

Raising Happy Children

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Raising children is hardly ever easy.

You feed them, clothe them, and they reward you with a temper tantrum every bedtime. But don't tear your hair out. Losing your temper will get you nowhere and might even make the situation worse. Follow these simple, research-backed strategies for raising happy, well-adjusted kids. And in the process, spare yourself (and your child!) those terrible tantrums.



Apply the following strategies to isolated problems or mix and match two or more to correct general behaviour.

1. Be a role model
Parents always talk about how easily children pick up swear words after hearing them from adults. Children are sponges when it comes to learnt behaviours. Do you raise your voice when you get angry or excited? If you do, chances are, your child will too. So be a role model. If you want your child to greet your elderly relatives, make sure you do it yourself.
2. Praise your child
Be free with your praise and stingy with your criticism. Parents often have difficulty here. After all, it's easy to find fault with kids – they are clumsy, they don't listen, and often test your limits. But shouting at them is not going to help. Instead, look for opportunities to praise their behaviour. Perhaps your child kept away her toys without being asked. In which case, tell her, "You made me very happy by picking up your toys." Rule of thumb: Give your child 3 positive comments for every 1 negative comment.
3. Talk face-to-face
If you need to tell your child something important, or if you simply wish to have their undivided attention, kneel or squat down next to your child. This way, you can compete better with other distractions and your child can focus more easily on what you are trying to say.
4. Listen to your child
Remember how frustrated you felt when your child was still a baby, crying away, and you couldn't understand why. Well, children get frustrated too when unable to express what they want. When this happens, a tantrum is not far away. You can help your child through ACTIVE LISTENING. Listen carefully to what your child is trying to say. Then use a bit of guesswork and repeat what you understand back to your child. Ask her if

you got it right.

5. Keep your promises

The world is unfair, but your child shouldn't have to learn that from you. If you promise your child something – maybe a trip to the neighbourhood tid-bits store as a reward for completed homework – make sure you keep to the bargain.

6. Exercise flexibility

You definitely wouldn't want your child playing with matches, or anything combustible. But if she insists on playing with a torchlight, what's the harm? So choose wisely on when to enforce the rules and when to allow your child a bit of leeway. This will help you observe the 3 positive: 1 negative comment ratio mentioned in No. 2 above.

7. Guidance

As a parent, the best you can hope to do for your child is to provide proper guidance. Don't try to control their actions, because it's just not possible. Instead, guide their actions by gradually giving them more responsibility for their own behaviour. This allows them to experience the natural consequences of their actions. Explain these consequences beforehand and then let your child decide. If she refuses to eat her dinner, don't get annoyed. Simply explain that she will get hungry later and allow her to experience that hunger.

8. Give clear and simple instructions

If you want your child to do something, give instructions in clear and short sentences using a calm voice. This way, your child knows what you want her to do. For example, try saying, "May Yee, stop hitting your brother. Keep your hands to yourself", instead of, "Don't do that". Remember, having well-adjusted and happy children starts with you. So start them thinking in a positive direction early.

9. Don't nag

Say it once, whatever you want to tell your child, and if she refuses to do it, remind her of the consequences and count to five. For example, if you want her to pick up her toys, set the boundaries by telling her exactly what is expected and the possible consequences if she does not do it. You do not need to repeat yourself; simply enforce the rules you have set.

10. Prepare for challenging situations

There will be times when your child will test your patience because they are over-stimulated by the situation. Take heart because this is normal. It is simply part and parcel of how children develop and is actually quite normal for children not to listen to their parents one-third of the time. Anticipate in advance situations where your child may misbehave, then talk to your child to prepare her. For example, the rules for traveling on the bus might be stay in your seat, use a quiet voice, keep hands and feet to yourself.

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