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10 Top Tips for Parents

- 1. Kids do well if they can.** Doing the "right thing" requires a child to put their own wants aside to meet the expectations or wants of others. For children who have trouble staying calm, this can be very difficult. Good behaviour is a skill that is learnt, not a choice. Children may know right from wrong, but may not have the emotional skills yet to behave appropriately.
- 2. There is a direct connection between children's feelings and their behaviour.** Children behave right when they feel right. Children do not usually misbehave to manipulate you; if they are misbehaving, it is because they are not feeling right. The feeling needs to be addressed before consequences are given for the behaviour. If a parent merely denies, ignores, or punishes the bad behaviour, they are teaching their child not to trust their own feelings. For example, if a child refuses to get ready for school, rather than simply telling them they have to go, and punishing non-compliance, parents should try and work out the feelings behind this refusal by starting conversations like, "I can see you're really upset about having to go to school... how come?"


- 3. Accept and validate your child's feelings.** Parents don't usually accept their children's feelings; for example, they say to their children, "You don't really feel that way... you're just saying that because you're tired... there's no reason to be so upset". Denying their feelings can confuse and enrage children and make them misbehave even more. We can help children feel right by accepting their feelings.
- 4. If you can't control your emotions, you can't expect your child to.** You need to model calmness. No one can make good decisions when they're angry or out of control. You need to try and calm the child down before they will be able to listen to you, and you also need to be calm to talk in a way that your child will listen. If you can sense that you are no longer calm, or that your child is angry or upset, try and give yourself and your child some space. Give your child an opportunity to engage in an activity to calm themselves down. For example, "You seem really upset right now... how about you take your colouring pencils and do some drawing?"
- 5. If your child is misbehaving, there are alternatives to punishment.** Research shows that punishment does not work in helping a child face their own misbehaviour. When children are punished, they can become preoccupied with revenge fantasies because they are so angry with their punishment, rather than how to make amends. This does not mean you shouldn't let your child know that what they have done is not okay. Consequences should be geared towards teaching your child something, rather than just punishing them. There is a way of helping your child take responsibility for their actions without punishment, such as first understanding why the child behaved that way (what need was being met? Is there another way your child can meet that need?), and teaching them more appropriate ways to express that need.

6. Problem-solving can be an effective way to solve a consistent behaviour problem. Inviting the child to brainstorm with you about how to solve a problem, allows them to learn the skill of managing their behaviour, without being punished or being told what to do. Here are the steps to problem-solving:

- Talk about the child's feelings and needs (what made them do the behaviour)
- Talk about your own feelings and needs (how their behaviour impacted on you)
- Brainstorm together to find a solution that works for both of you
- Decide which suggestions you like, which you don't like, and which you plan to follow through on



7. Praise positive behaviour, no matter how small. Parents often focus on what their child is doing wrong, and lose sight of what they are doing right. Tell your child what you think they're good at, or let them know you appreciate that they did the right thing. Also ask your child questions about why they did the right thing (just like we ask them why they did the wrong thing). This helps them understand how they behaved right, and builds their self-esteem.

8. Clear and consistent rules are extremely important. Rules stay the same and breaking rules gets the same response. If the same behaviour gets the same response every time, they will feel safer and more secure in their world. Put the rules in early and revise them as your child grows up so that they are always age appropriate. Parents should present as a united front and back each other up, never allowing children to play parents off against each other.

9. Tell your child you love them and show them warmth and affection. Be sure however, to provide this in a way that is safe for your child. Children who have been traumatised by physical or sexual abuse, can associate intimacy with confusion, fear or pain. A good rule to stick by is to be physically affectionate when the child seeks it. Try not to interrupt your child's play to grab them and hold them, or to command them to "give me a kiss", or "give me a hug".

10. No matter how your child has behaved, you should provide daily opportunities for fun and laughter.



"Protecting children against sexual assault"

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