

Parenting Principles

8 principles to raise healthy kids and build a happy home



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PARENTING PRINCIPLES:

8 Principles to
Raise Healthy Kids and
Build a Happy Home

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INTRODUCTION

What are the best ways to parent?
What are the key principles to keep in mind while fostering a loving family life?

There are key principles you can use to help direct your parenting journey with consistency, love, and structure.

- **Principle #1:** We will discuss the importance of values and expectations in the household. When values inform expectations, everyone in the family can come

to a place of understanding and acceptance.

- **Principle #2:** This section covers the importance of boundaries. Having a parent-child relationship is a strong source of guidance for a child.
- **Principle #3:** There are always consequences to our actions. This section covers the importance of teaching your children to take responsibility for their actions. Knowing that actions are followed by consequences will prepare your child for the real world.
- **Principle #4:** It is uncomfortable to allow our children to struggle. However, struggle is a wonderful teacher.

- **Principle #5:** When you have faith in your child's ability, he will feel secure in taking risks. Knowing that you are always on his team will help your child stay motivated when challenges present themselves.
- **Principle #6:** Grateful people are joyful people. By expressing gratitude for each other, your family unit will grow stronger and happier.
- **Principle #7:** Get active with your family. Try new things instead of sticking to the same-old routine. Creating new memories and encouraging new hobbies are two wonderful ways to bond with your child.
- **Principle #8:** Emotional stability and consistency is difficult to

maintain. Your children learn these skills from you.

These principles can provide a source of direction in the maze of parenting.

Let's explore these principles together in depth...

PRINCIPLE #1: WHY YOU NEED FAMILY EXPECTATIONS & VALUES

Creating a consistent household starts with values. Values are sources of strength and direction for everyone in the family. These can dictate the way the family makes decisions together. Values such as authenticity, honesty, respect, and love can flow into every aspect of the family.

Coming up with values as a family is a great way for everyone to take responsibility for living according to these values. Over time, you can gather your family together and reassess the

values you follow. As the family evolves, so can the values.

You can choose values by thinking about how you want your family to function. What do you prioritize as a family? How do you want your kids to behave? What do you want them to value as they grow older?

Answering these questions can help you narrow down your core values.

Consider these benefits of implementing values:

1. **Values teach kids to think critically about how they want to behave and navigate through their world.** When you model what it looks like to live according to values, your kids are better able to

apply these principles in their own lives. As they face confusing situations and difficult decisions, they'll be able to look to their values and make an informed decision.

2. **Values implement positive habits.**

Instead of coming up with expectations out of nowhere, values create a source of expectations. **This can make more sense to kids.** Knowing the importance of acting according to values will teach positive habits based on what they come to value themselves.

- For example, if they value health, they may develop healthy eating and exercise habits.

3. **Values help kids make decisions for themselves.** When you begin discussing values with your kids, you can show them how they can help guide your decision making. Over time, you can guide them towards choosing things based on their values. Eventually they'll go through that process themselves.

HOW CAN YOU PUT VALUES TO ACTION?

Having a set of core values helps foster a cohesive family unit. It's important to clarify how to act according to these values.

What does it look like when you're being respectful? Based on that value, multiple expectations can be set up. For

example, respect looks like treating the home with respect. So, the expectation might be to keep a clean room.

When kids are old enough to participate in these decisions, they're better able to take ownership of the values and expectations of the household.

If they can set expectations themselves, they're better able to accept the consequences if they do not meet these expectations.

EXPECTATIONS PROVIDE STRUCTURE

Children benefit from having structure. **Though they may resist it at first, setting up family expectations is a valuable piece of the foundation in a household.**

The best way to do this is by discussing how you want your values to inform the way your home works.

What does the value of safety look like to you? What do you need to feel safe? Perhaps things such as curfew, driving rules, or treating siblings nicely come into place. Brainstorm as many ideas as you can think of. You can discuss these ideas as new situations present themselves.

SETTING UP EFFECTIVE EXPECTATIONS

Expectations are most effective when they're achievable. When kids are repeatedly successful, they gain more confidence and pride in themselves. That doesn't mean expectations need to

be low. Having reasonably high expectations is not a bad thing. They teach your kids that you believe they're able to meet your standards.

You can expect them to go to science tutoring when you need it, but you don't have to push them to be an astronaut by the time they are nine-years-old.

When children don't have consistent and reliable guidance from their parents, they're more likely to seek out their peers for leadership. This can create a rift between you and your kids and make it more difficult to implement expectations in the future.

Values and expectations are the compass of the family. They help everyone get on the same page about how the family runs. They inform the directions the family takes, and they

help sustain closeness as the family evolves.

Expectations let children know what is and is not acceptable. They also teach valuable lessons that kids will carry with them into adulthood.

PRINCIPLE #2: YOU'RE A PARENT, NOT A FRIEND

As children grow older, they begin exploring their own identity. This can lead to a bit of distance between you and your child. This can be hurtful. You have worked so hard and you may sometimes feel unappreciated. Some parents try to connect with their kids by becoming lenient and acting more like a friend than a parent.

Though kids may respond well to this, it actually doesn't benefit them in the long run. **A lack of structure can lead your kids off track.** As a parent, you're responsible for your kid's safety, health,

and future. This can seem like a daunting task, but it is possible after you have implemented your values and expectations for your family.

Acting according to your values means setting clear boundaries.

Your kids will test the limits as they try to gain more independence. Having your boundaries in mind as they grow in new directions can help you remain calm and consistent through a tumultuous time.

SET AND STICK TO YOUR BOUNDARIES

Follow these strategies to effectively implement boundaries:

- **Begin by evaluating your core values.** Your values tell you what is and is not okay. Just as they help you make decisions and guide your family, they also assist in clarifying boundaries that would otherwise be murky.
- **Have your boundaries ready.** As your kids continue to grow, they'll face new milestones and responsibilities. You don't always have to rescue your kid when they're in difficult situations. You can create boundaries about how much you're willing to help them. This is especially important as kids grow older and need to begin

supporting themselves.

- **Pay attention to your feelings and reactions.** When you're in uncharted territory, you'll know a boundary is being crossed if you feel especially angry or uncomfortable. This can help you inform future boundaries when other similar situations occur.
- **Boundaries show that you demand respect.** If you lack self-respect, you're less likely to stand strong when your boundaries are being pushed. Maintaining boundaries helps solidify the expectations you have set into place. **It also creates a healthy dynamic between you and your child.**

MAINTAIN YOUR AUTHORITY

When children don't meet the family expectations, it's time to uphold your values, your boundaries, and your authority. When your kids are testing the limits and begin talking back to you, do your best not to take it personally. If your child is frustrated with you, he may lash out in disrespectful ways. Do your best to keep your cool in these heated situations.

Even though your children are unpredictable and emotional, you can still maintain stability for them by remaining consistent. When you remain calm, your kids will pick up on this. Though they may be going through a difficult time, they will apply what they learn from you to their future situations.

PRINCIPLE #3: BE FIRM, BUT FAIR

You're the first source of knowledge for your kids. It is your job to prepare them for success in the real world. Part of this process means teaching your kids that there are consequences for all of our actions.

You may see your child be friendly to someone and then make a friend. This is a teachable moment where you can show your child that when you are kind and respectful, good things happen. Valuable teachable moments also come about when children do not meet expectations.

HOLD THE LINE

If your child fails a test, you can implement consequences.

Consequences are most impactful when they have a direct relation to the action.

For example, it might not make sense to make your child do the dishes every day for failing a test. Instead, it may be more appropriate to limit free time and increase study time.

This is a good time to teach your child another valuable lesson: we must take responsibility for our actions.

Holding your kids accountable for their actions will teach them to own up to their mistakes in the future. It's helpful to talk through the reasoning behind these consequences so your child

understands why she is expected to meet expectations, and what happens when expectations are not met.

This prepares kids for the real world, where consequences can be much worse than getting a bad grade in class for not studying.

CONSEQUENCES IN THE REAL WORLD

- **Putting in minimal effort leads to less opportunity.** When kids are still living at home, they may get bad grades. You can show your kids that these bad grades will close them off from future opportunities to grow mentally, personally, and professionally. If your kid doesn't apply himself to work in the real

world, he may lose his job or miss out on a promotion.

- **Being disrespectful invites disrespect.** If your child doesn't take on the value of respect, he may be careless with others. This will not produce positive relationships. It may lead to your child not being respected professionally or personally. **Teaching your child that you get what you give is a powerful lesson that he will carry into adulthood.**
- **Irresponsibility leads to loss.** If your child is irresponsible with objects, money, or commitments, they're likely to struggle in the future. Being inconsiderate of money could lead to financial struggles in the future. If you teach your child the value of a dollar, he will grow up understanding the

importance of saving and spending responsibly.

- **Missing commitments leads to unreliability.** In the real world, if your child does not follow through on what he says he will do, people will likely deem him unreliable. So, when you're teaching your kid to follow through on commitments, you are also preparing him to be available and trustworthy in future endeavors.

REWARD SUCCESS

Addressing your child when she doesn't meet expectations will help her be more successful in the future, even when she doesn't like the consequences. It's valuable to teach your children about real world consequences. We often jump

to the negative when we think of the effects of our actions. However, many of our actions have really positive effects.

Provide specific praise when your child does something successful. You don't have to praise him every time he makes his bed, as that is an expectation. However, you could express genuine appreciation when he takes initiative and cleans the whole house so that you don't have to. Being considerate like this benefits your child in the real world.

Giving rewards for positive behavior is more effective than punishment. It feels good to get praise. Happy brain chemicals such as dopamine are released when we receive praise. Our reward center lights up. This leads to a desire to continue doing good things.

The need for kids to receive praise doesn't mean that you need to overly

compliment or coddle them. You don't need to give praise every day (unless your kid is on a real winning-streak). In fact, giving praise constantly makes it less valuable. Your child may begin to *expect* praise.

You don't need to give praise every day, and you don't need to wait six months between each time you express appreciation for your child's behavior. Instead, **give praise when it's appropriate.**

For example:

- When your child has gone above and beyond expectations
- When he has taken initiative for himself
- When she has completed a particularly challenging task

This type of encouragement is motivating and will help your child believe in his capabilities.

The praise you give should be intentional and specific.

For example, instead of saying, “You got an A, good job.” You can say, “Wow, I see that you worked very hard to achieve this. You asked for help and you persevered through the obstacles. You have a strong work ethic.”

TALK ABOUT IT

Using positive action as a teachable moment leads to more positive actions from your kids. When paired with natural consequences for negative actions, **your child will have a better**

idea of how his actions affect his world and the world of those around him.

Having conversations in these moments is valuable. You can think through your child's behavior with her. It may even give you a better understanding of why she behaved the way she did.

Have the difficult conversation.

If your child failed a test, you may have noticed that he had hardly studied. The instinct is to say, "Well, you need to study more." That's probably true.

However, having a conversation about this could broaden your understanding of a larger issue.

Maybe his math class is really hard to understand and he feels embarrassed. Fear of failure often leads to less effort. Children are afraid of trying something and failing anyway.

Instead, they can put forth little effort and say, “Well, I failed that test because I didn’t study, not because I’m not smart.”

Once you’re able to have a conversation about this issue, you can have a better idea of how to proceed.

Instead of punishing your child, you can teach him what to do when he needs help. Require that he meet with his teacher once a week or get him a tutor.

Punishing a behavior that a child doesn’t know how to fix can lead to confusion and resentment instead of progress.

Remaining firm but fair requires clear expectations and boundaries.

Natural consequences are implemented because that’s how the real world

operates. Similarly, outstanding behavior merits positive praise and acknowledgement.

Having a conversation about the consequences at hand can teach both you and your child something new. It can even lead to a better understanding of the needs of your child.

PRINCIPLE #4: MISTAKES ARE OKAY

Life is in a constant flow of success and failure, of happiness and disappointment. This is the nature of life. It is uncomfortable and difficult, but going through difficulty builds resilience. If you find that your child has made a mistake, you may want to comfort them and solve the problem for them.

Let your child hold the tension.

This will continue to help them take responsibility for their actions. When they're able to feel the feelings that go along with making the mistake, they'll be able to evaluate their values and learn what it feels like when they are or are not acting in accordance with those values.

When you come in to save the day when something goes wrong, your child will begin to think that he can't solve problems without you. This could lead to feelings of helplessness and doubt in the future.

When you let your child have ownership of the mistake, you teach them that you know they can handle it.

WHEN TO STEP IN

Let your child fail safely.

When your child is about to make a mistake that you know will cause harm, it's valuable to step in sooner rather than later. Kids don't have fully-developed frontal lobes in their brains. This means they're not fully able to think through

the consequences of their actions. Sometimes you need to point this out to them and have a conversation.

You can give guidance when your child asks for help. Part of making mistakes means learning how to ask for help. If your child reaches out for help, you can guide him in the right direction. In fact, these can be valuable moments of communication and understanding.

You don't need to give more help than your boundaries permit. However, when it's appropriate you can provide assistance.

FOSTER INDEPENDENCE

If your child makes a mistake, it means she was trying to make a decision for herself and her own individuality. That's

a good thing! When you make all of the decisions for your child, she won't feel comfortable to navigate failure and learn from it.

When failure comes in the real world, she'll feel helpless and lost rather than well-equipped to handle any difficulties.

If you can teach your child to grow through mistakes at an early age, she will know the coping skills she needs to handle anything in the future.

Looking for solutions to problems happens in the midst of problems. You don't need to leave your child out in the wild alone, but you don't need to hold her hand, either. You can find a happy medium and be a source of wisdom while your child is gaining her own wisdom.

Going through trials and tribulations builds character and compassion. By experiencing failure, your child can better connect with the authentic human experience.

Though you don't need to coddle your children through their mistakes, you also do not have to give up on them. If you give up on your child, he will likely sense this negativity and respond adversely to it.

PRINCIPLE #5: KIDS WILL BE AS SUCCESSFUL AS YOU BELIEVE THEY CAN BE

It can be disappointing and frustrating when kids don't meet the expectations you've set out for them based on your values. When the same mistake is repeated over and over again, you may begin to lose hope. It's natural to begin thinking of your child in a less positive light.

For example, if your child continuously does poorly in school, you may begin to think of him as a poor student. It may be true that your child struggles frequently.

However, when you begin to think of him as a bad student, he will see himself that way, too.

Treating him like he's going to fail or have another bad semester will often be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Treating your child as though he has already failed is not likely to lead to success.

A SELF-FULLFILLING PROPHECY

There was once a study done at a school where teachers were given two different groups of students:

- The teachers were told that Group A was a group of bad influences and students who struggle. Unbeknownst to the teachers, this group was actually comprised of

high-achievers.

- Group B was said to be a group of outstanding students with good behavior. In fact, the opposite was true.

The study found that teachers treated these groups of students differently. Teachers treated these students according to their beliefs about how successful these students were going to be.

As a result, the previously high-performing students in Group A began having behavioral issues and doing poorly in school. The previously less-successful students began performing better in school and earning better grades.

As you can see from the study, making assumptions about the potential of children causes their behavior to change.

Even though they are not specifically told, “You’re not well-behaved,” children will pick up on the ways that you treat them according to this belief. Over time, they’ll begin believing this themselves and will begin to act out even more.

For your best results, use these strategies to show support:

1. **Remember that if you begin to doubt your child, he will begin to doubt himself.** Though it may sometimes seem hopeless, staying optimistic will encourage your child to keep trying. When you give up, your kid does, too.

2. **Set high expectations and pay attention to the outcome.** When your child is struggling through a mistake, help him identify his situation and think positively about solutions. Encourage conversations about other possible outcomes and goals.
3. **Lead by example.** When you show your child that you believe in yourself, he will learn what it looks like to persevere through difficulty.

YOUR CHILD IS CAPABLE

Children are observant and curious. They're capable of learning great new things everyday, and they do. When they sense what you feel about them, they're more likely to perform according to your predictions.

Let your child explore new things and learn as they go.

Perhaps your child has a large interest in soccer. Despite his love of the sport, he may trip over the ball in every game. Instead of encouraging him to give up, show him that you believe in his ability to develop greater skills in something he is dedicated to.

Instead of shaming him when he doesn't make that game-winning goal, you can instead encourage him to keep practicing. This will show him that you believe him. **It will motivate him to continue making an effort.**

This will be a valuable skill later in life when difficulties arise. Instead of retreating while approaching hurdles, your child will learn to approach them

with courage. With willingness to work through struggle, anything is possible.

As children grow and evolve, their optimism will grow in proportion to your belief in their success.

Though it isn't always easy to maintain a positive spirit in times of difficulty, an effort must be made to move forward with hope.

When you believe in the potential of your child, he will, too. This positive thinking benefits gratitude. And, gratitude increases positive thinking. There is no replacement for a strong daily practice of gratitude.

PRINCIPLE #6: FOSTER A GRATEFUL HEART

Practice gratitude each day – both alone and with your family. Practice gratitude every day. Just 15 minutes of gratitude each day has many benefits that grow from your heart, to the heart of your family, and on to your community.

Our society tends towards the negative. Things are frequently inconvenient or disappointing. That is not the lens through which you want to see your world, however. Instead, make a conscious effort to increase your gratitude skills.

Extensive research has shown many benefits of gratitude. Gratitude increases feelings of connectedness and peace. Not only will the bond of your family grow stronger, but each member of the family will benefit as well.

Consider these benefits of gratitude:

- 1. Gratitude helps develop empathy.** When we're grateful, we're more aware of others and less concerned with ourselves. We have a broader understanding of the world around us. As a result, we're better able to be patient and understanding with others.
- 2. Gratitude enhances feelings of joy.** Even when the storms of life present themselves, grateful

people are able to remain hopeful. **Gratitude cultivates a core feeling of joy that is not evaporated in times of stress.**

3. **We sleep better when we're grateful.** By ending your day with gratitude, you're less likely to ruminate on the negative aspects of your day. If you're able to see the goodness and express gratitude, you'll feel stronger feelings of peacefulness.

4. **Gratitude builds resilience.** By actively acknowledging the specific things that you're grateful for, you're making a positive effort to look on the bright side. **Life is less likely to keep you down when you're able to see the light through the fog.**

5. **Gratitude increases self-compassion and decreases negative self-talk.** When we're able to step back and look at the positive, our thoughts are likely to mimic that positivity. This will lead to more positive self-talk and forgiveness in future errors.

GRATITUDE IN ACTION

It's one thing to think about and appreciate the idea of gratitude. It's a different thing entirely to put that gratitude into action. You may want to be grateful, but are not sure how.

You can start by noticing positive aspects of your day. At the end of each day, ask yourself, "What was my favorite thing about this day?"

Start small and work your way up to paying more attention to gratitude. When you're able to express gratitude in a meaningful way, you'll reap all of the benefits of a consistent gratitude practice.

By practicing gratitude as a family, you can teach your children to be grateful independently.

Here are some ways you can practice gratitude as a family:

1. **Create a family happy jar.** Grab a jar and a stack of index cards. At the end of each day, have everyone write down one thing they're grateful for about the day on an index card. All of you can share what you're grateful for and then put your index cards in the jar. Date the cards so you can look

back at all your happy memories!

2. **Talk about three things you're grateful for.** On the way to school or over breakfast, list three things you're grateful for. Ask your children to do the same. You can all begin your day with gratitude and gain a positive outlook on the day.
3. **Write thank you notes.** Show your children the importance of expressing thanks by sending thank you cards. Whether you're grateful for a vacation, a gift, or an opportunity, a thank you card is always appropriate. **This will teach your kids to really think about their gratitude.**

By spending time in gratitude, you'll feel a peace with the present moment that is hard to achieve any other way. When

you can accept and be grateful for what you have in the moment, you'll feel at ease with your family.

PRINCIPLE #7: BE ACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE

Building a happy home and healthy children requires an intentional effort from every member of the family. It's easy to turn on Netflix and have a day where you don't have to pay attention to anything. Some days, that really is exactly what you need.

Pay attention to how your family spends time together. If you notice that you're mostly inside or not doing many activities as a family, make a point to dedicate time with family.

INVEST IN MEMORIES

Invest in memories that bring your family closer together. You can get outside and participate in activities with your family.

Quality time is a great way to display love for your children.

Paying attention and listening to them can help build their confidence. It can also help you get to know your children as they grow and develop.

By fostering strong familial relationships, interpersonal skills are strengthened outside of the household. Children don't forget cherished one-on-one time. Family bond is a foundational component in the development of a well-rounded child.

A secure relationship is one where both parties feel known, understood, and accepted.

Showing your child that you take her seriously and care about who she is helps her develop a secure attachment. This will make your child feel comfortable taking risks and trying new things. When she knows she has a supportive family encouraging her, she is comfortable in challenging situations.

Fostering these positive relationships requires time and creativity. A good place to start is by taking the dogs for a walk together or going out to dinner together. Doing these activities without cell phones can present new opportunities for connection.

Making unique memories will bring about even more ways to connect.

Try these fun family activities:

1. **Choose your family's favorite non-profit and spend a day volunteering together.** Being of service increases empathy and gives a broader perspective of the world. Volunteering helps the family grow together. It also teaches your children the importance of compassion for others.
2. **Visit a museum.** Going to a museum provides the opportunity to have their own experience, together. As each of you interpret the art around you, you can have interesting conversations that may lead to new knowledge and understanding of each other. Seeing art and creativity in action can inspire creativity for everyone

in the family.

3. Learn something new together.

Take an art or cooking class. If you go to a painting class together, you can each create something new and have fun embracing the new experience. Taking a cooking class leads not only to innovation in the kitchen, but the chance to teach your kids about valuable life skills.

- 4. Have an adventure together.** Get out of the house and go on a hike or a nice walk. Getting away from screens and other worldly distractions can help you take a step back and just be together as a family. Family exercise promotes a healthy lifestyle and emphasizes the importance of long term physical health.

5. **Play games.** Partake in the hobbies that your children love. If you don't know much about their hobby, ask questions and get curious. **You will learn more about your children's strengths and interests. Your child will feel respect and love in return.**

Beginning habits of family time will hold the family closer together during times of stress or uncertainty. It's easy to let time fly and get stuck in the hustle and bustle of daily life. By adding regular family time to your weekly routine, your family will be able to stay in touch and strengthen communication.

As your kids turn to teens and teens turn to young adults, you'll remain closer by spending consistent time together.

You'll have the joy of watching your kids grow up by taking them out and

encouraging them to pursue things that are interesting to them. When you guide them to new experiences, they'll become more curious about the world around them.

PRINCIPLE #8: TEACH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is defined as *“the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically.”*

This skill is one that is carefully crafted. Teaching this skill is not easy – it requires allowing vulnerability and truth.

If your child is the smartest person in the room but has a hard time relating to people emotionally, he is less likely to move forward than an emotionally intelligent person. The ability to connect with others in a vulnerable and authentic

way is a carefully crafted skill that your child will learn from you.

Daniel Goleman is one of the key innovators in the research on emotional intelligence. He has written a number of books on the topic. In them, he outlines the five key elements of emotional intelligence.

Five key elements of emotional intelligence:

1. **Genuine emotional intelligence begins with self-awareness.** Self-awareness is an ability to recognize emotions and see their impact on those around you. Those who have an ability to understand the sources of their emotions are better able to understand how their emotions are affecting their

current state of mind.

2. **Self-regulation leads to adaptability and acceptance of change.** Regulating emotions can only happen with a strong sense of self-awareness. **Self-regulation means knowing when and how to express emotions.** The ability to remain calm in stressful situations until you are in a safe place to process your feelings is the core of self-regulation.

3. **Motivation should come from inside rather than outside sources.** Rather than chasing fame and recognition, intrinsically motivated people work hard in order to fulfill their own goals and expectations. Those who are motivated from secure sources are better able to roll with the punches and adapt to new things. They are

always looking for ways to improve and learn new things.

4. **Empathy is unequivocally linked to emotional intelligence.** This is the skill that most helps in connection with other people because it entails an ability to understand the struggles and success of those around them. By being able to connect with a diverse range of people, empathetic people foster stronger and more authentic connections to others.

5. **Social skills develop emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence develops social skills.** An ability to be positive and uplifting in daily social interactions improves relationships with the people you come into contact with.

TEACH WITH HEART

Teaching emotional intelligence may be the most valuable thing you can pass on to your child. However, it can also be the most difficult because it requires you to get vulnerable and honest in front of your child to an appropriate extent. Though it may sound cheesy, talking about feelings cannot be replaced with any other activity.

The ability to identify feelings starts early and it starts with you. You can begin teaching your child about feelings at a young age by expressing your own feelings.

For example, you can say, “When you don’t follow my directions about crossing the street, I feel scared that you’ll get hurt by a car.” **By showing your child that you’re scared and hurt**

instead of strictly reprimanding him, the experience will teach him more about safety.

NON-JUDGMENTAL COMMUNICATION

Pausing to identify your emotions is a difficult task. It's especially difficult in front of children. They look up to us and we often feel pressure to be the perfect parents they deserve. No parents are perfect.

The biggest thing children deserve is authenticity and truth from their parents. Grown-ups who can admit their human-ness are teaching a valuable lesson in honesty.

Communicating your feelings teaches your kids to communicate their feelings, too. **Instead of acting out of anger, having a conversation about it is much more productive.** Talking through feelings and getting to a place of understanding teaches healthy habits.

Trust is built when you allow your children to confide in you. When they're young, they are experiencing new emotions at every turn. Uncharted territory can be challenging to navigate. If you can listen without judgment, your child will feel more secure and willing to be honest.

When people can communicate their feelings instead of blowing up in rage or acting passive aggressive, they are more likely to get through their difficulty in a reasonable time frame.

ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY

It's difficult to experience new and uncomfortable emotions.

From the first hangnail to the first heartbreak, each hurdle that life brings requires more resilience and emotional understanding. Having conversations about these hurdles promotes emotional growth and understanding of self.

When you're going through your own exploration of emotions, you can share what the process is like with your child. When difficulties arise in your child's life, you don't need to swoop in to save the day. Instead, **sit with your child and encourage him to dive into his emotions with curiosity.**

Instead of running from emotions, show your children how to cope with and feel through life's many emotions.

TEACH COPING SKILLS

It's not always easy to let emotions flow through and out of us. Instead, the instinct is usually to try to hold it together and feign stability. Rather than covering up authentic emotions, teach your kids to feel and cope with these emotions in healthy ways.

When children don't know how to feel emotions, they often turn to other sources for a mental escape and relief. There are many coping skills online that are available for all personality types. When you're first introducing coping skills to your child, try them together and see what works.

Try these fun and effective coping skill activities:

1. **Observe nature.** After a particularly difficult day, spend time in nature in order to focus on what is right in front of you rather than negative ruminations.
2. **Have a dance break.** Take a moment to let loose and be silly in the midst of difficult times. Put on a favorite song and let your dancing shoes take over. This can help give a moment of relief in some murky waters.
3. **Create art.** Whether the interest is in woodworking or scrapbooking, choosing some materials and getting creative is effective in entering a calm state of

mindfulness.

4. **Practice Gratitude.** Fostering a grateful heart comes in handy in more ways than one! Gratitude increases feelings of peace. It helps connect us to what is around us in the present moment and it helps ease the pain of difficult stress.

SUMMARY

There's no perfect way to parent.

Having children means embracing the unpredictability of life. When you have principles to help guide the way you raise your kids and build your family, you're better able to stay consistent throughout the ebbs and flows of life.

Your family will grow with each passing year. Just as your kids will experience growing pains as they grow taller, your family will go through growing pains as you learn new lessons together. With every endeavor comes missteps, wrong turns, and entirely wrong directions.

When your values are clarified, a strong foundation of guidance provides an

anchor when everything feels up in the air. These values help clarify the expectations by which you and your family operate.

By acting according to values, you'll raise children into adults who also have their own set of values. Clarity of values provides a canvas on which to build a life one can be proud of. The benefits of these values present themselves and foster a stronger ability to implement positive habits and think positively.

Set expectations that are both challenging and achievable.

Based on your values, you can decide on the way you expect each member of your family to behave. Allow your children to be a part of this conversation and decide upon consequences that are related to the expectation.

Make the line between peer and parent very clear.

Though it is tempting to be well-liked rather than respected, remember that you're a parent and not a friend. This doesn't mean you can't get along with or have fun with your child. **It does mean you need to have clear boundaries.**

Boundaries help solidify expectations and they clarify the consequences of behavior. You may sometimes get a negative reaction from your child when they're faced with frustration towards you. Part of your job is to teach stability in times of anger or disagreement. You can model this with your child by remaining calm and patient.

Prepare your child for the real world by teaching him about the natural consequences of behavior. **Remain both**

consistent and considerate – firm, but fair.

When your child knows the importance of taking responsibility for his actions, he will be cognizant of his behavior.

Remind your child of the real-life consequences of his behavior by providing consequences to negative behavior that are related to the event. For example, if your child steals from someone, a corresponding consequence may include making verbal and financial amends.

Reward above-and-beyond behavior with positive praise and acknowledgement. Think of a specific success and outline the qualities that helped your child get that success.

Talk before you punish.

When your child does not meet your expectations, consequences follow naturally. However, before implementing these consequences be sure to have a conversation about the issue. Your child may have a different view of the situation.

If you can communicate with your child about his consequences, he is better able to make informed decisions in the future.

Let your children take risks and find their own way through mistakes.

You're responsible for your child's health and safety. You are not responsible for saving your child from every failure and hurdle they face. Encourage him to take responsibility for himself by looking at the mistake he has made and learning what he can from it.

Step in when your child is in danger or suffering. As your child gets older, you can put more responsibility on her to ask for help and find her way to her own solution. **Look to your values to direct you in times of distress for your child.**

Letting your child learn from failure does not mean giving up hope.

Your child will be as prosperous and successful as you believe he can be. When you believe in the potential of your child, she will, too. When you act as though your child will be successful, he will feel encouraged to meet those expectations.

If you notice consistent missteps, it may be more difficult to maintain patience and hope. However, these are the times when your child needs you to believe in him the most.

Teach gratitude, live gratefully.

Intentionally choosing 15 minutes per day being grateful has numerous benefits. It lowers stress levels and increases empathy. Gratitude helps improve sleep patterns and it nurtures self-compassion.

Expressing gratitude of your family helps strengthen the familial bonds between each member of the family. When we are grateful, we are more aware of the present moment and we enjoy the company of our loved ones on a deeper level.

Invest in memories, not TVs.

Step away from screens and take an active role in your family and create happy memories with unique experiences. Learn something new, be of service, or just act silly and have fun by

playing games. These precious bonding moments cannot be replaced.

Emotional intelligence is a key to a loving and supportive household.

The ability to identify emotions and express them appropriately is a skill that is best taught by you. Your children will learn how to behave emotionally based on the way you regulate your own emotions. You can have honest conversations with your child about true emotions.

When difficult emotions present themselves, you can help them gather a collection of coping skills that they can use in future times of fear or confusion.

Choose your priorities, imagine your happy family, and take action. Raising healthy kids and building a happy home comes from your heart and permeates

every member of your family. Enjoy the love and support of a healthy family while implementing new skills to help your family grow and move forward together.