

TIPS FOR PARENTS

National Resource Centre for Inclusive education

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Our Job as Parents: Our main job is to provide the conditions that help a child to develop to his or her fullest positive potential. By the time we're done, we want a resourceful, resilient, ethical person who can fully participate in and contribute to society. What a challenge!



The Early Years:

From birth to late adolescence, the child's brain is developing. How well it develops depends on us. The different parts of the brain, with their specific functions, need stimulation.

Specific Brain Functions:



Different parts of the brain are delegated for specific functions: language (taking in and sending out); emotions; music; spatial relations; coordination; social relations; decision making; hearing; vision; and more! Each part has to be stimulated for the fullest development to occur.

Stimulation is not complicated. All one has to do is talk to and respond to a baby and toddler (most brain development occurs before age 3); provide things to manipulate (e.g., blocks); show them right from wrong; have them listen to and create music (singing, humming, blowing on a plastic flute); help them to make choices, and so on.

How the Environment Affects Development:



From what has been said, you can see that you can have a huge effect on your child's

development, as can all family members. Outside forces on the child are called environmental influences. The other influence is from biology (e.g., heredity). Of the two, the environment plays the major role. For instance, even with Down syndrome (a biological problem), a child can achieve beyond our expectations—but only if we provide adequate stimulation.

When the Baby Cries:



Baby experts suggest picking up a crying baby. They are not crying for “no reason at all.” There is a reason, but we can't always figure it out. You are not spoiling the baby by picking it up and soothing. After age one, that's when spoiling can start.



Punishment:

Neither physical nor verbal punishment has to be used with a child. Neither one works, and both leave scars the child doesn't need to carry in life! We never have to hurt a child.

Children are Naturally Resilient:



This means that children “bounce back.” If a child skins his or her knee by falling, you don't have to worry that the leg will have to be amputated unless you cleanse the wound thoroughly, put antibacterial ointment on it and bandage it. We don't see many one-legged children whose condition was caused by a scrape, but some parents go crazy with the slightest tear of the skin.

If we overprotect children, they don't learn self-preservation. I am

not suggesting letting children play in traffic or jump off bridges. Use your judgment.

If we do too much for children, they learn to be dependent and unable to do things for themselves. This is not what we want!

If we constantly watch over a child for fear “something might happen,” that child becomes shy and not adventuresome. They pick up our fears.

If your child gets up before you do and puts a chair in front of an overhead cupboard, and piles books on the chair in order to reach the cookies, be glad! Yes. This is a resourceful child. I worry about the child who doesn't do something like this.

Structure and Organization:



Things always occur to throw us off course, but, generally, we should try to have structure and organization in the home. Not rigid, but generally predictable. Children need structure; without it they can become like a troupe of untrained monkeys. And then we blame them! Hmmmmmm. No. They're reacting to the lack of structure, the lack of predictability in their world. No one works well under these conditions. Imagine if this was the situation at work!

Have the Child Participate in the Home:

If we do all the laundry, always do the dishes, clean the bathroom, and sweep the floor, the child grows up expecting others to do what he or she can and should do. They expect maid service. I think we know some adult like this.



When children make the home run smoothly, they feel they are valued, and they learn to be responsible. When we don't have children participate, we are saying, "You can't help out; you're of no value to this family." Be sure to reinforce, for you are teaching something new! "Great job." "It looks wonderful." "You are so grown up."

Rules:



Every effective social organization (a work crew, a school, a village, a culture) has rules. The rules work best when everyone participates in setting them up. This means having all family members, especially the children, contribute to the rules.

Let everyone have input; write down what everyone says; and then, and only then, eliminate the ones that aren't needed.

Post the rules on the refrigerator, on the wall, on a door—somewhere where they can be referred to. This eliminates discussion and arguing when they have to be enforced.

When he was 11, we worked on rules for our son. With his input, he had to 1) always let us know where he was after school (e.g., at a friend's house) and 2) could not leave the house after school until he had a) fed the dog;



b) done his homework; c) brought in the firewood (it gets down

to 30 below in the winter where we live in NY); and d) had set the table for dinner. If he went out without those things being done, no TV for one night.



He came up with the consequence himself.

Accentuate the Positive:

Catch the child being good! Too often we catch the child being bad. If the child is doing what you want, use praise to strengthen that behavior.

If the child brushes his or her teeth, say, "Wow, I'm so proud of you for brushing your teeth without being told. You are such a big boy (or girl); good job!"



When Children Don't Obey: You might have noticed that children do not always obey. If you haven't noticed this, you don't have a child! We can get angry, and we all know how well that works! We can hit the child, and we all know how well that also works. A better approach than either of those is to repeat what we asked.

Simply say, "Please hang up your shirt." Don't say anything else, just those words. If the child starts arguing, don't respond back, just repeat, "Please hang up your shirt."

If the child still does not obey, gently go to him with the shirt in your hand, place the shirt in his hand, and repeat the request. Do not get emotional.

Don't Argue with a Child: You will lose!



Children Are Incapable of Plotting against Us!

Even though it may appear so, a child cannot plan to get our blood boiling. As smart as they might be in some areas, the part of the brain needed for this type of planning is too immature. They can't do it.



Nip Problems in the Bud:

Imagine you have a nice, flowering bush in your yard and that it can grow to be eight feet around and 10 feet high—way too big for your yard. When should you trim it? When it is fully grown or when it starts to get too big? When should I stop bad behaviors?" As soon as you see the slightest sign. Just like the bush!

It might be a change in volume or tone of voice, a change in facial expression. Just ask the child to repeat what he or she said. And ask again if it still isn't appropriate. If you don't check bad behavior early, you won't be able to deal with it when it is fully grown, like that bush.



The Manipulative

Child: I don't like this term, for it labels the child. As soon as we put a label on a child, we diminish his or her humanity. If I say, "He's a manipulator," that boy is no longer a child, a person, but some evil entity. This has all sorts of bad implications.



A child manipulates because it works. That's our problem. We give into it. Remember; don't argue with a child. "Just this once?" "Just a few minutes more on the swing?" "Just one more TV program?" "My dad let's me." "You don't love me." You've heard it all! Don't give in. Don't respond. You'll lose.



Giving into Whining:

You are in the supermarket, and Josh wants candy. You say, "No." He pleads, and you again say, "No," and then he starts whining, and then having a tantrum. You're exhausted and give in. What lesson have you taught him?

It's not the lesson we want. Do we know adults like this? Stick to your guns. Stay calm.



Do Not Explain

Too Much to a Child (or to anyone else, for that matter): I know you might not believe the following, for it goes against what you have been led to believe. However, information (reasons, explanations, lectures) has little effect on behavior.

So, your son has done something wrong, and you explain to him why he shouldn't have done it. When you're done, you ask, "Do you understand?" And he nods his head and says, "Uh huh." And then he goes ahead and does what you explained to him he shouldn't do!

ARE YOUR KIDS DRIVING YOU NUTS?



Drives you nuts!

Think of things which you do but know you shouldn't and things you don't do but know you should. Do you need a lecture? Nope, because you already know. You just do it or don't do it, anyway. Kids are the same.

Parents will often tell me something like this: "If I told him once, I told him a thousand times, and he still does it." And I respond, "Then why do you keep telling him?" Have you ever noticed that we continue to do things that don't work?



Intelligence Has Little

to Do with Appropriate Behavior: I will hear parents and teachers say, "For a bright child, I can't believe how dumb he acts." Being advanced in school does not mean one will be advanced socially or will make wise decisions. "Well, he's bright enough!" No; he's bright in certain areas not in others. Remember the different functions of different parts of the brain? This is a good example.

What Happens to Our Brain When We Are Upset:



Have you ever been so upset that you couldn't think straight? It's as if your mind froze? Well, when we are upset or stressed out, the chemicals in the thinking

part of the brain stop working. When we calm down, then we can think again. If you ever had test anxiety, you experienced this; the answers came to you after you took the test but not during the test!

When we're angry with a child, we sometimes "lose it," and lash out at the child, verbally or physically. We can do real physical and psychological damage by doing so. Later, when we've calmed down, we regret what we said or did but there's no amount of saying, "I'm sorry" that will remove what penetrated that child's world.



When you feel yourself getting tense and losing control, back off, even to the point of leaving the scene for a few moments. When you've cooled down, come back (works in marriages, too!)

How to Use Reinforcement:



We use reinforcement to develop and to maintain patterns we want the child to demonstrate—like hanging up clothes, getting things ready for school, speaking nicely, not hitting, obeying, and so on. Remember our goals as parents on page 1.

Praise is a good reinforcer much of the time. "I'm so proud of you!" "Nice job!" "Wow! Look at how well you did that!" "Super!" "Wonderful work!" "You are getting so big!"

Whatever it is you are trying to improve, remember that change occurs in small steps. Think of dieting. If you lose an ounce, you are on your way.

You might have 10 pounds to go, but one ounce is a start, and we should reinforce you for that and not wait until you lose the 10. We all need encouragement along the way. Especially children.



Reinforce immediately after the child shows the behavior--or behavior improvement--you want. Don't wait until later on; the child won't make the connection between what he or she did and the reinforcement.

You can link privileges, such as watching TV or playing with a toy, to good behavior. "Can I watch TV?" And you respond, "Did you earn it?" Hey, in real life, if we don't do our work we don't get paid (well, generally).



You can give the child points or chips for doing the appropriate things, and then he or she can exchange them for something desired. When she was 10, our daughter wanted a special dress. She earned 10 points each night for doing the dishes, and when she earned 100 points (ten nights), she got the dress. And the dishes got done!



Pair praises with the points or tokens, and eventually praise will be sufficient to keep things going. We all like to get a pat on the back once

in awhile, and we like to be shown that we're appreciated. We don't need stars or medals; a kind, thoughtful word will do. Husbands and wives should let each other know that they're appreciated, also.

"Oh, I don't have to tell her; she knows." Nope. You have say the words: "Honey, I want you to know how much I appreciate all you do to make our home a happy home. Thanks." Say it! Couples have to accentuate the positive with one another.



Helping Your Child to Succeed in School: Your child's success in school is more likely when you support what the school is doing. Go over your child's homework (but please don't do it for him or her; it will hurt in the long run.). Be sure that it is complete. Have a spot at home for the homework to be done. There should be some place set aside, and the bed isn't one of them. You are teaching your child organization. Speaking of organization, it would be good if your child had a set place to put the backpack, to hang up clothes, and to deposit items from the pockets (a tin can will work). Organization is a vital part of being successful.



Modeling: As we come to the end of these parenting tips, let's go back to your direct influence. One of your biggest influences is what

you exhibit in front of your child. They watch us and pick up our attitudes, our values, our traits, our emotional reactions, and even our tone of voice.

"Do as I say, not as I do" does not work! They don't listen to our advice as much as they model us. So we have to be what we want our children to become.

Isn't that scary! Oh, my; we have to be organized, be nice to one another, do our chores, act our age, and be responsible. When you think of what you will produce, though, it's well worth the effort. And our children will raise their children as we raised them.



If You Think There Is a Problem with Your Child:

1. Ask your school for help if there is something that concerns you about your child.
2. If your child is not in school, or if you wish not to go through the school, the following organizations and agencies can be of assistance:
 - a. School Community Liaison in your district
 - b. Rural Public Health Authority in your district
 - c. National Committee for Families & Children
 - d. CARE Belize for several physical disabilities
 - e. Belize Council for the Visually Impaired (BCVI)