is whining.** Sometimes children aren't even aware of this behavior.
- **Never give your child what he or she wants when he or she is whining.** This will only lead to more whining when your child wants something in the future.
- **The best way to respond when your child is whining is to say you don't understand him or her.** For example, say "I can't understand a word you are saying. You'll need to talk to me in a big girl (or big boy) voice."
- **Silence is golden.** Ignoring whining until you hear your child use a tone of voice that is acceptable will send a message that whining has little payoff.

- **Don't model whining.** Adults are just about as capable of whining as children. Do yourself and your child a favor by using appropriate behavior and language when you are frustrated.
- **Reward appropriate language.** When your child uses an appropriate tone of voice, especially when asking for something or expressing a complaint, acknowledge and praise him or her. For example, say "Thank you for talking so clearly. It helps me understand what you want." This is especially true if your child used an appropriate voice first, without whining. Either way, it's important that your child understands that talking in an age-appropriate voice is beneficial to him or her, and will earn praise from you.
- **Distract or redirect.** Sometimes, a simple distraction or redirection will be enough to get your child off the whining platform.
- **Time-Out.** A good old-fashioned Time-Out is sometimes necessary when whining persists and all of your other efforts to stop it have not worked.

Children whine for all kinds of reasons, usually because they are upset about something or because, in the past, it has helped them get something they wanted.

Additional Resources

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In Disciplining Your Adolescent, Consequences Are the Key

Disciplining your adolescent child can be one of the most difficult tasks you face as a parent. But you have the ultimate authority when it comes to expecting your child to follow the rules and meet your behavioral expectations, and deciding the consequences they earn.

One proven strategy for successful discipline is establishing a behavioral plan for your adolescent that spells out those rules and expectations, sets reasonable and effective consequences, and promotes good decision-making on the part of your teen.

And while having a strong relationship with your adolescent child is a big plus, consistently using consequences is the key to making your plan work.

For example, nothing means more to teenagers than spending free time with friends and having fun. You are in charge of all of the things that make that possible for your teen, including the car, gas, money and a phone. In these situations, your relationship with your teen should be similar to that of an employer and an employee. In order for your teen (the employee) to earn the privileges they want, they must work for them (follow the rules) and get your (the employer) permission to enjoy them.

Negative Consequences

- **Negative consequences should be short-term and related to the negative behavior that earned the consequence.** Short-term means that once your teen has completed a consequence — for example, doing an extra chore for talking back to you — the punishment is over. Tying a consequence to the behavior — for example, studying for an extra hour for getting a poor grade on a test — helps teens learn how to change their behavior so they avoid earning consequences for similar negative behaviors in the future. When your adolescent loses privileges for negative behaviors, give him or her an opportunity to earn the privileges back. You can do this by encouraging your teen to use positive replacement behaviors (that you teach) to show he or she is trying to change. Then you can recognize and praise your teen's efforts

with a positive consequence like regaining his or her privileges.

- **Give negative consequences without emotion, like a police officer gives a traffic ticket.** This lets teens know their parents gave the consequence only because they broke a rule or didn't meet your expectations, and not because you don't like them or are angry or upset. An unemotional delivery also prevents arguments and keeps your relationship with your teen mutually respectful.
- **When you create your behavioral plan for your teen, let him or here help come up with negative consequences for specific behaviors.** Having a voice in these decisions can provide incentive for your teen to follow the rules and the behavioral plan.

Positive Consequences

- **It is important to catch your teenager being good.** Good behavior should earn your teen more privileges, more independence and more time for fun.
- **Just like negative consequences, let your teen help select the positive consequences that he or she can earn for good behavior.** Again, this increases your teen's buy-in of the behavioral plan.
- **Constantly be on the lookout for good behavior to praise and reward with consequences.** At Boys Town, we've found that a ratio of four praise interactions for every one correction interaction (called the 5-to-1 Rule) is an effective way to increase positive behavior and reduce negative behavior. When your teen begins to understand you are not just looking for opportunities to punish him or her but are focusing more on noticing (and rewarding) good behavior, it sets the stage for more consistent positive behaviors.

Seeking Professional Help

Families sometimes experience problems that are beyond what a behavioral plan can address. If your teen is involved in harmful or dangerous activities like drug use, self-harm behaviors or physical aggression or violence, seek professional help. These are difficult times for parents, but there is no shame or embarrassment in reaching out to trained professionals for guidance and counseling. Parents make this decision because they are doing what's best for their child out of love and concern.

Additional Resources

- ***Get Out of My Life but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?*** by Anthony E. Wolf
- ***The Teenage Brain*** by Frances E. Jensen
- ***I'd Listen to My Parents If They'd Just Shut Up: What to Say and Not Say When Parenting Teens Today*** by Anthony E. Wolf

Using Effective Praise to Promote Good Behavior

Praise is one of the most powerful tools parents can use to teach their children positive skills.

Taking away privileges and giving Time-Outs can be effective when correcting misbehavior; however, recognizing and praising improved and good behavior helps to reinforce that behavior and reduces problem behaviors.

Practicing Effective Praise

Praise works best when it is given effectively and you remember to use it consistently and frequently.

- Look for the good things your child does, even the small things.
- Remember to praise the things your child already does well, improvements in his or her behavior and positive attempts at using new skills.

There are Three Key Steps to Effective Praise:

1. **Show your approval.** Use words or actions to show your child you appreciate what he or she just did. Give a smile or a thumbs-up, or use words of affirmation.
2. **Describe the positive behavior you saw.** Make your comments brief and specific, telling your child exactly what he or she did that was praiseworthy. For example, say "I really liked how you shared your toys with your cousins."
3. **Describe how using the good behavior will help your child and how it is appreciated by others.** Benefits can range from letting your child play outside longer because he or she has earned your trust to having your child make a friend feel more welcome in a social situation.

Tips for Using Effective Praise

- Give the praise immediately or shortly after you notice the behavior.
- **Verbal attention is beneficial, but physical attention is better.** Give your child a hug or pat on the back to show how proud you are.
- **Occasionally use tangible rewards.** These can include bike rides with Mom or an ice cream treat with Dad.
- **Apply the "4-to-1" rule.** That means that for every negative behavior you notice and correct, find four positive behaviors or reasons to praise. This is a good way to remember to look for positive behaviors.

Look for the good things your child does, even the small things.

Additional Resources

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- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
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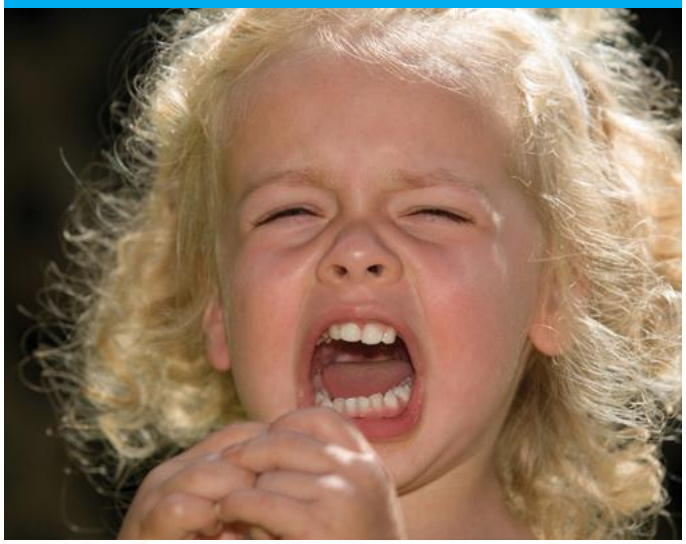
What Every Parent Needs to Know About "NO"



One word that gets the adrenaline surging and the heart pounding in every toddler is the word "No."

It can send most toddlers and many preschoolers into a head-spinning, body-flopping, ear-piercing orbit. For them, it simply means "Pump up the volume and game on!" This can result in some of the most frustrating experiences parents have to deal with and can certainly test their parenting skills.

Most children at the toddler age operate under the premise of, "If it feels good, give me more, and if it doesn't, I want nothing to do with it." Toddlers are focused on those things they can do, eat or watch immediately. Delayed gratification is not a well-developed skill at this age and basic reasoning skills are almost nonexistent. Unfortunately, when parents spend an excessive amount of time trying to explain and reason with their young children, it simply goes in one ear and out the other.

There is not a parent alive who hasn't said the word "No" to his or her child. In fact, "No" is probably the most commonly used word with toddlers. The use of "No" certainly has its place, but only if it's used effectively. The problem is that to toddlers, "No" is just a word unless it's paired with something that is meaningful to them. For example, a tornado siren is just a sound and a red traffic signal is just a light until we understand that one means we should seek shelter and the other means we should stop. So if you're going to use the word "No," and we recommend that you do, then you might as well make it as effective as possible.

Using "No" is important for a lot of reasons. It can be used to stop minor misbehaviors and to ensure a child's safety, like when a child reaches for a dangerous item or goes near a busy street. Children need to know that a specific action will happen depending on whether they stop what they're doing or continue what they're doing. They also need to understand that your first "No" will be your last "No." That is, it will not be followed by one "No" after another.

Here are a few things to consider when helping your child learn the meaning and value of "No":

- **Make sure "No" is the answer you want to give.** Parents sometimes let the word "No" pop out of their mouths without thinking about it. If your child is asking for something, the best thing you can do before saying anything is to ask yourself, "Why would I say 'No'?" Being selective about when you say "No" — and then sticking to it — allows your child, over time, to learn that "No" means "No." But if your answer to everything is always or usually "No," your child will think he or she has nothing to lose by appealing your decision (or throwing a tantrum).
- **When you say "No," it is not a suggestion.** Your child must learn to understand that when you say "No," it means "Stop." So your "No" needs to be followed by either positive praise when your child responds appropriately to "No" (he or she listened!) or immediate action (consequences) when your child does not stop.
- **Adding volume is not the solution.** If you say "No" and your child ignores you, repeating it as loudly as you possibly can is not going to help him or her understand what "No" means. It will just lead your child to cover his or her ears or become very good at tuning you out, even when you're yelling at 5,000 decibels. Just as a stoplight doesn't get any brighter, there is no need to make your "No" louder. Remember — act, don't yak.
- **Saying "No" multiple times only dilutes its value.** Constantly repeating your "No" teaches your child it's a word that can be ignored, and further reduces your authority as a parent.
- **Action is the key.** Don't take it for granted that children have an inborn ability to respond to "No" — they don't. So after you have issued one "No" — that's right, one "No" — you need to take action. If your child obeys your "No," or perhaps follows your redirection, then praise him or her for doing so. On the other hand, if your child ignores your one "No," take appropriate action to help your child understand that stopping what he or she is doing is an expectation, not a suggestion. On occasion, it may be necessary to simply physically redirect your child to another activity, physically prevent him or her from doing something dangerous or, if he or she is engaging in an inappropriate behavior, to place your child in Time-Out.

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
- ***Parenting the Strong-Willed Child: The Clinically Proven Five-Week Program for Parents of Two- to Six-Year-Olds*** by Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long

Taking Time Out to Learn about Time-Out

Consequences, both positive and negative, are the keys to teaching children important skills and appropriate behaviors, and helping them learn how to manage their own behavior. For toddlers and younger children, Time-Out is a great parenting tool to address and reduce problem behaviors.

Here are some questions parents frequently ask about how to use Time-Out as an effective consequence:

- **If I've never used Time-Out with my child, how do I get started?**
  The best way to get started is to practice Time-Out with your child before you use it in response to actual misbehavior. By practicing, you show your child exactly what you expect him or her to do when a Time-Out is necessary and make it more likely that your child will respond by learning from this consequence. So explain to your child what Time-Out is and what it will be used for, and then walk through the process several times: 1) Briefly tell your child to go to Time-Out and include the reason for it; 2) Have your child sit in the Time-Out location for a few minutes; and 3) Tell your child the Time-Out is over and that he or she can leave the location. You can also briefly explain that you may work together on learning a new behavior to replace the misbehavior that earned the Time-Out, and that this will happen after the Time-Out is over.

- **What behaviors call for a Time-Out?**
  A good rule to follow is to use Time-Out as a consequence for any behavior that tempts you to raise your voice. These behaviors might include physical aggression, not following a parent's instruction and major rule violations (e.g., running in the house, jumping on furniture).

- **Where is a good location for Time-Out?**
  Time-Out involves having your child sit in a "boring" place for a brief period of time. The best

location is one that has few distractions and limits the child's access to social contact with others and activities he or she likes. Avoid sending your child to his or her room for a Time-Out; there are too many toys and fun things to do there. The best place for a Time-Out location is an adult-size chair, a quiet corner or a step where you can see and hear your child and make sure he or she is sitting quietly and isn't playing with toys or others.

- **How do I begin a Time-Out and what do I do if my child refuses to go?**
  To send your child to Time-Out, give a brief instruction that includes the reason for the Time-Out. For example, say "Jimmy, go to Time-Out now for not picking up your toys like I asked," or "Rebecca, go to Time-Out now for hitting your brother." If your child doesn't follow your instruction, you can gently but physically guide him or her to the Time-Out location. This lets your child know you are serious and will follow through to make sure he or she goes to Time-Out and completes it.

- **What do I do or say to my child during Time-Out?**
  Time-Out means completely removing the child from your attention and other stuff he or she likes. If you give your child attention or continually talk while he or she is supposed to be in Time-Out, the consequence won't work. Therefore, the cardinal rule is that any response you make to your child is nonverbal once a Time-Out begins. In other words, until you tell your child the Time-Out is over, say nothing.

- **How long should a Time-Out last?**
  The Time-Out should start only when your child is calm and quiet. A good rule is for the Time-Out to last one minute for each year of the child's age. So a 4-year-old should spend four minutes in Time-Out. Your child should not be able to leave the Time-Out until you give him or her permission to do so.

- **What should I do once the Time-Out is over?**
  Messages about discipline should be very brief, so don't lecture or revisit the event that led to the Time-Out. However, you should spend some time teaching your child appropriate behaviors that can replace the misbehavior that earned the Time-Out. As part of your teaching, give your child multiple opportunities to practice those appropriate behaviors. The easiest way to practice is to give a few simple instructions and praise your child for following them.

- **What is Time-In?**
  Time-In is the opposite of Time-Out, and it's what makes Time-Out work. Time-In is the "good stuff," the things your child enjoys, like spending time with you, reading books, playing with toys or helping you with a chore. When you send your child to Time-Out, it takes him or her away from those fun things and, over time, teaches him or her that misbehavior leads to missing out on enjoyable activities. This realization (and your continued teaching and use of praise for positive behavior) eventually should reduce your child's inappropriate behaviors.

Additional Resources

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Kid T.I.P.S.

Tough Issues, Proven Solutions

DISCIPLINE

Time-In:

Providing **Positive Time** for Your Child

Imagine if your boss or spouse ignored your expected or positive behaviors and focused only on your negative behaviors?

Just as you find it enjoyable to hear positive words or praise from your spouse, boss, co-workers or friends, your children enjoy hearing positive words and praise from you.

Time-In is an important first step in developing an effective discipline system and building a healthy relationship with your child. Time-In occurs anytime you give your child positive attention. As parents, we sometimes have a tendency to overlook our children's appropriate behavior in favor of addressing or redirecting behavior we perceive to be negative. When this happens frequently, children learn that engaging in disruptive behavior may be the quick and easy way to get their parents' attention. Although it is important to address negative behaviors with redirection or consequences, parents also have to provide Time-In so children learn what behavioral choices are appropriate. Time-In is your easy way to catch your child being good and teach him or her how to get your attention in positive ways.

Use Time-In When Your Child:

- Plays quietly instead of disturbing you with demands of attention
- Follows an instruction the first time you give it instead of being told several times
- Shares a toy instead of grabbing one from another child
- Asks for something politely instead of whining
- Accepts "No" for an answer instead of throwing a temper tantrum
- Waits his or her turn to talk instead of interrupting someone else
- Completes a chore or uses a social skill you've taught

Ways to Use Time-In:

- Give a thumbs-up
- Say "Good job!"
- Give a high-five
- Say "Nice work!"
- Give your child a pat on the back or head

- Say "I like how you…."
- Smile or wink
- Use the words "Great," "Excellent," "Fantastic" or "Super" to describe your child's good behavior
- Give your child a kiss or a hug

You also can make sure your child has plenty of Time-In by joining him or her in activities like reading books, going to the park, taking a walk or playing a game.

By using Time-In frequently and consistently, your child will come to understand that it's more fun and more pleasant to get your attention by doing things you want him or her to do rather than by doing things you want to discourage.

Time-In is your easy way to catch your child being good and teach him or her how to get your attention in positive ways.

Additional Resources

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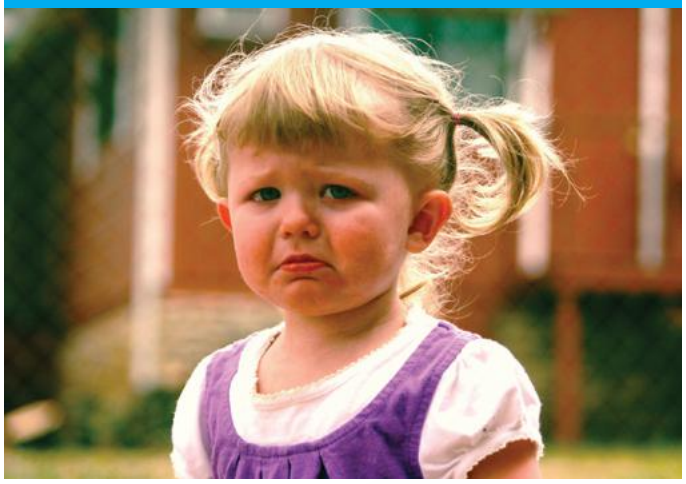
Taking the Terror Out of Toddler Tantrums



Every parent has been there or witnessed it: You're standing in the checkout line at a grocery store. You hear a shriek and the next thing you see is the unbridled fury of a toddler or preschooler who has lost control of his or her emotions.

What you may not realize is that there are usually small warning flags that signal a tantrum. And being able to recognize these signals in your toddler can help you defuse the situation before it gets out of hand.

For example, you may notice your child acting bored, whining, begging, ignoring or just constantly stopping. Cranky behavior such as fidgeting, teasing, irritability and resisting the smallest request is a big clue that an emotional meltdown may be coming soon. Some children simply start to shut down. They may display sleepy or sluggish behavior, and refuse fun things or avoid interacting with the rest of the family.

Unfortunately, many parents completely miss these cues. Perhaps it's because of our busy schedules. We have a thousand things to do and so little time to do them. And the duties of parenting can be overwhelming. However, when you can avoid a trip through the out-of-control and emotional minefield of a child's tantrums, you'll have one less thing to deal with in an all-too-busy schedule.

Responding BEFORE a tantrum happens

The best approach is to catch a problem behavior while it is small and use positive distraction to turn a bad situation around. Here are some tips:

- **DON'T start counting.** Many parents start warning and threatening their children by "counting down" before taking action to correct their behavior. Sometimes this threat just leads to a power struggle. Instead, when you notice a small problem behavior, correct it immediately. Start by giving an instruction and using a positive distraction: "You are whining. Come here and listen. Let's play Simon Says. 'Simon says to very quietly read a book.'" Another option is to give an instruction and a small consequence like a Time-Out: "You are whining. Stop talking. When the timer goes off in two minutes, you may talk again."
- **Prevent problem behavior.** Children learn best by repetition. Make it part of your child's daily routine to practice working on staying calm. Teach and practice calm-down skills three times in the morning, three times at noon and three times at night. Reward your child with praise each time he or

she practices. Your child will be nine times better at being calm, regardless of the situation.

- **Head them off at the pass.** When you notice your child fidgeting, being cranky or shutting down while you are on an outing, that's your cue to begin wrapping things up. Maybe you will miss the sale or that extra dinner item, but you will have your sanity.
- **Mix it up.** Take along a few things to distract and entertain your child. Children have short attention spans and need a variety of things to keep them occupied. Try bringing along some "finger fun" – books, hand toys, a small flashlight, stickers, flashcards, paper and special crayons, play food – to keep your little one occupied.

Responding WHEN a tantrum happens

Even when your child has a meltdown, remember that you need to control your own emotions and correct your child's behavior. Here are a few more strategies to help you and your child stay in control:

- **Train for the task.** Take time each day to practice your own personal staying-calm plan. The plan can be as simple as taking several deep breaths or as involved as reciting a positive message in your head. Also, have a game plan for what to say and do when your child acts out. It's also important that parents encourage and enforce the same behavioral expectations for their child. Devise signals or choose "clue words" that will alert you or your spouse when your emotions are starting to run high or when your child's behavior is spiraling out of control. Always be consistent. Say what you mean, and mean what you say.
- **Never surrender.** Avoid arguing or debating with your toddler. Teach, don't preach. The more rational you are, the quicker your child is likely to respond. Parents who surrender are parents who exhibit the same behaviors they're trying to stop (yelling, arguing, threatening, etc.). Don't sacrifice your adult role to act out your child's naughty behavior.
- **Return to the crime.** Your first reaction after stopping a tantrum may be to escape from the scene and get back to something more pleasant. However, your child should have the opportunity to undo whatever he or she did. Children are never too young to start taking responsibility for their actions. If your child acted out by making a mess, saying naughty words, hitting others or destroying objects, make him or her correct the situation. That means cleaning up the mess, apologizing, doing something nice for others or replacing what was broken. Children who have to deal with their negative actions learn a valuable lesson.
- **Use effective consequences.** For example, if your child acts out in a store, don't threaten to never bring him or her to that store again; that's unrealistic. More effective consequences would be taking your child to the car for a Time-Out or taking away a snack, a possession, playtime or some other privilege.

If you go to the car for a Time-Out, give your child a few minutes to calm down, and then complete the Time-Out. Then, clearly describe the appropriate behavior you expect him or her to use when you go back in the store. You may even want to help your child practice how to follow instructions and accept "No" for an answer.

After you've explained your expectations and practiced with your child, return to the store. Then let your child demonstrate what you just taught by giving simple instructions and praising your child for following your directions.

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
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The 7 P's of Toilet Training

The first step in toilet training is to make sure both you and your child are ready.

Okay, we realize no one is ever really totally ready for toilet training. But your child should be at least developmentally and behaviorally ready. That means your untrained child should be at least 2 years old and be able to do things like walk from room to room, raise and lower his or her own pants, sit independently and follow a few one-step commands without raising a big fuss.

Also, be aware that long after your child is toilet trained, daytime wetting and soiling accidents will happen from time to time – and that's the good news. The bad news is that bedwetting accidents are common all the way up to age 7, especially in boys. If accidents do become a frequent problem, you should probably ask your child's doctor about them.

Now let's get down to business. The letter P will figure powerfully in our plan. In fact, let's call it:

The 7 P's Potty Problem Prevention Plan

1. **Parent Modeling.** Frequently allow your child to go with either you or your spouse to the bathroom. It's like anything else; a smart kid can learn a lot by watching an expert. If you have some modesty about this, please park it for a while. After all, it's just you and your child, and both of you have seen all there is to see, so to speak.
2. **Potty Chair.** Give your child a chance to get used to and comfortable with the potty chair. Set it out and let your child sit on it, name it and put stickers on it.
3. **Practice.** Let your child practice using the potty chair. This practice should be "play" practice, with clothes on. The next part may be difficult for some dads, but trust me, it's only temporary. In the beginning, boys should be trained to sit on the potty chair or the toilet, for two reasons. First, sitting encourages bowel movements and so you might get a "twofer," which is a bowel movement and urination during the same sitting. Second, sitting will help avoid what one might call the "garden hose" effect. Untrained boys have not yet had to stand, urinate and aim all at the same time and may (will) accidentally spray the room (missing the potty or the

toilet). So, if you can stand it, so to speak, boys should sit. Later, when toilet training is well established, they can stand.

4. **Pampers® and Pull-ups®.** Unfortunately, for the program to work, your child must go "cold turkey" on Pampers and Pull-ups, except at bedtime. (Daytime and nighttime training programs should be separate; while you are working on daytime training, it is fine to keep kids in Pampers or Pull-ups at night.) The reason for the cold-turkey approach is simple: Pampers and Pull-ups are actually wearable toilets, and your child is unlikely to see much need for using the one in your home when he or she can much more easily use the one he or she is wearing.

5. **Prompting (Tell, Don't Ask).** As discussed in P #3, practice is important. Unfortunately, its importance will be much more apparent to you than to your child. In fact, let's tell it like it is – he or she could probably care less. So you will need to prompt your child to go to the bathroom and sit for a few minutes multiple times a day. Tell, don't ask. When we ask, what children actually hear is something like, "Would you like to go and sit on a large, cold porcelain receptacle that is full of potty water?" You can see how the logical answer to this question is "No." So instead of asking, just tell them it is time to go, take them to the bathroom and have them sit. Then refer to P #6.

6. **Praise.** In the early stages of a training program, toileting behaviors are like little sprouts in a spring garden – both need something to help them grow. For little sprouts, its water and fertilizer (so to speak). For toileting behaviors, praise and approval are the water and fertilizer that help them grow and blossom. So every time your child does any toileting behavior correctly – pulls down his or her pants, sits on the potty, whatever – be sure to praise him or her. Do this even when your child is having more accidents than successes.

   Remember, as children enter into the training phase, the training is likely to be way more important to you than it is to them. But if they get the idea that using the potty is a way for them to get their names in lights, the importance of training will quickly increase for them, along with their cooperation. You can take this a step further and use rewards. One method is to wrap little items – stickers, tiny toys, beads, gum, etc. – in tin foil and put them in jar near the bathroom. When your child achieves a success at any level, he or she gets to grab one prize (not one handful) from the jar. Praise and rewards make the training experience fulfilling, and make it more likely that children will repeat their positive toilet behaviors.

7. **Postpone.** Here in P #7 we have some really good news. You can always postpone. You can always put kids back in Pampers or Pull-ups, declare a moratorium on any discussion about toileting for a few weeks (or even months) and then start again. Your child will ultimately be motivated to be trained, possibly by something other than your prompting. So the point of P #7 is that if training is going badly, for whatever reason, you can use the time-honored method for winning a war that is being lost – declare victory and retreat.

In potty training, as in life, there are no guarantees. Helping your child learn to use the toilet can often be a "hit-and-miss" endeavor (both literally and figuratively). In general, try and remember that a child who is learning to use the toilet has to master many different skills, and success does not come all at once. So give your child time and expect some accidents. After all, wouldn't you rather be surprised than disappointed? Finally, throughout the process, try to remain calm and patient.

Additional Resource

→ ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.

Giving Your Child a **Fresh Start** to Avoid **Soiling Accidents**

Hit and miss. Stop and go. Just in time or too late.

Toilet training can be tough for parents and children alike, and a lot can go wrong before kids master this skill. Accidents are a normal part of the learning process, and parents must remember to have a lot of patience (as well as a dry set of underwear and pants).

Even when parents think their child is completely toilet trained, occasional accidents and mishaps can occur. But there's no need to worry or panic. Here are a few tips for getting through that period when your child almost has it down but isn't quite there.

Getting Started

- **Monitor the frequency of your child's bowel habits.** A normal stooling pattern for children is to have a bowel movement every day or at least every other day. If your child's movements are less frequent than this, you may want to monitor the frequency to determine if he or she is constipated or are holding his or her stool to avoid discomfort or pain. It's also possible your child is not going because he or she fears soiling his or her pants and disappointing you.
- **Monitor your child's wiping technique.** Some children have successful bowel movements in

the toilet, but aren't very good at wiping. This can result in staining or minor soiling episodes. Simply helping your child practice while making some minor adjustments in his or her technique can quickly resolve this issue.

- **Keep a journal of your child's soiling accidents.** Many children have soiling accidents because they are too busy playing and do not want to take time to use the bathroom. Other children ignore the physical cues that are associated with having a bowel movement, again, because going to the bathroom is not as important as the fun activities they enjoy throughout the day. Your journal will help you determine why your child is not going to the bathroom when he or she should. Then you can remind your child that it is important to "listen to your body" and, if necessary, set specific times before certain activities for him or her to sit on the toilet.

Continuing the Effort

If you consistently use these three steps for a few weeks and the soiling episodes continue, there are some other general steps you can take as you work toward resolving the issue.

- **Re-establish regular sit times.** A good time to have your child sit on the toilet for a bowel movement would be 10-15 minutes after each meal. Set a timer for five minutes and tell your child you want him or her to stay there at least until the timer dings. It's okay to give your child a book or toy if it helps him or her relax. Praise your child's cooperation with sitting and if he or she has a bowel movement, provide special praise and attention.
- **Again, remind your child to "listen to your body."** When your child does "listen" to the physical cues and has a bowel movement in the toilet, make a big deal about it, heap on the praise and give a special reward.
- **Check regularly for clean underwear.** If your child is clean, praise him or her. If your child has had an accident, have him or her help clean up.

Children ages 4 and older should be able to remove their soiled clothing, rinse it out and put it in the washing machine. With your help, they also should be able to clean themselves. It may be necessary to have your child sit in a few inches of water in the bathtub to avoid getting a rash. In general, your child should see this whole cleaning-up process as a "hassle" that keeps him or her away from playing and having fun. This eventually teaches your child that it's easier to leave an activity for a few minutes to go the bathroom than to have an accident and have to spend a lot of time cleaning up, changing clothes and missing out on something fun.

If you follow these steps and your child continues to have difficulties, consult your child's pediatrician.

Additional Resource

→ ***The Ins and Outs of Poop: A Guide to Treating Childhood Constipation*** by Thomas Duhamel

Toilet Training Readiness

Many parents get nervous when they think about toilet training their young child. The folklore about toilet training may have a lot to do with their anxiety.

For example, parents hear stories about children being toilet trained at six months of age. Those kinds of stories are ridiculous; a child who can't walk cannot possibly go to the toilet without help, which is what being toilet trained means. Or, a mother hears from relatives that as a child, she was easily trained and then never had an accident – day or night. Such folklore makes parents think there is some simple way — if only they knew it — to toilet train a child once and for all. No wonder parents question whether they or their child are up to the task of toilet training.

We'd like to help you get past these myths and misconceptions and provide some practical, common sense information that can help prepare you for toilet training and make it a more pleasant and satisfying experience.

Forget the folklore

You can toilet train your child effectively and efficiently if you keep in mind some basic guidelines. Do these four things before you get started with your training:

Relax

Toilet training is often the first child-rearing task parents take a strong stand on. Sure, it is important. But adding tension and pressure to the process will not make it any easier for you or your child. Remember, unlike eating, sleeping and playing, there is no natural, immediate payoff for your child when he or she uses the toilet. Your child may not always cooperate with you during toilet training, but your tension will just make things worse. You know your child eventually will learn to use the toilet, so don't make it a contest of wills. Be calm and patient, and allow your child some time to get used to the idea.

Wait

Most children are toilet trained when they are 2, 3 or 4 years old. A few children are ready earlier, but just to be on the safe side, wait until your child is at least 2 years old.

Make sure you are ready

Having other parts of your life running smoothly will help ease the chore of toilet training. So ask yourself questions like these to determine if the time is right to take on the task: Do you really want to find out where the bathroom is in every store and restaurant you go to or on every highway and street you drive down? Are you ready for potty interruptions all day long? Have the grandparents let up on their pressure about toilet training? (Remember, toilet training does not need to be a community affair. If you don't want to mention your child's efforts to anyone else, don't.) Has the crisis at work passed? Is the household relatively stable now, and will it continue to be so for a few weeks?

Make sure your child is ready

Here are a few of the basic signs or skills that can indicate when a child is ready for toilet training. Your child:

- Is at least 2 years old (children under 2 aren't physically able to consistently control their bladder and bowels)
- Can stay dry for several hours at a time
- Has regular, predictable bowel movements
- Is aware of the need to go potty (e.g., squinting face, special squatting stance, wiggling of hips/legs, etc.)
- Understands toileting words such as "wet," "dry," "dirty" and "potty"
- Asks to have his or her diaper changed
- Expresses a desire to wear underwear or "big boy/big girl" underpants
- Is able to pick up objects, lower and raise pants, and walk from room to room easily
- Is able to follow one-step instructions, such as "Sit down" or "Follow me"
- Can sit quietly for 2 to 5 minutes

6 Basic Steps to Getting Started

1. **Let your child watch you.** Children are great imitators: if you're comfortable with it, bring your child along when you use the toilet.
2. **Set out a potty chair** so as you begin toilet training, your child can get used to it.
3. **Give your child extra fluids.** This will provide more opportunities for your child to practice newly learned toileting skills.
4. **Practice, practice, practice.** Rather than asking if he or she needs to go, simply take your child to the bathroom and have him or her practice sitting and pulling his or her pants down and up. (With boys, it's best to have them start by sitting down to urinate.)
5. **Provide LOTS OF PRAISE.** Every time your child does any toileting behavior correctly (e.g., pulls down pants, sits on the potty, has a bowel movement in toilet), make a BIG DEAL about it! Occasionally giving small rewards can provide extra incentive.
6. **Don't force the action.** Like adults, children are more likely to quickly pick up a new skill when the process is stress-free.

By forgetting the folklore, following a few guidelines, getting yourself and your child ready, and preparing, toilet training should be easier for everyone involved.

Additional Resource

→ ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.

Approaching Your Child's Teacher

You can help your child get the most out of the school year by developing a positive relationship with his or her teacher early on.

Communicating with your child's teacher is necessary so you can understand your child's strengths and needs, learn how he or she gets along with peers and help solve academic, social or behavioral problems.

Here are some tips for approaching your child's teacher to address four common concerns:

- **I am concerned that my child is falling behind academically.** Declining grades, homework difficulties and continued academic concerns all warrant a conversation with your child's teacher. During your conversation, explain the purpose for your visit before stating your concern and use inclusive language (we, us), whenever possible. For example, say "I wanted to meet so we can help Sam reach his full potential." Avoid words that imply there is a problem with current strategies (even if you believe there is one). Saying "We need to come up with a more effective plan," may not be as effective as saying "I'd like us to work together to help my son do his best. How can we make some modifications in the plan?" Also, include specific information or describe a pattern of behavior you have noticed (e.g., "Sam has been in his small reading group for two months. I am concerned because he is still reading at a second-grade level."). By emphasizing data or facts, you can stay focused on solving the problem and avoid the appearance of blaming the teacher or causing him or her to be defensive.
- **My child is frequently teased at school.** Seeing your child upset because of what peers have done or said to him or her is difficult. It may be tempting to ask your child's teacher whether the offending peers have been punished or other details about them. Instead, devise a plan with your child to handle teasing. Encourage your child to ignore it and teach him or her when a teacher should be notified. Share this plan with your child's teacher and ask the teacher to praise or acknowledge your child's efforts to follow through with it. This strategy also could be used to address other classroom concerns.

- **I am concerned that my child doesn't get along with his or her teacher.** Personality clashes between children and teachers are common. They can provide opportunities to teach your child how to get along with people he or she does not like. If there are specific practices or procedures you believe are harmful or are creating difficulties in the classroom, engage your child's teacher in a problem-solving conversation. Ask the teacher if he or she has noticed these difficulties, and share some of your own experiences talking with your child about a certain topic or managing a specific behavior. Acknowledge the teacher's unique perspective and share with him or her what you've found to be helpful at home.
- **I am concerned that the teacher is not doing enough to address my child's needs.** This can be an especially difficult conversation. Review previously agreed-upon strategies to support your child and start a discussion with the teacher about barriers that may be preventing these strategies from being implemented. Acknowledge that employing new strategies takes time. Ask what you can do at home or in the classroom to support school efforts. If the teacher resists your efforts and your child continues to have academic or behavioral difficulties, it may be time seek help from the school psychologist or an outside professional.

Other tips for approaching your child's teacher:

- **Attend open house nights and other school events.** This sends the message that you are invested in supporting the school and your child's teacher. Showing an interest in the school early on provides opportunities for you and your child's teacher to have conversations that are not always about solving a problem or addressing a concern, which is important for building a positive relationship. It also helps you stay informed about school expectations and procedures.

- **Find out how your child's teacher prefers to be contacted.** Ask the teacher if emails, telephone calls or in-person visits during pick-up or drop-off times work best.
- **Find out if you can observe or help in the classroom.** Your willingness to be in the classroom tells the teacher you view working on your child's success as a partnership.
- **Don't adopt the viewpoint that no news is good news.** If you have concerns about how your child is doing at school, reach out to the teacher; don't wait to be contacted first.

Remember that you and your child's teacher both want the same thing – for your child to be successful in the classroom. Acknowledge the teacher's efforts to work toward this goal and thank him or her for instituting helpful strategies. Even if you do not agree about everything your child's teacher does, keeping your shared goal in mind will help you effectively navigate tricky situations.

Additional Resource

→ ***Home-School Conferences - A Guide for Parents***
Andrea Canter, Ph.D., NCSP

Avoiding the Drama of **Completing Homework**

The Problem:

Your daughter is having problems getting her homework done. She promises to complete it after she "takes a break."

This usually includes having a snack, watching TV, playing outside and calling a friend. However, once her break is over, she refuses to do the homework. Your daughter's daily homework routine is turning into a huge drama, one that is similarly being played out in homes across America.

The Solution:

Here are a few tips to make your child's homework routine more effective and manageable:

1. **First, establish a rule of "we work before we play."** This means your child needs to do homework before using electronics, playing outside and enjoying other fun activities.
2. **Homework should be done in a quiet location that is free of distractions.** This means no access to electronics, especially phones. The kitchen table is usually NOT the best place to do homework. But if your child needs close supervision for homework, then the kitchen table may be your best option.
3. **Set a specific time for homework to be done, preferably as soon after school as possible.** Give your child 10 or 15 minutes to take a break, eat a snack and talk about his or her day. Then it is time to get down to business.
4. **If your child has after-school activities, then set a homework time as soon as possible after those activities, ideally before dinner.** If that is not possible, have him or her complete homework right after dinner. Avoid pushing homework time too far into the evening because your child will get tired, completing homework will get more challenging and his or her bedtime will get later. This might adversely affect the quantity and quality of your child's sleep.
5. **Children in kindergarten and first grade often do not have homework. Regardless, establish a**

homework routine as soon as your child begins school. This might include taking 5 or 10 minutes after school to read a story, color, practice letters and so forth. Establishing a routine at an early age will make it easier for your child to follow that routine once he or she actually has homework.

6. **Think "large to small" to avoid a last-minute rush to get bigger assignments done.** By teaching your child to break down larger, long-term assignments like book reports into smaller parts and make them part of the daily homework routine, you will help your child learn to manage time more effectively and complete projects on time, reducing everyone's frustration.

7. **If your child seems to consistently be spending long periods of time doing homework, check with your child's teacher(s) to see if this matches the teacher's expectations.** Your child may be receiving an inordinate amount of homework and may be struggling to complete it in a timely manner. For certain children, homework assignments may need to be modified to make them more manageable.

Additional Resources

- **parent-institute.com**
- **reducehomeworkstress.com**
- ***Getting Organized for Schoolwork and Homework: Homework Time Made Easier*** by Neil McNerney, M.Ed., LPC
- ***More Effective Homework: A Parent's Guide to Helping Out without Freaking Out*** by Neil McNerney, M.Ed., LPC
- ***How to Help Your Child with Homework: The Complete Guide to Encouraging Good Study Habits and Ending the Homework Wars*** by J.S. Schumm, Ph.D.

Establishing a routine at an early age will make it easier for your child to follow that routine once he or she actually has homework.

Working Collaboratively with School Staff When You Have a Concern

As parents, we're constantly observing and monitoring our children's health, happiness, development, friendships, and school progress, to mention a few. It can be difficult when we have questions or concerns about school to get accurate and complete information from our child. It's common for a child to provide one perspective on a situation, which may leave parents with questions. Also, parents attempts at conversations are often met with short, vague responses. For example, when parents ask how the child's school day was, children often respond with some version of, "it was fine."

Here are some ways to gather information about your child's school day if you have concerns:

- **Observe social interactions** when you drop your child off at school, pick your child up from school, and attend school events.
- **If your child is involved in any extracurricular activities** through school, observe your child's interactions with peers, teachers, and coaches.
- **Ensure that your child completes assigned homework**, so you know what is expected and how well your child is learning the material.
- **Review your child's work that gets sent home.** Many teachers use folders to send completed and graded work home on a daily or weekly basis.
- **Read and respond to emails and notes** that teachers send home.
- **Monitor your child's grades if the teacher uses an online grade platform.** This could tell you if your child is submitting work by the deadlines, how your child is performing on daily work, how your child is performing on tests, and attendance information.
- **Listen to conversations that your child has with siblings and friends about school.** Car rides can be a great time to just listen and learn about your child.

If, despite your efforts to gather information, you continue to have concerns about your child's academic progress, behavior, and/or social relationships, here are some tips:

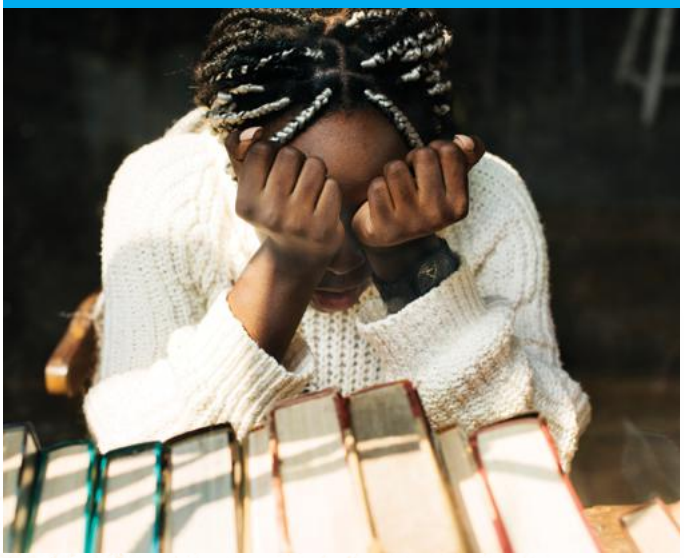
- **You as parents are your child's first and most important teachers.** Have your child practice at home and establish a daily study routine. Make

sure that your child consistently completes assigned homework.

- **Ensure that your child is getting enough sleep and eating breakfast each morning.**
- **Contact your child's classroom teacher or homeroom teacher.** Ask neutral, open-ended questions to gather information. Examples of questions might include the following:
  - ***He seems to get frustrated when doing math homework. Do you have any concerns about his progress in math?***
  - ***I've noticed behavior sheets in his backpack. Could we please arrange a time to talk, so I can better understand the concerns and find ways to help?***
  - ***What do you notice at recess? He tells me that no one will play with him.***
- **If parent-teacher conferences are approaching,** you might send a message ahead of time asking to address a few specific topics. This will allow your child's teacher to pay special attention to any areas that are of concern and to prepare information ahead of time.
- **If it will be a while until parent-teacher conferences,** you could contact your child's teacher and ask to arrange a brief phone call or meeting to discuss your concerns.
- **If you have discussed concerns with your child's teacher and the concerns persist,** you could arrange a meeting with your child's school counselor to discuss them. School counselors often spend time in classrooms providing lessons on social/emotional learning topics, and they may facilitate friendship groups to assist students with developing healthy friendships.
- **If you continue to have concerns,** you could request a multi-disciplinary team meeting. These teams are often comprised of professionals from several disciplines, and may include a classroom teacher, special education teacher, speech therapist, school counselor, school psychologist, and school principal. The goals of this type of meeting are to discuss concerns, to determine if additional supports/interventions are needed, and if so, to develop an intervention plan. If an intervention plan is developed, this same team will schedule a follow-up meeting to evaluate progress and to determine appropriate next steps. It is helpful to be patient and focus on data when monitoring progress.
- **If your child has a diagnosed medical condition that you feel may negatively affect your child's learning,** your child may qualify for a 504 Accommodation Plan. Examples of medical conditions may include anxiety, ADHD, and Crohn's Disease. When a 504 Plan is in place, school staff provide accommodations to limit the impact of the health stressor on your child's education. Examples of common accommodations are extra time on tests, taking tests in a private space that is quiet, and being allowed to use the restroom whenever it is needed. To determine if this is appropriate, contact your child's school counselor to discuss your concerns and specifically ask about a 504 Plan.
- **If your child's academic performance falls significantly below grade level in reading, writing, or math,** and your child has not responded to other interventions, school staff may ask your permission to conduct a special education evaluation. This type of evaluation often includes reviewing your child's academic records, observing your child in the classroom, and also may involve completing rating forms and additional evaluation of your child's academic skills. Parents would meet with the school team to discuss the results of the evaluation, determine if your child qualifies for additional services, and if so, develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Remember that you and your child's teacher(s) are partners, working toward shared goals. Show appreciation toward your child's teacher(s) and communicate early on if you have a concern, asking how you can help.

Better Understanding Dyslexia and Learning Disabilities in Reading



If you child has difficulties with reading, you might wonder if he or she has dyslexia or a learning disability in reading. It's important to understand the general difference between these two terms, especially when you want to identify the best plan of action to improve your child's reading skills. This resource explains the basic differences between dyslexia and a learning disability in reading and effective interventions for both.

What Are the Keys to Strong Reading Skills?

The National Reading Panel has identified five areas of reading instruction that are necessary to develop strong reading skills:

1. Phonemic Awareness – understanding and pronouncing the sounds that make up words
2. Phonics – accurately blending together all sounds in a word
3. Reading Fluency – reading smoothly and accurately
4. Vocabulary – understanding what words mean
5. Reading Comprehension – understanding main ideas and supporting details in a passage, article or story

Students begin developing these skills in preschool when they learn letter names and sounds. Reading instruction continues throughout elementary school as students grow in their abilities to read smoothly and accurately. Abilities transition from learning to read to reading to learn in third grade. If students have not mastered the five areas of reading instruction before this time, they may experience difficulties learning in other subjects as well.

Reading skill deficits may include reversing the order of letters or words, difficulties with accurately identifying and combining letter sounds, reading slowly and trouble with comprehension. If you notice that your child is having these problems and is falling behind in school, you may consider asking for extra help from your child's school or a private tutoring service. You also may consider having your child tested for dyslexia or a learning disability in reading.

What Is the Difference between Dyslexia and a Learning Disability in Reading?

Policy makers, psychologists and school administrators have not yet identified one specific way to distinguish between dyslexia and a learning disability in reading. However, it may be helpful to think of "a learning disability in reading" as a common name for general difficulties with reading and think of "dyslexia" as a medical term that refers to very specific reading skill deficits.

Definitions of both learning disabilities in reading and dyslexia include difficulties in the five major reading skill areas identified by the National Reading Panel. It is possible that children who have a learning disability in reading may show signs of dyslexia.

How Is Dyslexia Assessed and Diagnosed?

There is no one assessment for dyslexia. Assessments for dyslexia should examine all five areas of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel (on front side). It is important that anyone who evaluates your child to determine if he or she has dyslexia not only conducts an assessment but also interviews you and your child, observes your child's reading, and reviews his or her education records and recent homework assignments to understand all of his or her reading skills and needs.

What Are Some Effective Interventions for Dyslexia and a Learning Disability in Reading?

High-quality reading interventions will have similar components, whether or not a student has dyslexia or a learning disability in reading. Because dyslexia commonly includes difficulties with phonemic awareness, decoding and spelling that may impact reading fluency and comprehension, effective interventions for dyslexia should target skills in these areas. High-quality interventions for children with a learning disability in reading are also designed to improve these skills. Essential components for improving reading include direct instruction in decoding strategies, phonemic awareness, reading fluency and reading comprehension. Direct

instruction is another way of saying that children will have frequent opportunities to practice specific skills, and that they will receive corrective feedback and rewards for accurate responses. Any reading intervention that is implemented should be evidence-based, which means scientific research has demonstrated that the intervention is effective for improving reading skills.

Additional Resources

→ ***Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*** by Sally Shaywitz, M.D.

Parent-Teacher Conferences:

A Partnership for Improving Your Child's Classroom Success

One of the best opportunities parents have to connect with their child's school is parent-teacher conferences. Attending parent-teacher conferences sends the message that you value what takes place at your child's school and that his or her learning is important.

Research also shows that collaborative home-school relationships are linked to high academic achievement and low rates of disruptive behaviors in students.

Here are some tips to help you make the most of your parent-teacher conferences:

- **Focus on the positive.** Ask your child's teacher what he or she believes your child is doing well and what progress your child has made since the beginning of the school year, or since the last time you had a conversation about his or her performance. It's sometimes easy to forget to talk about the positives and focus only on the problems, so be intentional about discovering what your child is doing well.
- **When discussing concerns or problems, try to find solutions as a partner with your child's teachers.** Thank your child's teacher for what he or she has done to address any difficulties and for bringing them to your

attention. Ask what you can do at home to help your child build skills or gain knowledge that will support efforts in the classroom. Convey an open and accepting attitude as you brainstorm solutions.

- **Ask your child's teacher to let you know when new strategies are implemented to address concerns and whether or not they are effective.** This way, you can stay informed about what your child's teacher is doing in the classroom, monitor progress (or lack of progress) and use the information as a guide in determining whether you need to seek outside assistance.

Other questions you can ask at parent-teacher conferences include:

- How is my child doing relative to the other students in the class?
- Is my child on track academically and socially for his or her grade level?
- What does he or she need to improve?
- What skills does he or she seem to have continuing difficulties with?
- How does he or she interact socially with peers?

After attending parent-teachers conferences, debriefing with your child will convey that he or she is part of the team. During this conversation:

- **Focus on the positives** that you and your child's teacher discussed.
- **Emphasize specific behaviors** that you, your child and your child's teacher can use as you move forward to address concerns and support progress.

One more valuable tip is to be proactive. Don't assume there are no problems or concerns in the classroom because your child's teacher has not contacted you. Make it a point to regularly communicate with your child's teacher about specific questions or concerns you might have in between parent-teacher conferences. This is another way you can help your child get the most out of his or her classroom experiences. Additional Resource

Additional Resource

→ ***Home-School Conferences - A Guide for Parents***
Andrea Canter, Ph.D., NCSP

Disciplining Your Child at Home for School Misbehavior

The Problem:

Parents frequently have questions about how they should discipline their children at home for misbehavior that occurs at school.

They usually want to address school misbehaviors at home for two reasons:

- To reduce future misbehavior at school
- To promote consistency in expectations for their child's behavior at school and at home

Conversations at home about behavior at school can be difficult for children and parents. Children may dread talking to their parents after they already received a consequence for their behavior at school. Parents may struggle to find a way to explain to their child that what he or she did at school was not acceptable without ruining the whole family's evening at home.

In most cases, teachers have discipline strategies in place for dealing with misbehavior. Discipline at school usually involves having a child lose recess for the day, doing an extra assignment or classroom chore, or staying after school for detention. Most teachers also routinely notify a child's parents when a child breaks a school rule.

When they learn of their child's misbehavior, parents at least want to talk to him or her about the issue and may even want to give a consequence like taking away a privilege at home.

The intended outcome of using consequences both at school and at home is to help children learn this lesson: **"When I break a rule at school, I'm also going to get punished when I get home. Therefore, I don't want to break rules at school."**

But while this makes sense in theory, children can have a difficult time applying their experiences in one setting to change their behavior in a different setting. So punishment and lectures at home for misbehavior that occurs at school often only create opportunities for negative communication between parents and children.

Furthermore, repeatedly taking away privileges at home for misbehavior at school may reduce a child's motivation to follow any rules because he or she only ends up getting more negative consequences.

The Solution:

Before addressing a school misbehavior issue with your child, make sure you have all the information you need from your child's school.

- **When did the misbehavior occur?**
- **Did it occur during a structured (e.g., math class) or unstructured (e.g., recess) time?**
- **What was happening before the incident?** Was your child arguing with a peer? Was he or she told "No"? Did another student take something away from your child? Had an adult just given an instruction?
- **Was your child aware of the expectation or rule he or she broke?**
- **How did the school address the behavior with your child?** Did he or she receive a consequence?
- **What will the school/teacher do in the future to prevent this behavior?**

Once you have this information, thank your child's teacher or administrator for letting you know what happened and let him or her know how you intend to address the issue with your child.

Then sit down with your child and talk. If the misbehavior appears to be an isolated incident involving a minor infraction (e.g., talking out of turn, forgetting homework, not sharing, calling another student a name, etc.), tell your child in a calm and matter-of-fact tone, "Your teacher let me know that (describe your child's behavior) happened at school today and that your consequence was (describe the consequence). I am disappointed that this happened, and I hope you have a better day at school tomorrow." Keep this conversation short and to the point!

If relevant, you and your child can briefly brainstorm specific ways he or she can avoid similar incidents in the future.

If the misbehavior is serious or has happened two or three times in the past, you may want to develop a system for managing this behavior at home

and school and set up a procedure to regularly communicate with your child's teacher.

On days when your child displays positive behavior throughout the school day, praise him or her at home and let your child choose a special reward from a "reward list." Rewards might include going to the park with Mom or Dad, playing on the iPad or picking a special dessert for dinner. Make sure your child gets to select a reward every day he or she has a good day at school.

When your child does not have a good day, he or she does not get a reward. Briefly explain why by saying "I see you did not meet your goal at school today. You do not get to pick a reward. Let's try again tomorrow to have a good day." You may have a brief conversation about what your child needs to do to have a good day, but keep it short and sweet!

Then have your child follow his or her normal after-school routine and play with your child as you normally would. Over time, this approach can help reduce your child's misbehaviors at school and help him or her understand that good behavior earns enjoyable rewards.

When Kids Don't Want to Go to School

Many children are reluctant to attend school at some point in their lives, making it one of the most common childhood behavior problems.

The reasons children don't want to go to school vary. One reason is high rates of school-related anxiety. Reluctance also tends to be worse after kids have been out on sick days or vacations because it's hard for them to return after time away from the classroom.

Sometimes, reluctance to attend school is just a temporary thing, and is easily remedied with a conversation between a parent and the child. A bigger problem occurs when reluctance transitions to outright refusal.

School refusal behavior is defined as a child refusing to attend school and/or having difficulty remaining in class for an entire day. A number of factors make refusal different from normal avoidance. These include:

- How long a child has been avoiding school
- How much distress the child associates with attending school
- How strongly the child resists
- How much the child's resistance is interfering with his or her (and family) life

The consequences for missing school intermittently or over a lengthy period may include family conflict and stress, problems in learning and earning good grades, difficulty making and keeping friends, dropping out of school and delinquency.

Signs of School Difficulties

A number of signs can indicate a child may be having difficulty attending and staying in school, including:

- Fear of specific things at school: tests, teachers, other kids, riding the bus
- Physical/somatic complaints
- Temper tantrums
- Refusal to get out of bed or get dressed
- Clinging to parents
- Asking the same questions over and over (Can I just stay home? Can't we do homeschooling?)
- Arriving late for school
- Crying in the classroom
- Missing school during test or presentation days
- Asking to see the nurse and then calling parents to be picked up
- Truancy/missing certain classes or leaving school before specific classes

- Withdrawal, extreme shyness at school and different behavior in different classes (may indicate poor peer relationships or bullying)

Understanding the Problem

To effectively address this behavior, the first step is to determine the reason for a child's reluctance or refusal to attend school. Some of the most common reasons include:

- **Bullying:** Verbal, physical or relational bullying
- **Learning problems:** Specific learning disabilities, ADHD, expressive or receptive language problems, memory deficits
- **Medical problems:** Chronic medical problems such as asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, cancer, epilepsy
- **Family stress/illness or conflict:** Chronic illness in the family, child needs to work to support the family

One of the most extreme reasons is an anxiety disorder. Nearly any of a number of anxiety disorders —separation anxiety, selective mutism, panic disorder, OCD and social phobia, to name a few — could be the culprit, and refusing to go to school may be just one symptom.

A child also may have a lot of "suspicious" sick days and/or make frequent trips to the school nurse. Anxiety can be shown in physical ways, so symptoms could be consistent with anxiety about attending or staying in school. If you are in this situation, we recommend getting your child checked out by a pediatrician so as not to overlook a possible medical problem.

How Can I Help My Child?

Here are several steps you can take if your child regularly doesn't want to go to school:

- Have a mental health professional who is familiar with school-based anxiety or school refusal complete an assessment with your child to determine the reason(s) and severity of the school refusal.
- Learn and use skills that can help reduce child and parent anxiety/distress.
- Reward your child's appropriate behavior of attending school and provide negative consequences for inappropriate, attention-seeking behavior such as tantrums and truancy.

Working with Your Child's School on a Plan for Attending and Staying in School

Identifying and working with appropriate school personnel to address your child's school refusal behaviors is another important step you can take. Areas to focus on include:

- Discussing your child's absences and amount of school time he or she misses
- Reviewing your child's current grades, homework and credits
- Discussing your child's current behaviors in school
- Exploring possible barriers to school attendance (learning problems, peer problems)
- Becoming familiar with school rules regarding attendance and truancy, and the legal or disciplinary actions that can result when a child is not going to school
- Making a plan and setting an expected timeline for your child's re-integration to school, while also considering possible obstacles
- Discussing whether a 504 or IEP is appropriate for addressing learning and social-emotional issues that are interfering with your child's school attendance

Additional Resources

- ***Getting your Child to say "yes" to school: A Guide for Parents of youth with school refusal behavior*** by C.A. Kearney
- ***Helping Your Child Overcome Separation Anxiety or School Refusal*** by A.R. Eisen, L.B. Engler and J. Sparrow
- ***When Children Refuse School: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Approach Parent Workbook*** by C.A. Kearney and A.M. Albano

Tracking Your Teen's School Progress

Are you having trouble keeping track of your teen's school progress? Have you been shocked to discover your teen is failing only after it was too late to salvage the quarter or semester grade?

In general, parents receive less and less feedback from school as their children get older. This is understandable: The older the student, the more responsibility he or she should be given to take care of things personally.

However, you are still the parent and need to know how your child is doing in school. Even if the responsibility of completing homework rests on your teen, you need information about deficiencies before it is too late. You can then take your own action. You might consider providing extra help for your teen, withholding privileges or just asking for a heads-up from school about possible red flags. A bad grade might simply be a snag in one class, but failing grades are also an early sign of problems such as chemical use, negative peer influence, bullying or internalizing problems such as depressed mood or anxiousness.

Managing School Matters

If you have concerns about your teen's academic or behavioral activities:

- **Identify important school staff with whom you should meet.** This includes your teen's teachers, the school principal, counselors, the school secretary and possibly others.
- **Introduce yourself** to school professionals, and tell them who your child is.
- **Project an attitude of cooperation** with school professionals. Tell them you want to work with them to ensure your teen's success in school.
- **Determine how often you should contact school staff.** Base your decision on your teen's needs and his or her teachers' schedules.
- **Make a plan for maintaining contact** with school staff, such as weekly phone calls, school notes, assignment books and emails.

- **Make a special plan to work together with the school** when problems in your teen's schoolwork or behavior arise.
- **In addition to these actions, be sure to attend all scheduled parent-teacher conferences and other events** where you can at least touch base with your teen's teachers about his or her progress.

Many parents contact the school only when they are upset about something. The best way to build a strong relationship with school staff is to make positive contact whenever possible. Show appreciation for the efforts teachers and counselors are making to help your teen. Everyone benefits when the relationships between school and home are positive and cooperative.

The older the student, the more responsibility he or she should be given to take care of things personally.

Additional Resources

- → **nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/families-and-educators**
- → ***Homework: A Guide for Parents*** by Peg Dawson, EDD, NCSP
- → ***Home-School Conferences: A Guide for Parents*** by Andrea Canter, Ph.D., NCSP

Establishing Healthy Napping Habits

All children need adequate sleep to function at their best. For young children, naps are critical to achieving the total sleep time they require. And, like they do at bedtime, some children may resist naptime.

Every parent knows how a missed nap can wreak havoc on an otherwise perfectly good day. Unfortunately, when naptime becomes too frustrating, parents often decide to stop daily naps, even though their young children still need them for proper growth, development and healthy emotional functioning. The solution is to establish a positive naptime routine and schedule.

Tips for Pleasant and Successful Toddler Naptimes:

- **Establish a healthy naptime routine from the beginning.** As an infant, your child will initially need your help to learn to fall asleep. Put your child down for naps in his crib or bed, in a quiet, dark room.
- **Your child's age matters when it comes to napping and what to expect.** During the first year of life, children take more than one nap per day. On average, 1-month-olds nap four times per day, 3-month-olds nap three times

per day and 6-month-olds nap two times per day. Children may continue to take more than one nap per day until they are 18 months old.

- **Paying attention to how long your child stays awake between naps will help you develop an effective naptime plan.** At one month, infants are ready to nap after being awake for 90 minutes. Watch for your infant's sleep cues (rubbing eyes, crying, fussing) after 60 to 75 minutes of wakefulness so you can help him or her fall asleep. As your child gets older, he or she will stay awake for longer periods of time between naps, usually in 90-minute increments (i.e., 90 minutes, 3 hours, 4.5 hours, etc.).
- **Pay attention to your child's sleep-wake schedule.** At 18 months to 2 years, toddlers typically sleep nine hours at night and nearly three hours during the day. Three-year-olds typically sleep 10 hours at night and just over 90 minutes during the day. If you try to put your child down too early, he or she may not be ready to nap. If you put your child down too late, he or she may have trouble falling asleep at bedtime. For children who nap twice a day, late morning and mid-afternoon naps are most common. For children who nap once a day, a mid-day nap – sometime between noon and 3 p.m. – is best.
- **Set a firm rule that your toddler must stay in his or her room during naptime.** It's fair to expect your toddler to sleep (or at least rest) for 60 to 90 minutes. If your child comes out of his or her room before that time frame, help your child return to the room right away. If he or she comes out again, help your child return and close the door for a short time.
- **If your toddler is at home with you during the day, make sure he or she sleeps in a bed or crib for naps.** Allowing a child to sleep in a place (e.g., your bed, a couch) that is different from where he or she sleeps at night can cause difficulties at bedtime.

- **Teach your child to fall asleep on his or her own.** Resist lying down with your child because, over time, he or she will learn to fall asleep only when you are there. That will make it difficult for your child to fall asleep without you being present, both during naptime and bedtime.
- **Stay calm and follow through** with your child's regular nap routine, even when things get stressful or difficult.
- **Children begin to give up naps at around age 4.** As you notice that your child needs a nap less often, replace napping with daily quiet time. During quiet time, your child can look at or read books or play quietly with toys in his or her room. This will help your child feel rested and energized, and ready to tackle the remainder of the day.

Additional Resources

- ***Good Night, Sweet Dreams, I Love You: Now Get Into Bed and Go to Sleep!*** by Patrick C. Friman
- ***Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*** by Richard Ferber
- ***The Bedtime Pass*** by Connie J. Schnoes, Ph.D.

Managing Nighttime Wetting

Nighttime wetting is fairly common, especially for younger children. In fact, up to 20% of 5-year-olds wet the bed at night.

Although most children outgrow nighttime wetting by the time they reach school age, many continue to experience at least occasional episodes of wetting well after they've started school (up to 3% of children still wet the bed at age 9).

This can become very frustrating for both children and parents. A number of factors can contribute to this problem; some are medical or developmental, while others are behavioral. If a child continues to have frequent nighttime wetting by age 7 or 8, it may be time to intervene. Here are several strategies that may help you resolve this issue:

- **First and foremost, discuss the issue with your child's pediatrician.** You'll want to rule out any medical causes for nighttime wetting before turning to behavioral intervention. Some physicians may prescribe medications that treat nighttime wetting. These medications can be very effective, but they may interfere with behavioral strategies prescribed by a behavioral health specialist. If you're getting assistance in

both the medical and behavioral areas, it is important that your child's pediatrician and behavioral health specialist coordinate their treatment approaches.

- **Motivation is a key to successfully addressing nighttime wetting.** Both you and your child must make a commitment to taking the steps necessary to eliminate the problem.
- **Teaching children how to "hold" their urine can be beneficial.** This helps them strengthen the muscles that are associated with controlling urine flow and extending bladder capacity. Your child's pediatrician may suggest using "Kegel exercises" to help strengthen these muscles. These exercises include having your child hold his or her urine as long as possible before urinating or stopping urination in midstream.
- **When your child remains dry throughout the night, give him or her lots of praise and a reward.** The reward might be a special activity or item that you think will motivate him or her to continue having dry nights.
- **One of the most effective ways to treat nighttime wetting is using a wet alarm.** A product called the Wet Alarm 3, which can be purchased online, is a sensor that clips on to your child's pajamas. As soon he or she starts to urinate, an alarm sounds. Besides alerting children that they have started to wet, the alarm also motivates them to stay dry in order to prevent the alarm from sounding.
- **When your child does wet the bed at night, it is important to have him or her remove the wet bedding and clothing and replace them with dry items.** Your child also should help wash and dry the wet bedding and clothing the next day. You'll need to provide some supervision for this, but again, it is important that your child helps take responsibility for dealing with the results of his or her nighttime wetting.

- **Finally, limiting the amount of liquids your child consumes at night before bedtime will not eliminate wetting.** Research shows that this does not necessarily eliminate wetting and may only limit the amount of wetting that occurs.

Additional Resource

→ ***It's No Accident: Breakthrough Solutions to your Child's Wetting, Constipation, UTI's and Other Potty Problems*** by Steve Hodges

Sleep Tips
for Children of All Ages

Sleep is essential to every person's physical, psychological and emotional health, as well as their learning, growth and development.

This is especially true for children, whose ideas about their sleep habits are sometimes very different from those of their parents.

We are not born knowing how to fall asleep; we must learn. Parents need to teach their children how to fall asleep when they're tired. Here are a few tips and recommendations for children across all ages. (By the way, the current recommendation for adults is nine hours of sleep per night!)

Infants and Toddlers

- Infants up to 6 months of age are asleep more than they're awake. Think in terms of 90 minutes; infants are ready to sleep again after being awake for 90 minutes, regardless of how long they've slept. As they get older, they increase their awake time in 90-minute increments (i.e., they gradually move from being awake 90 minutes to being awake 180 minutes between naps).
- Infants typically wake for and need nighttime feedings until they are 6 months old.
- By the time they are 1, most infants take two naps – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. By age 2, children typically take one nap in the early afternoon. Naps are important until children reach age 4, when they start to give them up.

Recommended Total Hours of Sleep for Infants and Toddlers (by age)

1 week:	16 hours	12 months:	11.75 hours
1 month:	14 hours	2 years:	11.5 hours
6 months:	12.5 hours		

Preschoolers and School-Aged Children

If you have kids between the ages of 3 and 10, you're probably used to some sort of bedtime avoidance. "I need a glass of water!" is a common one. Or maybe it's the child who sneaks under the covers in Mom's and Dad's bed for a late-night snuggle.

For all sorts of reasons, kids in this age range often don't like the idea of going to sleep. This is

understandable; after all, in a child's mind, sleep means "the fun of the day is over." So it's no wonder that many young kids hold out as long as they can before finally drifting off to sleep.

- We learn how to fall asleep, so if your child is awake in the night, something is probably different in his or her sleep routine. Maybe your child fell asleep next to Dad or a sibling, and now that person is not there. Transition objects like a stuffed animal or blanket can help if they are part of the bedtime routine.
- "White noise," such as a fan, can help a child fall asleep or fall back to sleep.
- If your child has nightmares, stay calm and reassure your child he or she is safe.
- Nightlights in your child's room are okay, but are not necessary.
- Create a bedtime routine and set a regular bedtime that allows your child to get enough sleep.

Recommended Total Hours of Sleep for Preschoolers and School-Aged Children (by age)

4 years:	11 hours	8 years:	10.25 hours
5 years:	10.75 hours	10 years:	10 hours
6 years:	10.5 hours		

Tweens and Teens

Many changes in sleep habits occur just before and during the teenage years. Many, if not most, teenagers would prefer to stay up late and sleep late. Here are a few tips for helping your teen sleep better at night and get up when he or she is supposed to:

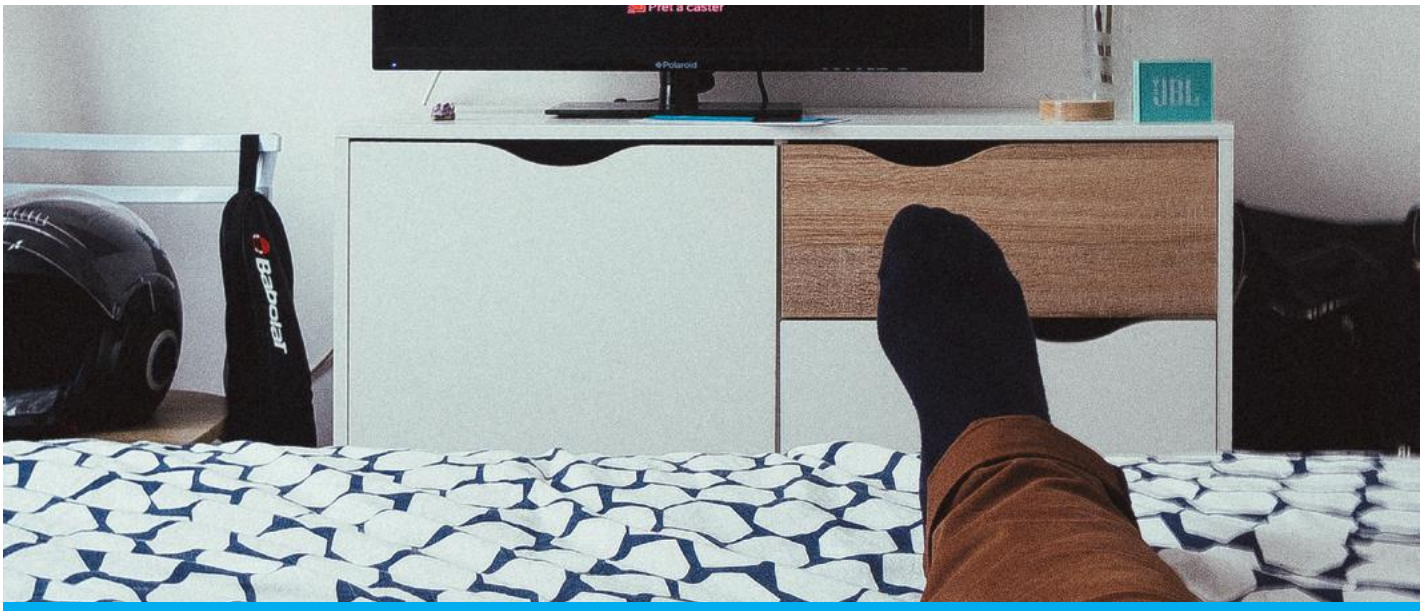
- Practice healthy sleep hygiene habits: nothing but sleep happens in bed; the bedroom should be quiet and dark for sleep; your child gets ready for bed just before bedtime.
- Work with your teen to set a bedtime and stick to it. (Teenagers are very good at finding all kinds of excuses for not going to bed on time and reasons for staying up later.) Make sure the lights are out by the designated time.
- Your teenager should finish all homework before 10 p.m. Unfinished homework is a common excuse for why teens can't get to sleep, and it's often difficult for parents to send their teens to bed knowing they haven't completed their homework.
- Remove or turn off ALL electronics at bedtime. If necessary, have your teenager turn them over to you at night.
- Your teen should avoid drinking caffeine after 7 p.m. Too many teenagers drink highly caffeinated products at night to help them focus on their homework. This makes it very difficult to fall asleep.
- Do not allow your teenager to sleep well into the afternoon on the weekends. He or she can stay up later on weekend nights, but only until a reasonable time. Getting away from a sleep routine over the weekends can disrupt your teen's sleep schedule during the school week.

Recommended Total Hours of Sleep for Tweens and Teens (by age)

12 years:	9.75 hours	15 years:	9.25 hours
13 years:	9.5 hours	17 & older:	9 hours

Additional Resources

- ***Good Night, Sweet Dreams, I Love You: Now Get Into Bed and Go to Sleep!*** by Patrick C. Friman
- ***Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems*** by Richard Ferber
- ***The Bedtime Pass*** by Connie J. Schnoes, Ph.D.



Is It Time to Pull the Plug on Your Teen's Bedroom TV?

Does it seem like your teenager spends too much time watching television? Do conversations about your teen's viewing habits and the possibility of limiting screen time usually go nowhere?

If so, you are not alone. According to the University of Michigan Health System, 71% of children (ages 8-18) have a television in their bedroom. Oftentimes, parents feel overwhelmed when it comes to monitoring their kids' television time. Most either overreact by over-monitoring all technology, all of the time, or underreact by allowing their teens to watch whatever they want, for as long as they want, any time they want, without supervision or limits.

Benefits of Removing a Bedroom TV

If your teen has a television in his or her room, there is a simple, practical solution for reducing that type of screen time. **Remove the television!** It's a decision backed by research and one we wholeheartedly endorse. Here's why:

- **Your teen will get more sleep.** Removing a TV from the bedroom improves sleep quality and allows teens to go to sleep sooner.
- **There is less chance your teen can watch inappropriate programming.**

- **Your teen's interpersonal skills can improve.** If everyone has their own television, there's no need to communicate with each other about what to watch. However, if there are limited TV screens, your teen must learn how to share, take turns and negotiate with other family members on viewing choices. This may lead to some disputes at first, but it will eventually help your teen learn how to manage adversity and make decisions as part of your family "team."
- **You'll have more quality family time.** Watching TV together as a family provides more opportunities to strengthen relationships than watching in isolation. Choosing programs the whole family can watch creates opportunities to bond with your teen and to learn more about what's going on in his or her life.
- **Your teen will have more time for other activities.** Encourage your teen to get involved in or to join you in activities like outdoor recreation, music lessons, sports, reading, volunteering, painting and gardening.

Convinced to Pull the Plug Yet?

A study in *Pediatrics* magazine also found that 16% of teens with bedroom TVs watch more than five hours of television a day. The American Academy of Pediatrics backs up all this research with its recommendation to remove TVs from children's bedrooms or not put them there at all.

Removing a TV from your teen's bedroom is a big decision for you and will mean a big change for your teen. The best way to approach it is to talk about it as a family. Calmly explain to your teen why this is a good idea, citing the benefits listed earlier and the health concerns research has tied to excessive TV viewing. Help your teen understand that you want to take positive steps to ensure he or she is healthy. Your teen may be upset at first, and that's okay and natural. But in the long run, it's a healthy decision that will benefit your whole family.

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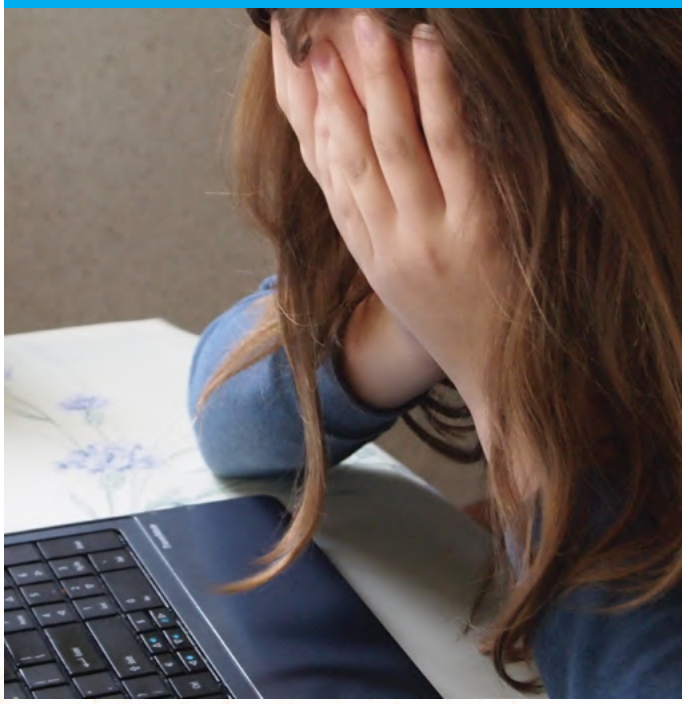
Help Delete Cyberbullying



Keeping up with technology can seem like a never-ending task for parents. Just when you feel like you have a grip on knowing about the latest popular websites and apps, a new one (or twelve) pops up for download.

But as difficult as staying on top of technology and social media can be, it can be even harder to know when your child is the victim of cyberbullying. Few children tell their parents or other adults when they are being bullied online, and they often suffer the negative effects in silence.

Research on cyberbullying, while still emerging, indicates that those effects are similar to those experienced by children who are victims of in-person, or traditional, bullying. They include an increased risk for depressive and anxious symptoms, low self-esteem, substance use, poor peer relations, academic difficulties, and other concerns. That's why it's imperative that parents (and educators) keep an eye out for changes, over time, in a child's behavior and mood at home, in school, with peers and online, that may signal that bullying is happening.

Warning signs include:

- Withdrawing from others
- Decreased interest in preferred activities
- Increased sadness or worry
- Increased irritability or arguing
- Lower grades or incomplete homework
- School avoidance
- Avoids talking about peers or school
- Avoids associating with friends or certain peers
- Changes in mood or behavior after spending time on phone/video game/computer

Equally important in a bullying situation is the ability of parents and other adults to effectively respond when a child shares his or her problems.

Here are several tips and resources for helping your children when he or she is being bullied online:

1. **Increase your awareness about technology so you are better prepared to have discussions with your child.** You should not only be aware of the websites and apps that are out there, but also should know which ones your child is visiting or using. Establishing a consistent and open dialogue where you can express your expectations for your child's technology use, as well your genuine interest in his or her online experiences, can make your child feel more comfortable about sharing what he or she is doing or encountering online. Children (especially teens) aren't very likely to share this information with their parents or others if they feel they will be judged or misunderstood. So doing your homework about websites and apps before talking to your child can make you a more credible resource and open up the lines of communication.
2. **Encourage your child to share difficult experiences with you.** Children are more likely to open up to parents who are able to listen to and validate their children's experiences as victims of bullying, and then help them find solutions to the problem. Parents sometimes want to connect with their child or help ease their pain so badly that they often end up simply giving the child a list of things to do. This can leave children frustrated and feeling like their parents really aren't listening to their concerns. Often, the best approach for parents is to be present for their child and listen to what they have to say without immediately offering solutions. Then parents can ask the child what he or she has done to try to solve the problem, and offer to help. Sometimes, kids just want ideas or want their parents to advocate for them. Above all, parents should show support for their children while exploring possible ways to stop the bullying.
3. **Advocate and collect evidence, when appropriate.** Encourage your child to keep screenshots, text messages and posts as evidence that he or she is being bullied. Then when you advocate for your child at his or her school (or with other authorities), you will have evidence, when necessary, that the bullying is occurring.
4. **Consider therapeutic support.** When children are victimized by in-person or cyberbullying, it can lead to mental health concerns. Obtaining therapeutic support from school-based or outpatient providers for your child can help reduce the impact of bullying.

Additional Resources

- **cyberbullying.org**
- **stopbullying.gov**
- **empowerment.unl.edu**

Internet **Safety**

Kids are always connected! Laptops, tablets, smart phones and iPads make the Internet accessible at any time and almost anywhere.

But whether children are on Instagram, Tik-Tok or whatever popular social site pops up next month, parents need to know how to keep their kids safe while online.

Understanding the Basics

The Internet is everywhere! Media devices play a major role in how your child gathers information and communicates with others. It is fairly common for parents to feel overwhelmed as they take on the difficult task of keeping up with constantly changing technology. While there is no specific age when a child might start using the Internet, Boys Town parenting experts suggest that parents talk to their children about Internet basics as soon as they begin to show interest. These basics include:

- Safely navigating the Internet
- Keeping passwords and personal information private
- Not sharing too much information online
- Understanding the risks of social media conversations

Protecting Your Child Online

As a parent, it is essential to explore the Internet with your child to help them understand its function. Establishing expectations and limits early on can help you better monitor your child's activity online. It may be impossible to totally monitor your child's Internet activity, but you can establish online rules that can help keep your child out of dangerous situations. Boys Town parenting experts recommend:

- Keeping your home computer in a common area
- Providing education on the long-term impact of what your child sends or posts online
- Blocking access to inappropriate sites and filtering web content
- Setting social media or phone breaks
- Obtaining passwords or "friending" your child so you can more easily monitor social media pages they may be visiting

Using Consequences

Children need consequences to learn. If your child is complying with your rules and making good decisions online, it may be time to reward that behavior by increasing their independence (i.e., letting your child try a new social media site, moving from knowing their passwords to "friending" or "following," increasing screen time or allowing access to electronic devices).

If your child is not following previously set media guidelines (time limits, visiting only websites you've approved, etc.) or if social media is becoming your child's only social outlet or way to make friends, you may need to start giving negative consequences in order to change these behaviors. Consequences can include:

- Further limiting your child's screen time or taking away electronic devices for a set amount of time

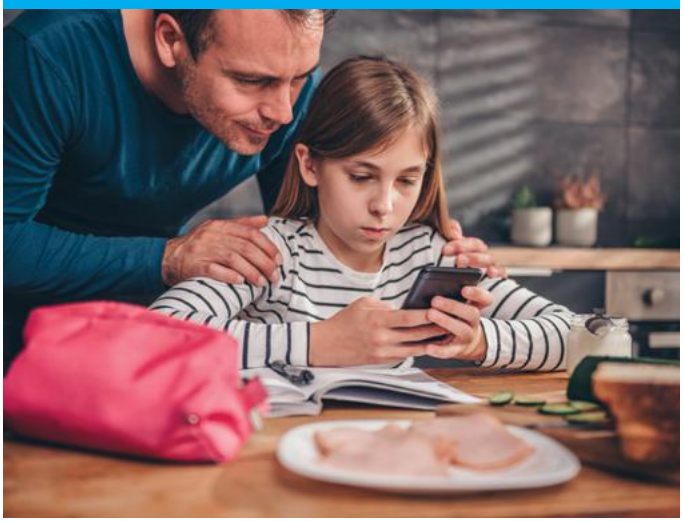
- If your phone or internet provider allows, you can temporarily restrict Internet/wifi access to individual devices on your plan
- Collect your child's phone or tablet charger until they complete an extra chore.

You may consider seeking advice from a health care professional if these consequences aren't working and your child is becoming increasingly dependent on the Internet or other social media for companionship.

Additional Resources

- **commonsensemedia.org**
- **internetmatters.org**
- ***The Art of Screen Time*** by Anya Kamenetz

Keeping the Lines of Communication Open on Social Media



When it comes your child's use of social media and technology, it's important to talk about privacy and safety concerns, such as cyberbullying and phone use that can distract from other activities (at school or while driving). Here are just a few topics to help get your conversation started!

- **What is fun about using social media?** What social media apps would you want and what do you like about them?
- **What types of things would you like to post?** Pictures?
- **Who would you allow to follow you on social media?** How do you decide if someone should follow you?
- **What do you do if someone you do not know contacts you or asks to follow you?**
- **What information should you share online?** What information should you not share online? How do you keep your information private?
- **How would you respond if someone who made a mean comment to you online?** What if that person was a friend? What would you do if someone was posting hurtful things about you or a friend?
- **What kinds of problems can result from hurtful, negative or mean social media posts?**
- **What unsafe or dangerous situations could happen** if you made your profile and personal information available to everyone?

Make It More than a One-Time Discussion

Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with your child about his or her social media/technology use and habits is essential to ensuring your child's safety and providing you with peace of mind. This section provides valuable advice on how to do that.

Talk early and often. Start a conversation around social media as soon as you can. It can be more challenging to talk about your expectations and rules if children already have phones and are set in their own social media habits. Consider the timing of your child's social media-related chats, and make social media part of regular, everyday conversations.

A tone of curiosity, reflection and openness in your comments and responses will support a continued, open conversation. When talking about posts and online comments, encourage children to think before posting by asking themselves questions like: Why is it important to me to post about this topic? What is the value in posting about this? Will I feel good about posting this later today or next week?

Expect mistakes and use them as teaching opportunities. Even when parents set realistic expectations for their children's online behaviors, children will still make poor decisions. The best way to help children learn from their mistakes is for parents to state the preferred or expected positive behavior, help their children practice it and give consequences.

Responding to mistakes. When your child makes a mistake with social media, you might feel compelled to restrict all access. Instead, consider using task-based consequences, which involves removing access to social media privileges and requiring your child to complete a task in order to earn back access. The task could be doing a household chore, mowing a neighbor's lawn, etc. Privileges are restored after your child completes the task, identifies the error and describes how he or she will handle similar situations in the future.

Catch your child being good. Your child may make more "good" choices than "bad" choices with respect to social media use. Be sure to recognize those good choices by praising your child for doing the right thing and following agreed-upon rules and expectations.

Be a positive role model. How do you use your own devices? How often are you on your phone? Do you scroll through social media at dinnertime or in the middle of a conversation? There are many perfect times when you can model appropriate social media use to your child. Since children are always watching, take advantage of opportunities to discuss your own social media presence by setting a positive example in your online posts.

Explore social media together. Since you're in control of the content you'll be looking at with your child, you can selectively view a variety of different sites and social media outlets without getting into inappropriate or dangerous areas. This creates a good opportunity to discuss potential dangers with your child. Ask questions about the games, people, sites and YouTube channels your child enjoys. Join with your child by visiting these sites together.

Let your child earn more leeway. As children follow your agreed-upon rules and meet your expectations, you can consider giving them greater independence on social media. You could say something like, "I will be checking in less often since you have kept our agreement for the past few months." As you make changes and grant more independence, you can expect them to exhibit greater responsibility. You might also adjust consequences for mistakes as your child gets older.

You can prevent many problems through ongoing communication, monitoring and making yourself available to talk. Children feel respected when their parents are open to hearing different perspectives, including theirs. Parents who respond calmly, even when they have to give a consequence for their children's poor choices, are more likely to have open communication with their children about social media.

Additional Resources

- **commonsensemedia.org**
- **internetmatters.org**
- ***The Art of Screen Time*** by Anya Kamenetz

Parenting in the World of Social Media

Social media and the technology that drives it present unique challenges for parents. Parents may sometimes wonder how they're supposed to keep up with a constantly changing technological world that their children seem to grasp naturally.

But teaching your child to responsibly access and use social media is not that much different from teaching them to drive responsibly. The biggest difference is that driving has specific rules and regulations that drivers must follow, while the rules that govern social media are often vague, broad and open-ended.

Here are some tips for raising your social media IQ and setting rules that help your child stay safe and behave appropriately online:

- **Learn the language.** Get familiar with the websites, terms and language your child and his or her peers are using, especially vocabulary terms like "hashtags," "tweeting," "streaming" and "selfies." Also, educate yourself about passwords, privacy settings, Internet access and things like "the Cloud." Discuss concerns with your electronics experts; they can answer questions about products, parental controls and software that may apply to your child's needs.
- **Move slowly but surely.** When it comes to driving, you wouldn't allow your child to get behind the wheel without any experience or knowledge of the rules of the road, or without hours of supervision and training. Social media should be approached in the same way. Children should have a lot of restrictions on their social media activities when they're younger or just starting to use it (e.g., parental supervision, frequent monitoring, limited access to sites/devices, minimal screen time, no private passwords). As children prove they can be responsible, they can earn more freedom, access and independence.
- **Keep your child's maturity level in mind.** You know your child better than anyone. There are numerous devices, apps, access levels and privacy settings that may not be appropriate

for your child's age or developmental level. Read up on information for these and other items and issues, and monitor your child's use of them. Then you can slowly expand your child's access and online activities when you think your child is ready.

- **Technology is only as good as how it's used.** Technology was not created to make a parent's job even harder. Despite the potential dangers and uncertainties that social media can pose for children, there are online activities that are fun, educational and worthwhile. Work with your child to explore positive ways technology can be used and incorporate them into your family life (e.g., family game nights, visiting distant relatives through FaceTime, watching funny videos).
- **Find a healthy balance between screen time and other activities for your child.** Children shouldn't have an all-access, all-the-time pass to social media. Set screen time limits and encourage your child to participate in other social activities that require face-to-face interactions with other people (e.g., having friends over, playing sports, volunteering, working a part-time job).
- **See missteps as opportunities.** Children will make mistakes when using social media. As a parent, your goal is to help your child learn from his or her mistakes. This learning occurs from having your child accept your instructions and feedback, practice appropriate online behavior and experience consequences like losing devices or screen time for a set period of time.
- **Be a filter.** Ask questions about online games your child enjoys, who he or she talks to through emails, tweets and other messaging technology, and sites or YouTube channels he or she visits. An even better way to be aware and monitor the information your child is receiving is to sit down and visit these sites together.

- **Be a good role model.** How often are you on your phone or tablet? Do you post on Facebook at dinnertime or in the middle of a conversation? Remember that your children are watching and will pick up cues from you. Set a good example and model how to use social media appropriately.
- **Trust your parenting instincts.** Effective parenting is all about communicating with and supervising your child and his or her activities; setting clear expectations for behavior; consistently enforcing rules and guidelines; and following through with the appropriate consequences, for both positive and negative behaviors.

Now, if you could only figure out how to take a decent selfie.

Additional Resources

- → **commonsensemedia.org**
- → **internetmatters.org**
- → ***The Art of Screen Time*** by Anya Kamenetz

Setting Expectations for Social Media with Children and Teens

Ensuring that children use social media appropriately and safely is one of the biggest challenges parents face today.

While it often gets a bad rap for the negative ways some people use it, social media isn't really bad. It's just new. And kids are always just a few steps ahead of their parents when it comes to technology. They usually are much savvier than their parents, and parents always seem to be catching up!

But just because kids know how to access social media doesn't mean they know how to use it correctly. That's where the rules you set come in.

Granted, there are risks related to social media. There are also benefits children can enjoy when they learn to use social media safely, such as strengthening friendships, learning new perspectives and connecting with experiences they wouldn't typically have.

It can be difficult as a parent to change with the times. It's normal to think things like:

- ***What if my child makes a big mistake?***
- ***I need to protect my child from dangerous content on social media.***
- ***I'm afraid social media will take over my child's life.***

While these concerns are valid, they simply present considerations that you, and your whole family, need to address. Here are some helpful tips:

Do your homework. Many parents don't feel confident talking about technology and aren't sure how their children are using social media. Take time to learn more about it with your child, your technology provider and online resources. Learn about passwords, privacy settings, data updates and Internet access. Talk to your Internet provider about parental controls that may benefit your family's situation. Educate yourself about age-appropriate content, public versus private settings, location-tracking and sharing, ads and in-app purchases, "disappearing" videos and pictures, and cyberbullying. Having a better understanding of

what social media is and how it is being and can be used can help you feel more confident when you set rules for your child. Here are some handy resources: commonsensemedia.org and internetmatters.org.

Monitor the time your child spends on social media, games and apps. Parents are often more successful when they focus on how their children are using technology rather than on the types of technology they are using. You can assume that if your children have access to devices with apps, they are accessing various content (social media, videos, games, etc.). Gaming apps often have a social media component, so it's important to teach children how to manage their conversations, sharing, etc. when gaming, too. Setting rules that help you monitor and manage your child's use of any technology will give you a clearer picture of your child's involvement.

As a family, develop a device/cellphone agreement. Create an agreement that fits your family's needs and clearly spells out easy-to-follow rules everyone can understand and follow. Here are some examples of rules for a child's cell phone use. (The following examples are only considerations and may not cover all areas you want to include in your agreement.)

- **Device time limit in AM, PM and weekends:** Can use phone for 30 minutes in morning once ready for school; can use phone for 1 hour after homework is completed; can use phone after completing chores on Saturday and Sunday.
- **Acceptable settings and times:** Cannot use phone in bedroom or bathrooms, only in family room and kitchen; cannot use phone at dinner table or during other family activities as defined by parents.
- **Evening check-in:** At 7:30 PM, child puts phone in charger in parents' bedroom (or kitchen) for the night.
- **Morning check-out:** At 7:15 AM, child checks out phone before leaving for school.
- **Routine monitoring and settings:** Child allows parents to look at phone whenever they want and to set restrictions. Parents never need permission to look at phone or change restrictions.
- **Managing passwords:** Child is to share all passwords with parents and notify them about any changes. Child cannot place additional passwords on phone.
- **Managing risk:** Child will tell parents when he or she receives unknown/unusual/strange phone calls or texts, or finds an unauthorized app.
- **Appropriate conduct:** Child will use phone to post/send/share appropriate content (no nude pictures and no personal/identification information) and engage in appropriate interactions with peers (no bullying or leaving others out of conversations).

Set consequences for violating rules; these can include losing phone privileges for a predetermined length of time. A task-based "earning back" system, where a child must complete an extra chore before he or she can use the phone again, typically helps children learn about taking responsibility and making better choices in the future.

Additional Resources

- → **commonsensemedia.org**
- → **internetmatters.org**
- → ***The Art of Screen Time*** by Anya Kamenetz

Creating a **Technology-Alternative Lifestyle** in Your Home

- **Does your child spend too much time on devices such as phones, tablets, computers or gaming consoles?**
- **Does your child struggle when you try to limit or remove access to these devices?**
- **Does it feel like your child constantly complains when he or she is not connected to technology at home?**

If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you are not alone.

While some parents may long for the days of limited technology and no cell phones, that is not the norm for kids today. Most children spend a significant amount of time in front of a screen, a routine that usually starts at an early age and continues into adulthood. Working on devices also is part of a child's school day, so access to technology is ongoing and constant.

Given this culture, it is very important for parents to learn more about technology – the good and the bad – and incorporate what they learn into how they raise their children. One challenge parents commonly face is getting their children to spend less time on technology and spend more time on alternative activities. And while there is no way to completely separate kids from technology, there definitely are ways to create a technology-alternative lifestyle that brings a happy, healthy balance to children's lives.

What is a technology-alternative lifestyle? In its simplest definition, it's a lifestyle that includes more "unplugged" time in a child's (and a family's) life! It's doing the things kids miss out on when social media and other forms of technology occupy a big part of their world.

This includes having face-to-face contact and conversations with others, strengthening family relationships and connecting with personal and family values. A technology-alternative lifestyle can help families find more time to be together, which can lead to important experiences that help shape a child's or a teen's healthy behaviors.

Technology-Alternative Tips

Here are some tips for creating a technology-alternative lifestyle in your home:

- **Make "together time" a habit.** Together time can take on many different forms. Find activities that everyone in your family can enjoy, like cooking and eating meals together, playing a game, reorganizing a room, going for a family bike ride or watching a movie together. These types of activities encourage conversation and present opportunities for you to give specific praise to your child for being with you. They also help your child understand that family time can be joyful and rewarding.
- **Share responsibilities and chores.** Being part of a household means taking care of the house. Set a chore hour when everyone takes care of an assigned task, or work together to tackle a bigger job like spring cleaning. Attack kitchen clean-up as a team or divide and conquer as you clean and organize the family room. The important element here is that your family is doing something together.
- **Get active.** There's more to life than what happens in front of a computer, TV or phone screen. Social media should not replace spending face-to-face time with others and having personal interactions. Encourage your child to get out there and attend school events, get involved in extracurricular activities or plan outings with friends. If your child has creative interests like painting or music, work together collaboratively to find opportunities for growing those talents.
- **Set realistic, meaningful limits on technology use.** Technology is a major part of our world, and your child or teen will always want to use it. You can head off arguments by setting reasonable limits and helping your child develop healthy media habits. Set time limits on technology use, give phones a "bedtime" before your child's bedtime and create a technology-free zone, such as at the dinner table or during a family activity. Teach your child that there are certain situations where using devices is appropriate and other situations where it is not appropriate, and discuss these situations as a family. Set your expectations for technology use in the same way you establish house rules for watching TV, completing homework or doing chores.
- **Be a role model for your kids!** Kids who see their parents demonstrate healthy technology habits are more likely to do the same. While it seems simple, parents sometimes forget how important it is to show their children the behaviors they expect them to use. Establish habits like setting limits on your own phone use in the evening and/or on weekends. When you're on your phone, you might even ask yourself, "Do I need to be on my phone right now?" Given the right environment and positive role models, kids can quickly learn the importance of balancing technology use.
- **Open the conversation and join in.** Encourage your child or teen to talk about what he or she learns from or finds interesting on social media. Also, discuss how to use technology safely and how to manage potentially tricky (or even dangerous) situations. The most important aspect of child and teen technology use is good decision-making. Children are most likely to make good decisions with technology when parents keep the door open for communication.

Additional Resources

- **commonsensemedia.org**
- **internetmatters.org**
- ***The Art of Screen Time*** by Anya Kamenetz

Taming the Tech:
Parenting in the Digital Age

Electronics, Internet and Social Media

The digital world is an ever changing and evolving landscape, and for even the most tech savvy parents it can be hard to stay up to date. Here you will find some tips and considerations when discussing and putting limits on technology. Teaching your child to interact with technology in a healthy way will set them up for success for years to come

Get Educated

Each family will have different values and comfort levels when it comes to technology. Before setting expectations and rules, take time to learn about your child's technology, parental controls, and appropriateness of different apps. See our additional resources section for websites that will help you make informed decisions about your child's technology usage. It can even be helpful to download the apps your child would like to use so you can familiarize your self with their features.

As a general rule, it is better to be more cautious when your child first starts using technology; you can always change your mind and allow more apps or privileges later.

Keep It Age Appropriate

Children

Youth will often want to fit in with their friends and when it comes to technology it is no different. In elementary school, technology should be limited to education and recreation. At this age, children will be most interested in playing video games or apps and watching videos online. It is important to remember that while the content of video games may be age appropriate, online interactions may not be. Streaming services (YouTube, Netflix, etc) have "kids" channels but this content should still be reviewed by parents. Technology usage should also be done in a common space at this age. For children in elementary school recreational screen time (not school related), should be limited to no more than one hour per day.

Tweens

By middle school, kids will be looking for ways to stay connected with their friends. At this age, responsible youth may be allowed to have some social media, as long as their parents have full access to the account. During their tween years, youth may also be allowed a cell phone. Parents should regularly check their child's phone and investigate different parental controls. Just like on an airplane, all portable electronic devices should be powered down and put away before bedtime. For youth in middle school, recreational screen time should not exceed two hours per day.

Teens

Once your teen reaches high school you may allow them more freedom with technology if they have shown responsible usage in the past. Teens may be allowed more autonomy over their social media usage and apps. It is still a good idea to maintain some parental controls on the phone and have regular conversations with your teen over internet safety as well as maintaining privacy on the internet. Even at this age, there should still be limits on screen time.

Setting Limits

Like many things in life, moderation is key. For preschool aged children personal electronic time (phones and tablets) should be kept to a minimum. Instead, opt for TV time with the family or traditional play. As children get older, personal electronics may start to become required in schools but there should still be recreational times that do not involve screens of any kind.

An easy way to encourage non-screen time activities is to only allow screen time after a certain time of day to encourage youth to entertain themselves in different ways. A University of Michigan study found a concerning link between emotion dysregulation and excessive screen time. The theory was that too much screen time did not allow children to learn coping and emotion regulation skills. Here are a few good rules to institute for everyone in the household (adults included!).

- No screens during mealtimes or family outings
- No screens 30-60 minutes before bedtime
  - It can be best to have youth turn in electronics before bed
  - Multiple studies have shown that technology usage before bed leads to poor sleep and daytime sleepiness due to a lack of sleep
- Have discussions and be mindful of what you post online
- Create and encourage non-screen related activities

The Bottom Line

Technology is an amazing invention that has transformed our lives for the better. It is important to teach youth of all ages how to have a healthy relationship with technology while also imposing limits on what they can access and when. It is vital that adults within the home model the behaviors they want to see in their children.

Resources & Parental Controls

- **commonsensemedia.org**
- **smartgensociety.org**
- **life360 (tracking and monitoring app)**
- **Parent Switch (parental app for Nintendo switch)**
- **The Brick App**

Dealing with the Impact of Divorce

Approximately half of all marriages end in divorce. Considering this statistic, countless children are impacted when their parents divorce.

Some areas of children's lives that are affected include where they live, what school they attend, what types of activities they can participate in and their relationships with friends and family members.

Despite these changes, most children whose parents divorce are well-adjusted, and it helps when they can continue to have regular time with both parents.

This is often a difficult time for parents and children alike. But there are steps parents can take to minimize the impact of their divorce on their children.

Here are some tips for how you can help your children, and yourself, through this transition:

- **Rely on friends and family** for the support you'll need.
- **Avoid dating for several months following the separation** to give you and your children time to adapt to the changes.
- **Avoid arguing with or speaking negatively about the other parent in front of your children.** Schedule times to talk to your ex-spouse when the children aren't present.
- **Communicate with your ex-spouse to make necessary plans and arrangements.** This is not your child's responsibility.

- **Let your children be children.** Don't place adult responsibilities on them or confide in them as though they were adults.
- **Financially support your children** to maintain their standard of living.
- **Have consistent rules and routines** for your children when they are in your home.
- **Consider mediation,** which involves parents working with a neutral third party to assist with negotiations. Mediation is associated with better outcomes for children and families, when compared to court involvement.

Additional Resources

There are number of supports available to help you and your children through these changes.

A good parenting resource on this topic is Dr. Robert Emery's book, ***The Truth about Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions So You and Your Children Can Thrive.***

If you notice drastic behavioral or emotional changes in your child, consider contacting his or her school counselor or asking your child's physician for a referral to a mental health professional.

Parenting the Picky Eater to Make Mealtime More Enjoyable

Do you often find yourself suffering from "short-order cook syndrome," preparing two or three different menus at mealtime to appease the desires of a finicky eater?

Mealtime should be a pleasant, relaxed family time and a positive environment where all family members can share what's going on in their lives.

If your mealtimes usually end in arguments about what or how much your child should be eating, follow these guidelines. They'll help you cope with your picky eater and help make family mealtime more enjoyable.

1. **The first step is to eliminate the possibility that your child's eating habits are caused by health problems.** Make an appointment with your family pediatrician and share your concerns about your child's appetite and eating habits. Ask the doctor to weigh and measure your child and have him or her show you how to plot out a standard growth chart. Assess your child's growth and development over time, taking into consideration genetics and family body types. If your physician has no concerns, you can move on to other mealtime strategies without worry.
2. **Establish rules for a family-style meal** where everyone sits down together to eat. Turn the television off. Include all family members in the dinner table conversation, limiting adult-only conversation. Also, don't use mealtime to nag or punish your child for behaviors that aren't related to mealtime.
3. **Establish a set of mealtime rules for your child.** For example, he or she must stay seated, eat at the table, use his or her silverware, not throw food, etc.
4. **Praise your child for any appropriate behaviors** he or she uses during a meal, especially things like sampling new food items or foods he or she doesn't prefer or like. Praise! Praise! Praise!
5. **Don't discuss eating habits or problems at or near mealtime.** These discussions and related teaching should take place at other times. Do not bribe, threaten or scold your child over his or her eating habits at the dinner table. You can discuss mealtime rules, but do it before the meal begins. Also, keep discussions about the importance or

value of a good diet or other food-related issues brief and to the point.

6. **Limit your child's eating time to 20 minutes.** If your child is going to eat, he or she will do so in the first 20 minutes of the meal. If your child finishes before that time, give praise and let him or her leave the table. (This decision depends on your mealtime rules.)
7. **Give your finicky eater small but reasonable portions of preferred foods along with very small amounts of nonpreferred foods.** Tell your child that he or she must eat the nonpreferred foods in order to have seconds of the preferred foods. Over time, gradually increase (or at least try to increase) the amount of nonpreferred foods you want your child to eat. Do not force your child to be a member of the "clean plate" club or to eat the nonpreferred foods.
8. **Plan your menus in advance.** Include your picky eater in this process, looking for opportunities to encourage him or her to try something new. Children's cookbooks are available to help with meal planning. Once you have created a menu, stick to your plan. Remember, you are not a short-order cook.
9. **Children should get in-between-meal snacks only if they finished their previous meal.** And desserts should be a reward for finishing lunch or dinner.
10. **Make mealtime a family affair.** All family members should follow the same eating and snacking rules you set for your finicky eater.
11. **Be sure to limit the amount of beverages your child drinks between meals** (do not limit water intake). Children should not drink juice, milk or other flavored liquids close to mealtime.
12. **Make mealtime fun by providing an occasional smorgasbord of favorite foods.** The more fun mealtime is, the more invested your finicky eater will be in participating and trying new foods.
13. **Final Step: Provide numerous opportunities for your child to learn how to manage "inconveniences"** (like trying new foods!). This can be accomplished by having him or her do new chores, decreasing TV or computer time and increasing expectations for good behavior.

Final Reminders

- **Don't worry.** Parents of a finicky eater often worry that their child will starve or not grow or develop normally. Starvation should not be a concern just because your child hasn't eaten a vegetable or fruit in the past six weeks. If your child receives good medical attention and is in good health, there shouldn't be anything to worry about. Your child's ultimate height and body weight is more a function of the genes you have donated to him or her than what you serve at meals. The next time you are at a family gathering, take an inventory of the variety of body shapes and sizes.
- **Assemble a support group for your child** and enroll grandparents, daycare providers, your pediatrician and other family members as participants.
- **Bribery and forcing your child to eat will get you nowhere.** If you push, the results will probably be unhappy meals and family relationships, and increased defiance. So be firm and consistent in your parenting style, but not overbearing.

Bon appetit!

Additional Resources

- ***Coping with a Picky Eater: A Guide for the Perplexed Parent*** by William G. Wilkoff
- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.

Making your Mornings More Manageable

Getting out of the house on time with children dressed, teeth brushed, tummies filled and backpacks in hand can be challenging.

And doing it all without nagging, yelling and racing may seem impossible. But don't give up! You can create an environment that helps your child learn how to take responsibility for his or her morning routine, and leads to more pleasant interactions for everyone every morning.

The following steps to an effective, less stressful morning routine are relatively simple. You just have to get everyone to follow them consistently. It won't happen overnight because old patterns are hard to break. But with time, effort and patience, you'll soon be seeing smoother, happier mornings.

1. **Decide what time you need to walk out the door in order to be on time.** Then make every effort to have everyone ready to go by that time. Provide countdown alerts to your child when your "walk-out" time is 15, 10 and 5 minutes away.
2. **Make a list of all the things your child needs to do from the time he or she wakes up until it is time to leave.** Think carefully about how much time each task takes to complete and make sure everyone is up early enough to get everything done without rushing.
3. **List the morning tasks in the order they are to be completed and post the list (possibly in two or three places) where your child can see it.** Use drawings and pictures to help younger children understand what they're supposed to do. The list could include:
   a. Get dressed
   b. Brush hair
   c. Eat breakfast
   d. Take medicine
   e. Brush teeth
   f. Put on a coat and grab the backpack next to the door
4. **With your child, identify a fun activity (which you must approve) he or she would enjoy doing if you complete all of your morning tasks and have spare time before leaving.** This might include watching TV, playing a video game or a game on the computer, playing with the dog, reading a book, listening to music or playing the piano. Write this activity (or draw a picture of it) at the bottom of the morning to-do list.

5. **Explain to your child that he or she is to complete each task on the list every morning and check them off as they are completed.** Also explain that when every task is done, he or she gets to do the fun activity that is last on the list. For younger children, you can read each task, check it off together and then read what's next.

6. **As your child works on and completes a task, provide specific praise.** You may say things like "Just two more tasks and you get to watch TV" or "Wow, you are doing great! I bet you will have time to play the piano this morning."

7. **When your child successfully finishes the list, make sure he or she gets to do the fun activity.** If all the tasks don't get completed, he or she does not get to do the fun activity.

8. **No matter how many tasks your child completes (all, a few or none), walk out the door on time!** Your child may have to finish dressing in the car or go to school without breakfast or with messy hair. The key to making the list work is to not give in to the temptation to nag or scold or do tasks for your child.

Before starting this approach, it is a good idea to talk with your child's teachers and let them know you are doing this to improve his or her independence and sense of responsibility. That way, they'll understand why your child may arrive at school hungry or with messy hair on a few mornings. This shouldn't happen very often once your child figures out how to get through the morning routine successfully.

Planning and patience are the keys to making this strategy work. This is about teaching your child to take responsibility for getting ready for school as independently as possible. It's okay to help once in a while. But if you have to constantly remind or plead with your child to do the tasks, or help with or do them yourself, it won't take long before your behaviors become the morning routine and nagging, yelling and racing once again becomes the norm.

Above all, no matter what happens, remain patient and calm. Change takes time. Your encouragement and guidance will go a long way toward helping your family adopt a new, more pleasant morning routine!

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
- ***Parenting the Strong-Willed Child: The Clinically Proven Five-Week Program for Parents of Two- to Six-Year-Olds*** by Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long

Kid T.I.P.S.

Tough Issues, Proven Solutions

TODAY'S FAMILY

Too Much of a Good Thing: Knowing When Your Child Is Overscheduled

Kids' activities are designed to provide opportunities for growth and development. Connection with others, service to others, learning new skills and developing a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence are valuable life lessons that come from these opportunities.

Extracurricular activities also provide an avenue for kids to have memorable new experiences, gain insight about themselves and others, develop social, problem-solving and coping skills, and learn tolerances for differences.

All of this engagement outside the home is definitely enriching and worthwhile. But how can you tell if your child may be overscheduled and is trying to do too much?

- **First, look to the fundamentals.** Daily structure and routines, including bedtime, mealtimes and rise time, should remain consistent and within reason. If these areas become compromised, then other important aspects of your child's life will suffer, such as academic performance and family time. Assess the balance between major areas of your child's day, including schoolwork, social activities, community service and family time.
- **Second, determine your family values.** For example, what activities do you expect your family to do together, and how often? What emphasis do you place on academics? How much do you value community service or religious involvement? Your child will gravitate toward those events and accomplishments that earn him or her the most attention and rewards. For example, if academics are important, then your son or daughter should receive appropriate applause for school achievements. They will follow your lead and quickly come to recognize what is valued.
- **Third, assess your child's behavioral balance.** Look for specific changes in your child, such as increased irritability or intolerance, emotional over-reactivity, compromised academic performance and struggles in coping with life's ups and downs. Although most activities provide an outlet for social engagement, kids

who are overcommitted may be prone to isolation and withdrawal. Common sense balance is the key to getting the most out of extra activities. If your child's participation in an activity is more important to you than it is to them, then it's probably not the right activity for your child.

- **Finally, look at how you (the parent) are affected by your kids' involvement in extracurricular activities.** If you find yourself getting flustered or your personal life is suffering (not enough sleep, unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise, not getting tasks done at home, increased anxiety about time, etc.), then perhaps your son or daughter is overextended.

Extracurricular activities provide a great opportunity for kids to develop a healthy personal balance as well as a sense of values. Promote your family to be active and engaged, and encourage your child to participate in at least one organized activity. Consider your parenting values and fundamentals, and be sure to establish reasonable expectations. Keep in mind that down time is essential as well, and follow your child's lead when taking on too much seems to be taking too much out of him or her.

Extracurricular activities provide a great opportunity for kids to develop a healthy personal balance as well as a sense of values.

Parenting Athletes:

Best Practices for a Positive Sports Experience

Youth sports can be intense, for kids and parents alike. While coaches teach skills and strategy, it's often the support at home that shapes whether a young athlete feels confident and motivated, or pressured and discouraged. Your role isn't to control the outcome, but to create an environment where your child can enjoy the game, grow through challenges and build lasting confidence.

Most kids won't go on to play professionally, but all of them can walk away with valuable life skills. The strategies below are designed to support your child's growth, well-being and love for the game, on and off the field.

1. Support the Effort, Not the Outcome

- Focus on growth and effort. Praise hard work, improvement, promoting a positive team culture and determination, rather than just wins or stats.
- Celebrate learning. Mistakes are part of the process—treat them as opportunities to grow.

INSTEAD OF	TRY SAYING
"Did you win?" or "How many points did you score?"	*"You've been putting in so much effort at practice and I can really see it paying off. I'm proud of how hard you're working."*

- **Listen without fixing.** Sometimes kids just need to vent—resist the urge to solve every issue. Be a calm, supportive listener – not a problem solver.

2. Be a Role Model

- **Stay positive.** Your behavior sets the tone. Model calm, constructive responses, even after tough losses. Show respect toward coaches, referees and other families.

3. Trust the Coaching Process

- **Let the coaches coach.** It can confuse your child when you undermine the coach's guidance.
- **Respect the coach's role.** Communicate appropriately and trust their process, even if you disagree at times.

4. Support Their Journey

- **Let your child lead.** Encourage them to play for their own enjoyment—not because they feel pressure to perform.
- **Check your motives.** Make sure you're supporting your child's interests, not fulfilling your own.

5. Make Your Presence Count

- **Show up consistently.** Your presence means more than your advice.
- **Enjoy the moment.** Cheer, clap and support with enthusiasm—avoid criticism from the stands or during the car ride home.

6. Celebrate Who They Are, Not Just What They Do

- **Separate identity from performance.** Remind your child they're valued no matter what happens in the game.

Let's be honest, youth sports can bring out strong emotions in all of us. But parenting an athlete isn't about chasing wins or perfect performances. It's about providing steady, consistent support that helps kids stay balanced, focused and resilient.

When you emphasize effort over results, respect the coach's role and show up in a positive, constructive way, you're helping your child develop skills that go far beyond the scoreboard. The real goal isn't a trophy, it's raising a young person who enjoys the game, grows from the experience and carries those lessons into every part of life.

Raising Confident Kids

Confident children believe in themselves and their ability to face and take on new challenges. That's why it's only natural that parents want to instill confidence in their kids. Having confidence makes kids feel good about themselves and better enables them to try new things, cope with their mistakes and try again.

Since there is no parenting manual, parents are often left wondering how to build confidence in their kids.

Boys Town offers these recommendations to help with confidence development and maintenance:

Have realistic and developmentally appropriate expectations and trust the process.

- Don't ask your child to do something that you, as a parent, cannot do or did not accomplish until later in life. Parents often have grand expectations for their kids and, while those expectations usually come from a positive place, it can cause suffering for both the parent and child to expect more of them than what is developmentally appropriate.
- Take care to recognize your child's areas for growth, as well as their resilience, strength and adaptability. It is important to give children space and time to grow and to reassure them that you are there to support them.

Be mindful of language and start with challenging thoughts.

- Understand that language can cause confusion and we often try to make sense of the world with overly simplified or overly complicated language, so urge your children to ask for clarification if they don't understand what is being said.
- Encourage your children to challenge their brains by asking probing questions when they don't understand something, and help them to learn that thoughts come and go and to not take them too seriously.

Pay attention to expressed language.

- Parents must be mindful of how they speak to themselves and their children and avoid overly critical, inflexible or extreme language.
- Make sure that the language being expressed reflects family values and areas of importance.
- When speaking to your kids, it's important to highlight qualities and values behind the performance. For example, don't dwell on the grade your child received on a project, but rather on the thought and persistence put into it.
- Avoid statements that label your kids like, "Jane is really shy" or "Tommy's not very athletic," as these types of comments can negatively impact self-concept development, even if the comments may be based on observed facts.

Lead with values and what matters.

- Remember, language is most effective when it is clear, linked to values and used to highlight strengths and potential.
- As parents, reflect on your values, share them with your kids and let your kids explore and share what they value.
- A great way to start the values conversation is with a question like, "What do you want people to say about you at your 75th birthday party?"

Stop talking and start doing.

- You are your child's role model, so let them see you try new things, fail and pivot when necessary. Do things that are important to you and based on your values.
- Teach your children to bravely face the world and help them to manage their fears and understand expectations.

A healthy self-concept is built through life experience and supported by trust, personal values, developmentally appropriate expectations and intentional use of language. Boys Town Behavioral Health offers a variety of resources to help parents to navigate the challenges of building a solid self-concept in kids including these Values Assessments.

Additional Resources

- **therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/values/none**
- **motivationalinterviewing/org/value-card-sort-online-game**

Spending **Quality Time** with Your Children

As a parent, you do everything you can to give your children a good life. You work to provide them with a safe, comfortable home, clothing, healthy meals, school supplies and opportunities to enjoy fun activities and pastimes.

While meeting these physical needs is important and a family priority, spending quality time with your children may be the single most critical thing you can do to ensure their healthy emotional development and growth. Time spent together means opportunities for you to teach, for your children to learn and for both of you to strengthen your loving, nurturing relationship. By being around you, your children develop their self-esteem and a sense of belonging, and have experiences they will remember and cherish all their lives.

From teaching your children manners and common courtesies like saying "Please" and "Thank you" to letting them know that they are loved unconditionally, spending time together helps everyone stay connected as a family. And there are other practical benefits, like making weekly schedules, reaching decisions that affect every family member and staying up-to-date on what is happening in everyone's life.

Suggestions for Spending Time Together

Any time spent together is good, but the most effective time together is meaningful time. This means time without distractions like TV and taking part in activities that more than one person will enjoy. It also includes sincere conversations and genuine praise.

Here are some tips for establishing a fun, frequent and meaningful family time routine:

- **Set aside one day a week** when the whole family does something special together.
- **Plan special gatherings** with grandparents and other relatives.
- **Have regular family meetings** where everyone has a chance to participate.
- **Sit down as a family as often as possible to eat a meal and discuss your day.** For added fun, invite your children to plan, shop and cook with you, or make a dessert together.
- **Support your children** by doing things such as coaching Little League or helping in the classroom.
- Encourage your children to share and express their feelings and to talk about both the happy and sad events in their lives.
- Establish new traditions with your kids. They don't have to be elaborate, and can fit into your already established weekly routine, such as mealtimes, bedtime or weekend errands.

Additional Resources

- ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- ***I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old*** by Michelle Nicholasen and Barbara O'Neal
- ***Parenting the Strong-Willed Child: The Clinically Proven Five-Week Program for Parents of Two- to Six-Year-Olds*** by Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long

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