

PARENTING



All children need three types of inner resources if they are to become adults with self-discipline:

1. Good feelings about themselves and others;
2. An understanding of right and wrong; and
3. Alternatives for solving problems.

Twelve Strategies for Raising Children Who will Be Self-Disciplined and Responsible Adults:

1. Express Love

Expressions of love can head off undesirable behavior. When a child feels loved, he or she wants to please his or her parents. A warm facial expression, a kind tone, a look of admiration and enthusiasm, a hug, all express love in an unmistakable way. Older children, who may be embarrassed by physical expressions, welcome the personal attention of a game or special time with mom or dad.

2. Be Predictable

Children thrive in a predictable environment. Routines and schedules carried out consistently provide feelings of stability and security. This is also true with parenting behavior – consistent messages and consistent, reasonable consequences result in a child who trusts his or her parents. Consistency can be especially important for some children with hearing loss who have limited communication skills.

3. Communicate Clearly

Make sure your words and actions are sending the same message. Young children need to have things spelled out for them. To teach an abstract concept like “sharing” use examples.

If there is a communication challenge because of hearing loss, acknowledge the need to purposefully develop strategies to close the gap. With a child who has hearing loss, consider creating a routine way to make sure your message was understood as intended. Have him or her repeat back what was understood. Role-play to teach productive, appropriate questioning techniques that will be essential at home, at school, and throughout the child’s environment.

4. Understand Problem Behavior

By being a good observer, you can gather information that will help you understand what your child’s problem behavior means. Look for a pattern. What happens before the behavior starts? When, where and with whom does it occur? Is there a physical cause such as hunger or fatigue? Was the communication experience unsuccessful, resulting in frustration, anger and lashing out? Does he or she feel threatened, hurried or ignored? Is your child seeking attention in an unappealing way? Is he or she having trouble expressing himself or herself and projecting his or her negative energy in a physical way? Which is needed...punishment or a shoulder to cry on?

5. Catch Your Child Being “Good”

It’s easy to take for granted what we approve of, and hard to ignore what we don’t like. This makes it easy to neglect opportunities to praise good behavior and instead focus on bad behavior. Let your child feel and see your approval. Turn ‘no’ statements into ‘yes’ statements, i.e. “I love how careful you’re being with that antique vase.”

6. Set Up a Safe Environment

Children love to explore and thrive in environments where things can be pulled on, climbed over, taken apart and put back together again (maybe). This isn't being naughty, this is their nature. Make their environment safe. The more appropriate things there are available to explore, the fewer problems with inappropriate behavior a child will have. Consider how this applies to adolescents and even teenagers. A safe environment is one where the rules and limits are defined and understood.

7. Set Sensible Limits

Neither parents nor children want to live in a police-state atmosphere in which there are so many rules it's impossible to avoid breaking them. Generally, very young children can remember only a few rules and a great deal of adult supervision is required to enforce them. Make the language simple and direct, like: "Use words. No hitting."

The limits expand as the child grows older. Going outside established limits is an exercise in trust between parent and child. If your adolescent or teenager demonstrates responsible behavior, he or she should be rewarded with certain privileges. If he or she demonstrates a lack of responsibility, the limits may need to be more tightly drawn and defined until trust is built again.

8. Defuse Explosion

Step in while your child is still calm enough to discuss a problem. Intervene before anger gets out of control. If certain situations are recipes for disaster, talk about them ahead of time and create some plans for coping and resolving. For children with hearing loss, not being understood because of a communication difference or understanding gap is a common occurrence, and one that lends itself to frustration and anger. Anticipate these kinds of circumstances. Parents can often help children avoid a meltdown by pointing out problem-solving alternatives that can be employed before the problem rises to a crisis state.

9. Teach Good Problem Solving Skills

There are good solutions to problems, and not so good solutions to problems. How do you get your child to know the difference? Start by clearly labeling unacceptable behavior and explain why. Follow up with positive suggestions for what to do next time. For children under four, it's best to simply state what you want them to do next time. For older children who can express themselves and think abstractly, ask them what they could do next time that would be better. Suggest additional alternatives. As children get older and mature, they will be able to employ these tactics more successfully if they have had practice since childhood.

If a problem stems from communication gaps, which is often true for children with hearing loss, use the same strategies and exploit every opportunity to expand the child's language base around conflict resolution. Knowing how to express thoughts and feeling and state his or her position will increase your child's sense of empowerment to successfully solve problems.

10. Don't Overreact

Giving lots of attention to problem behavior can create another set of problems. Telling your child to go to a time out place or removing him or her from the play area where he or she misbehaved, delivers a consequence for bad behavior without drawing attention to the activity.

11. Seek Professional Help When Needed

Most children grow out of common behavioral problems with the patient guidance of parents and other caring adults. But for a small percentage, the problem behaviors persist and can become severe. Professional help is an excellent resource that can provide support and a constructive plan of action.

12. Be Patient with Your Child and Yourself

Misbehavior happens. It's human nature to learn from our mistakes. And a key to the healthy psychological development lies in the child's ability to do just that. If you follow all 12 steps faithfully and still experience a repeat of bad behaviors, remind yourself that your child is in a learning process called childhood. Your consistency, patience and love will provide him or her with the support needed to emerge into a mature adult.

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