

Tips for Being a Nurturing Parent

A healthy, nurturing relationship with your child is built through countless interactions over the course of time. It requires a lot of energy and work, but the rewards are well worth it. When it comes to parenting, there are few absolutes (one, of course, being that every child needs to be loved) and there is no one "right way." Different parenting techniques work for different children under different circumstances. These tips provide suggestions as you discover what works best in your family. Do not expect to be perfect; parenting is a difficult job.

Help Your Children Feel Loved and Secure

We can all take steps to strengthen our relationships with our children, including:

- ☆ Make sure your children know you love them, even when they do something wrong.
- ☆ Encourage your children. Praise their achievements and talents. Recognize the skills they are developing.
- ☆ Spend time with your children. Do things together that you both enjoy. Listen to your children.
- ☆ Learn how to use nonphysical options for discipline. Many alternatives exist. Depending on your child's age and level of development, these may include simply redirecting your child's attention, offering choices, or using "time out."

Make Sure Your Children Are Well Cared For

To take good care of your children, be sure they:

- ☆ **Eat nutritious foods.** Try to make mealtime a fun, learning experience. Regular meal times help you to be sure your children are getting the right nutrition at the right time. Be prepared for messy mealtimes when children begin feeding themselves.
- ☆ **Receive good medical care.** Care begins before babies are born. After birth, regular medical visits allow your children's doctor to monitor their development, immunize them against various diseases, and address any questions, concerns, or frustrations you have about your children's health or behavior.
- ☆ **Develop good sleep habits.** Healthy, happy children need regular sleep. Most infants sleep a lot. As babies grow older, they sleep less and less. Soon, their routine includes regular time awake combined with naps; eventually, they no longer even need naps. Children feel best if they have a regular bedtime. Having a bedtime routine helps children settle down and prepare for sleep. Most children under the age of 12 need 10 to 12 hours of sleep to feel their best.
- ☆ **Are kept safe.** Infants should never be out of a parent or caretaker's sight unless they are in a crib or another equally safe place. As soon as children begin to crawl, it is important to child-proof your home. Toddlers need supervision and frequent reminders about behaviors that are dangerous. Children this age will usually listen when you say "no" but may quickly forget what you said and may also be testing the limits of what they can do. Choose caregivers carefully to be sure your children are safe, even when you can't be with them.



Realize that Community Resources Add Value

Children need direct and continuing access to people with whom they can develop healthy, supportive relationships. To assist this, parents may:

- ☆ Take children to libraries, museums, movies, and sporting events.
- ☆ Enroll children in youth enrichment programs, such as sports or music.
- ☆ Use community services for family needs, such as parent education classes or respite care.
- ☆ Communicate regularly with childcare or school staff.
- ☆ Participate in religious or youth groups.

Seek Help If You Need It

Being a parent is difficult. No one expects you to know how to do it all. Challenges such as unemployment or a child with special needs can add to family tension. If you think stress may be affecting the way you treat your child, or if you just want the extra support that most parents need at some point, try the following:

- ☆ **Talk to someone.** Tell a friend, healthcare provider, or a leader in your faith community about what you are experiencing. Or, join a support group for parents. (See Circle of Parents™ and Parents Anonymous® Inc. in the resource directory on page 85 to locate a group near you.)
- ☆ **Seek respite care when you need a break.** Everyone needs time for themselves. Respite care or crisis care provides a safe place for your children so you can take care of yourself.
- ☆ **Call a helpline.** Most States have helplines for parents. Childhelp USA® offers a national 24-hour hotline (1-800-4-A-CHILD) for parents who need help or parenting advice.
- ☆ **Seek counseling.** Individual, couple, or family counseling can identify and reinforce healthy ways to communicate and parent.
- ☆ **Take a parenting class.** No one is born knowing how to be a good parent. It is an acquired skill. Parenting classes can give you the skills you need to raise a happy, healthy child.
- ☆ **Accept help.** You do not have to do it all. Accept offers of help from trusted family, friends, and neighbors. Do not be afraid to ask for help if you feel that you need it.

