



Parenting the early years

Reflection guide

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Overview

- Understand the purpose of parenting and identify our parenting styles
- Learn strategies to encourage responsibility and independence
- Learn to accept that milestones and expectations are unique to each situation
- Learn how to effectively communicate with young children
- Adopt discipline methods that work for your family
- Learn the value of praise

Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

The purpose of parenting

“The purpose of parenting is to protect and prepare our children to survive and thrive in the kind of society in which they live.”

In other words, parenting is about preparing our children for success in the fast-paced, multicultural, high-tech and democratic society we live in

Responsibility & independence

Children start to want independence at an early age. Parents need to find a balance between letting their children do things for themselves and providing support and guidance. The key is “freedom within limits”.

Stimulate your child’s sense of responsibility and independence with these ideas:

- a) **Avoid pampering:** Let your child do things for themselves as their age and ability allows. Encourage your child to make decisions. This includes self-care (brushing their teeth, tying shoelaces), family chores (setting the table, cleaning their room), getting themselves up in the morning, etc. In short, not doing for them on a regular basis what they can do for themselves.

- b) **Don’t overprotect:** The idea here is that as much as we may want to, we can’t protect our kids from the bumps, bruises and even stitches of childhood. If we try to, we may stifle their sense of independence. Adversity can help children develop ‘emotional muscles’ that they will need to survive and thrive in life. For example, you can talk to other parents in your neighbourhood about what’s reasonably safe in your community and allow your child the appropriate freedom.

Parenting styles

Purpose: To prepare children to grow into adults who can thrive in this world

Authoritarian

- Controlling
- Old fashioned, no explanation
- Produces submissive children

Permissive

- Few rules
- Gives too many choices to child
- Kids tend to be more aggressive because they are not taught boundaries and expectations

Democratic

- Teaches children responsibility
- Most effective and popular style
- Children develop the skills necessary to live in a fast world

Children & chores

One way of teaching your children to be responsible is by giving your children chores to do – this also allows them to be productive members of the family. Here are some tips

- Start early
- The earlier you can get your children in the habit of helping out and contributing, the better
- Choose age-appropriate chores for your children and change them as they mature. For example, don't ask your 6 year old to take out the garbage – maybe they can help with pairing up socks
- Get children involved with the process of choosing which chores to do! This will encourage your child and give the feeling of self-importance
- Teach one chore at a time
- Break the chore down into small tasks
- The encouragement of experiencing many small successes along the way is vital to your child's motivation to continue
- Demonstrate the chore
- Children learn a lot by watching, so demonstrate each step. But be careful to not say how easy it is. It may be easy for us, but that just makes your child feel bad when he has trouble doing what you just said was easy
- Explain the purpose of the chore
- Encourage effort as well as results
- Provide lots of praise your words of encouragement will make your child feel good about themselves, their progress and you. Also, when you speak positively, you feel better about your child and about your own parenting, so it's a win-win

Communication

One of the most important factors of any relationship is communication and it certainly holds true for the parent-child relationship. As parents, we have the dual responsibility of developing our own communication skills as well as helping our child develop theirs. There are four aspects of communication with your children that you should consider:

1. Communication roadblocks:

Any word, tone of voice, or body language that influences a person to end the communication. Examples: being too commanding, giving advice right away, minimizing the situation “everything will be ok”, being judgmental “that wasn’t a very smart thing to do”, sarcasm, being a know-it-all, etc

2. Active listening:

a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. It means:

- Giving your full attention, (get down to child’s eye level if possible)
- Keeping your own talk to a minimum,
- Keeping the focus on your child’s problem
- Acknowledging what you’re hearing: asking clarifying questions, words of encouragement like “I see” or even “uh-huh” and summarizing what you hear them telling you
- Make solid eye contact

3. Responding to feelings, not just content:

Look for the feelings behind the words, and relate them back to your child. When you can identify what your child is feeling and relate it back to her, you let her know that what she is feeling really does matter. When we respond to a child's feeling and get it right, it's amazing what happens – the child may nod her head and continue to share her feelings! If we don't get it right, the child has an opportunity to correct us. Either way, the communication is enhanced

4. Looking at alternatives and consequences:

As parents, it's our responsibility to have our children think about the consequences of their decisions before they make them. When you and your child are talking about a problem they may be experiencing, you should ask your child to let you know what decision she is going to make to solve their problem. Let your child know that she doesn't have to make a decision right away, but when she thinks of a solution, for her to share it with you. When this happens, and you recognize that it may not be the best course of action, ask questions like:

- What do you think will happen if you try that?
- What else could you try?
- What do you think you can do to improve things?

A few other points:

- Your children always need to have their feelings accepted and respected, even when you don't see things the same way
- Showing a positive attitude towards a child is as important as the words you speak
- When children are hurt or upset, the last thing they want to hear is advice or someone else's point of view
- Use self-control when you become upset at a situation to avoid saying something hurtful. This will be teaching your child to handle being upset in ways that do not hurt others

Understanding why your child misbehaves

Kids often misbehave because there is something they are getting out of their actions. This is their goal or the “payoff”. Your job, as a parent, is to recognize what the payoff is so you can avoid doing the paying off and then encourage your child to realize their goals through good behaviour instead. The following list is five common goals that kids have and how they’re manifested in negative and positive behaviour:

Common goal	Negative behaviour	Negative approach	Positive approach
Belonging	Undue attention seeking – your child wants attention and service	Lecturing, reminding, nagging	Act more, talk less and use logical consequences
Power	Rebellion – your child wants to be the ‘boss’	Fighting or giving in	Withdraw from the power struggle, cool off before talking about it, use the FLAC method.
Protection	Revenge – your child wants to hurt you	Punishing the child more severely which justifies the child’s desire to get even	Avoid temptation to hurt them back. Find out what’s hurting them. Use the FLAC method.
Withdrawal	Avoidance – your child wants to be left alone	Giving up on the child “I don’t know what to do!”	Stay encouraging. Get help if you need to.

Discipline

Understanding why your child misbehaves: They are getting something out of it. Understand what the 'payoff' is for their bad behaviour.

Using polite requests, "I" messages and firm reminders. For example, if your child is speaking disrespectfully to you, you can sit him down and say:

- "I have a problem with...you using that tone with me."
- "I feel...angry when you use it."
- "Because...it's disrespectful and I don't talk to you that way."
- "I would like for you to...talk to me respectfully."

There will be cases where polite requests and "I" messages aren't going to do the trick and you have to get tougher with your kids. In these cases, use a "firm reminder" – the idea is basically to tell them in as few words as possible what you want them to do. One way to remember this rule is the acronym "KISS" – Keep it Short and Simple. By using a firm tone of voice and keeping it short and simple you get through to them before they have a chance to tune you out. For example:

The problem: Your child has ignored your request to make his bed and is playing a video game.

- Firm reminder: "James.. bed.. now."
- The problem: Your child is beginning to yell at you.
- Firm reminder: "Karen, lower your voice, now."

Logical consequences vs. punishment:

Often, as parents, we tend to react to our kids' misbehaviour and dole out a punishment that we think is appropriate. For example, we might tell our child to go upstairs and sit in their room when they've made a mess in the living room. This approach works sometimes to get the results you want and often it doesn't.

An alternative discipline method is called "logical consequences" and the difference is that the consequence of a misbehaviour is logically linked to the misbehaviour itself. In our previous example, rather than sending our child away, we could ask them to clean up after themselves. This has a direct connection

with their misbehaviour, rather than sitting in their room which has no connection. Once we connect the consequences, kids are more likely to see the justice in *our* actions and

they also learn to be responsible for the consequences of *their* actions.

The FLAC method for discipline:

Feelings: Acknowledge their feelings. Example: “I can hear how much you’d like to stay up late and watch that TV show tonight...”

Limits: Don’t say “Because I said so”, say “because this is what’s necessary for the situation”. Example: “.. but you need to get nine hours of sleep so you’ll be rested for school tomorrow, stay healthy and keep growing”.

Alternative: Give your child the power of choice. Example: “How about if I record the TV show for you and you can watch it tomorrow after dinner and homework?”

Consequences: If the child continues to misbehave, a logical consequence is called for. Example: “I really understand that you want to stay up late tonight and watch your TV show but I don’t want you to go to bed late and be tired for school tomorrow. So, you can either go to bed right now and I’ll record it for you or you can keep arguing with me and miss it altogether. It’s your choice.”

Consistency & following through

Consistency is the “backbone” to discipline because it shows the child you’re serious:

- Be consistent in your expectations of your children
- Be consistent with the consequences of their behaviour, both positive and negative,
- Have an agreement with your spouse to parent consistently.

Encourage positive behaviour

Tell them what you like...

“I like that you are helping out with chores around the house.”

Say how you feel...

“I feel good knowing that you responded to my request and that I can count on your help”

Tell them why...

“Because as a family, we all have to do our part and help each other.”

Offer to do something for your child

keep it simple. Keep it logical and more like a celebration and win/win than a reward...

“Since you’ve been so helpful to me, is there anything I can do to help you?”

Web resources

- Invest in Kids - www.investinkids.ca
- Kinder Start - www.kinderstart.com
- Child Development Info - www.childdevelopmentinfo.com
- Child & Family Canada - www.cfc-efc.ca
- BC Council for Families - www.bccf.bc.ca
- Canadian Institute of Child Health - www.cich.ca