
Parenting Infants & Preschoolers

During the first year of life, respond to your baby's cries in a timely way. These cries tell you that he/she needs something now. You build your baby's trust in you if he/she knows, "When I cry, my parents come." Contrary to myth, this won't spoil baby. In fact, it makes baby feel more secure and means they may not cry as much later.

Talking and singing to your baby helps them learn that there are other ways of communicating. Baby will learn to talk sooner if you talk to her/him. Looking at baby helps him/her to never feel too alone. Holding makes your baby trust she/he will be loved. Touching baby makes baby comfortable from the closeness.

Take "time-outs" on a regular basis for yourself with friends, family or alone. You will be more refreshed when you return to your child. Take care of yourself. It is easier to be a good parent when you are healthy, content and feeling good about yourself. Develop or maintain your sense of humor. Keep a "this too shall pass" attitude. Remember that today's calamity may well be tomorrow's precious memory.

To prevent frustration for both you and your child, don't plan on running a lot of errands when your child is tired or hungry. If you must get things done, keep trips short and bring food or a drink along.

Begin to develop simple routines while your child is young. Routines provide security for children and help them shift from one activity to another. Sudden changes in routine can be alarming to a young child and produce fussiness in them. Help children make changes more smoothly by giving them advance notice that something will happen or something needs to be done.

Give your child simple choices as soon as he/she is able to let you know what they prefer. For young children give two options (Do you want Cheerios or eggs for breakfast). Any time you offer choices, make sure both are acceptable to you (Instead of saying "do you want to go to bed or not?" say, "Do you want to go to bed now or in five minutes?").

Limit the number of "rules" you have to 3-7 specific ones to avoid power struggles. Rather than saying "No running in the house" try saying, "Walk in the house." Rules should state what you want to have happen. Rules should be used for health, safety and avoiding danger.

Praise is powerful. Catch your child "being good" and be specific in telling them what you notice about their behavior that pleases you. Some examples: "Thank you so much for helping me clear the table." "I just love the picture you drew. Can you tell me about it?"

Be a good role model. Let your children know that you feel good about yourself. Also let them see that you too can make mistakes and can learn from them.

Have reasonable expectations for your children. Help them to set reachable goals so they can achieve success.

Discipline means teaching rules or expectations for appropriate behavior. It is the first step in the child's learning how to be responsible for his/her own actions, and it builds self-esteem. Effective discipline could be setting realistic limits, listening carefully to your child, praising cooperation or accomplishments, or encouraging choices.

Minimize weaknesses and failure. Children do not profit from knowing only their flaws. Support their effort, not just their success.

Punishment is a consequence when the child has chosen to act inappropriately. Effective punishment should not be hurtful (no put-downs or ridicule). Punishment should fit the misbehavior (example: hitting others means time-out away from others). Punishment should be directed to the act, not to the person.

When using time-out for discipline, be as matter-of-fact as possible. Time-out is effective beginning at between 3-4 years of age. The rule of thumb is to give one minute in time-out for each year of age.

If you have to say "no" repeatedly to your older infant or toddler, (and you will) try using "redirection". Verbally and/or physically remove your child from what he/she is doing and get him/her interested in another activity.

It sometimes helps to remember that your child does not necessarily share your agenda. Your agenda may be to have a neat house, and little children not "getting into things". However, your child's agenda is to explore and be curious about different things in their environment.

Invest in a timer, and let the timer be the limit-setter. You might set the timer for 5 minutes and say "When the timer rings, I'll be able to help you" or "you can have a tantrum until the timer rings, and then we'll talk about what is making you so angry". Or, "You have until the timer rings to pick up your toys. Whatever is left on the floor you lose for (whatever amount of time)".

Be consistent in your messages to your child about what you expect. If you say no to a behavior one day, your child will be confused if you allow it the next day. Talk with others who care for your child to be sure you have similar expectations.

Above all, show how much you care for them. Hug them. Tell them they are terrific. Tell them often how much you love them.

For more information or help, please call:
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