

Setting Your Positive Parenting Goals

Raising Happy, Intelligent & Healthy Kids in a Loving Family Home



Positive Parenting – What Does It Mean?

The words “positive parenting” seem to be thrown around a lot. Some people think it’s simply being loving to your children and avoiding punishment. Well, they’re partly right, but the important thing to remember is through the positive reinforcement there are consequences for behaviors and you are always working toward the goal of having happy, well-adjusted children. Children who live in positive environments don’t turn out to be spoiled brats! They grow up to be intelligent and successful in all aspects of their lives.

Guidelines to Positive Parenting

Whatever your goals for positive parenting might be, here are a few guidelines to keep you on track to being a positive parent:

Show Unconditional Love: Unconditional love means we accept our children completely as they are. We accept their physical characteristics, their talents and skills and even what we might consider to be their shortcomings. If you have childcare for your children, make sure they follow the same philosophy of unconditional love.

Try to understand your children and provide them with the care and love they need. Not all children are exactly the same and they may have different needs. But whatever their needs are, show them you love them in all situations.

Even when your child misbehaves, remember your child is not bad. Instead, it’s the behavior that needs to be corrected. When you can still show unconditional love when a child is misbehaving you can better understand why they are behaving that way.

Most importantly, unconditional love gives your children confidence and shows them that it’s okay to make mistakes.

Be Consistent: Your behavior with your children should be consistent and predictable. Set limits and expectations your children can understand and are aware of.

For example, bedtimes should always be the same. If you let your child stay up late a few nights and then you expect them in bed early the next night, you’ll run into problems. Of course, that doesn’t mean you can’t have a special stay up late night now and then, but expect there to be some adjustment to an earlier bedtime after.

If your child misbehaves, consequences should always be related to the behavior. For example, if your child is coloring and proceeds to draw on the

walls, coloring time is over. Taking away another privilege, unrelated to coloring just doesn't make sense. The consequence should be employed each and every time they behave that way. Sometimes it's easier as a parent not to go through with the consequences, but with consistency it's easier to get the behavior to cease.

What's better – not dealing with the situation or dealing with a few times to get it to stop? You'll probably agree it's the latter.

Allow room for change. Sometimes, we as parents, make decisions that we might discover are too strict or are no longer age-appropriate. It's okay to re-adjust and then reinstate consistency.

Protect Your Children: Be involved with your children and ensure they are always in a safe (both physically and emotionally) environment. Comfort them when they need comforting so they feel secure.

If they see something that frightens them, talk to them about it and help them work through that fear. Never ridicule them, but show them how things that can seem scary really don't have to be.

On the other hand, if your child is afraid of something like a roller coaster, it's not necessary to force your child to get over that fear. Riding roller coasters are not a necessity in life.

Then there are some things that might be necessary. If you require childcare and your child is uncomfortable with staying with a new caregiver, spend some time with your child and the caregiver together.

Empower your children with knowledge to deal with unsafe situations. Whether it is a stranger approaching them, an earthquake or simply crossing a busy street, make sure they know what to do in each situation.

Encourage your children to surround themselves with positive and safe people.

Give Your Children Choices: Allowing your children to make choices fosters independence and confidence. It also helps children make good decisions for themselves when they're on their own.

When they're young, allowing your children to choose what they wear can be very empowering. Of course, very little ones can be overwhelmed by too many choices, so pick out two t-shirts and let them choose from the two.

As your children get older, they can have more decisions. Even if you have your heart set on your daughter being a piano player, if she wants to explore the violin or even hockey instead, encourage that.

You can also help your children make good choices by helping them consider all the factors involved in that choice. If they want to play hockey, they'll have to consider the early morning practices and loss of free time. They'll also want to think about the skills they will learn, the teamwork they'll benefit from and so on.

Be a Role Model & Teacher: Demonstrate how your children should behave and relate to other people with your own example. If we are constantly angry and yelling (which we'll talk about a bit later), how can we expect our children not to use anger in their interactions with other people?

If you want your children to choose healthy foods, make sure that you follow a healthy diet as well. If you want them to read each night, make sure they see you reading regularly as well.

You can be a role model by telling your children about your experiences that they may not have seen firsthand. Be honest, don't be afraid to admit your mistakes and let them learn from your sharing.

Play & Interact with Your Children: Be involved with your children. Play games together, go on outings together and have fun. Even if your children are older and more independent, find things that you can do together. Interacting with your children deepens your family connection and allows you to demonstrate yourself as a role model for your children.

Have tea parties with your little girl. Attend your older children's sporting events and get together to talk about it afterward. Do art projects together. Get involved with school project (but don't take over)!

There are many opportunities throughout each and every day to be involved with your children. Make sure you take as many of them as you can. Sometimes we can get involved in household chores or other things that need to be done. Try to set a schedule for these activities, so you have plenty of time afterward to interact with your children. Or better yet, get your kids involved in the household chores. Prepare meals together, reorganize closets or clean out the garage. Even if the tasks aren't fun, keep the conversation light and enjoy your time together.

Praise Your Children: Praise them for the things they do well, improvements and efforts they make and encourage them to pursue their interests. Do what you

can to make sure your children are surrounded by people who praise including older siblings, relatives, educators and friends.

Tell your kids:

“Good job”

“You are a great...”

“You are so kind.”

“I trust you.”

“I love you.”

“I like you”

“I’m proud of you”

“You make me happy”

“You are so good at...”

...and other positive things regularly. Don’t forget hugs and kisses too! Remember, there doesn’t even have to be a specific reason to share praise. Share it liberally just because.

Avoid Bribery: We’ve all done it, especially with younger and unruly children. The problem with offering bribes for good behavior is that kids become focused on the rewards and not worrying so much about what is good behavior. Children who are accustomed to bribes may also demand more bribes and refuse to behave, unless there’s something in it for them!

That doesn’t mean you can’t reward your children, but just as we’ve talked about being consistent and having consequences related to the behavior, rewards should be related as well. For example, if you are planning to go out for some errands and you’re concerned that your children might misbehave, don’t offer to buy them a toy or treat for their good behavior. Instead you can say something like:

“If you can stay close to me while we’re shopping that means we can get done much more quickly. If we can get done quickly, we’ll have enough time to stop at the play area before we go.”

Now, they can better understand that good behavior has immediate and logical consequences. i.e. When they behave well, the shopping gets done faster and there is more time for fun stuff.

Control The Anger: When our children do something dangerous or against your family's rules it's sometimes easy to lose our cool, especially when they've done the same behavior repeatedly. Anger is a natural emotion, but it needs to be controlled and expressing anger by yelling and hurtful words is not always the best solution.

Anger is an unhealthy emotion for both parent and child. It raises your blood pressure and causes stress. It makes children feel small and many comments thrown out in anger can do long-term damage. Add to that, teaching our children that anger is an appropriate response to a mistake or error in judgment.

Take a moment to breathe (as long as they are not in immediate danger) and compose yourself. Again, be consistent in the way you react and impose discipline and do it without anger or yelling.

Remember to keep things in perspective. If something else is bothering you, don't take it out on your children. Is that toy on the floor really such a horrible thing? Yes, it could be dangerous if somebody trips over it, but it's a mistake that can be corrected without anger.

If you lose your temper and yell or worse yet, say something you don't mean, it's okay to admit your mistake. Explain to your children that the way you reacted to the situation was wrong, but that doesn't eliminate the need for consequences for improper behavior.

Listen to Your Children: Listening allows children to feel free to talk to you about anything that is troubling them and makes you a trusted confidant.

If your child has something to say, listen to them. Make eye contact with them and listen to them at eye-level. Don't interrupt them and let them get their thoughts and feelings out. Listen to their dreams and aspirations. They need to feel confident in sharing their innermost desires.

If you have more than one child, try to take time out with each child individually and listen to them. Have your spouse watch the other kids while you go out for a special lunch or if you're a single parent, have a trusted friend or relative take care of the other children. When kids have to compete for our attention, sometimes it's tough to really hear them and get to know our special children.

Positive Parenting & Your Goals

The previous section about guidelines has probably already generated a lot of ideas about goals you could set for you and your children in a positive home environment. Here are some specific parenting goals you may want to share with your children.

Schedule More Family Time: People are busy, kids and parents included. Make sure there is a block of time each day (with few exceptions) where the family comes together. This means work, chore and activity schedules should be coordinated for maximum family benefit.

Invest in a family calendar, if you don't already have one, so everyone can write down his or her commitments and time can be set aside together. Whether it's sharing a meal, playing a game or even enjoying a favorite T.V. program, make sure there is family time. Getting kids involved in extra-curricular activities has positive benefit, but over-scheduling children to the detriment of family time benefits no one.

In addition to sharing time altogether, it's also great to set aside a bit of alone time with each of your kids. This doesn't have to happen every day, but your kids need time to be able to regularly communicate with their parents privately. Private talks shouldn't just be reserved for when there is a problem or issue that needs to be discussed. Set a schedule with your spouse or talk to a family member or friend that will give you time with your kids on a regular basis.

Adopt a Healthy Family Lifestyle: In today's hectic world, it's sometimes easy to let healthy choices and time for an active lifestyle to go out the window. If you want a healthy outlook to dominate your children's lives, it has to start with you. If you want healthy kids, you have to be a healthy parent.

Talk to your child about the benefits of exercise and talk about healthy food choices. You don't have to be marathon runners or forbid any special treats completely, but add more healthy items to your regular day.

Here are some ideas to adopt a more healthy lifestyle:

- Do your meal-planning a week in advance and purchase all the ingredients you need. If you don't plan ahead, you're more likely to choose more fast-food options.
- Make meal time fun and get kids involved in the preparation.
- Leave a fruit bowl out where kids can help themselves.
- Prepare a veggie plate with cut vegetables that is readily accessible in the refrigerator at all times.

- Limit the number of times you eat out or take out. If you do need to choose prepared foods, make more healthy choices. If a restaurant you frequent doesn't provide healthy choices, go elsewhere.
- A few times a week, make your family-time a physical activity. What you'll do will depend on your parents ages and interests, but you might try:
 - Go for a nature walk
 - Visit a local aquarium, zoo or other attraction that requires walking.
 - Enjoy a game of tennis, golf or even bowling. Choose activities the kids like. If it keeps them off the couch, it's probably a good thing.
 - Get family chores done. Wash the car together, vacuum, but make it fun with great conversation and play.
- Encourage your children to get involved in sports on their own. If there is a sport they would like to learn more about, enroll them and let them get extra physical activity.

Limit Angry Outbursts: As we already talked about, everyone gets angry. What we do with that anger is what matters. In many families, it's not just the anger of parents that is the problem. In a home where yelling is acceptable, kids often model the same behavior. If there is a lot of yelling or more abusive name-calling and fighting in your home, here are some ideas for a more serene home.

- **Make sure your expectations are clear.** Many times we make assumptions that our spouses or our children understand what we want them to do. For younger children, tasks need to be broken down into smaller components (ex. get your hat, put it on, get your boots, put them on).
- **Take a moment to calm down.** Not all situations need to be addressed immediately. If you need some time to calm down, take it. If just a few seconds or minutes won't do, call a friend or family friend to give you some time for a real break to calm down.
- **Make sure they know why.** This will vary from situation to situation and depend on the age of your child, but your family members need to understand why something might be bothering you.

If you have a headache and your child is endlessly hammering on his toy piano, yelling them to stop playing isn't going to make much sense. After all, it's her toy and she is using it in the way it was intended. You can always explain that you have a headache and suggest an alternate, more quiet activity.

- **Parents Get Cranky When They're Hungry & Tired Too:** We know our children have "moods" when they're hungry or need more sleep. We, as adults, react the same way. Make sure your needs are taken care of.
- **Decide What's Worth "Fighting for":** Sometimes we get ourselves worked up about things that are insignificant in life. Is it worth exploding over every sock left on the floor? Choose your battles wisely because a constant battleground in your home is not helping anyone.
- **Make it Okay to Share Feelings:** It's okay to share angry feelings, including your children, but it should be done with words and in a calm manner.
- **Set Consequences for Inappropriate Outbursts:** Children need to understand there are consequences of hitting, name-calling or other abusive behavior.

Finishing Up

It doesn't matter what your parenting goals are, you can use the guidelines in this document to help you create your own unique positive parenting goals. Decide on your goals, share them with your family and come up with a plan to accomplish those goals. Make it a family effort and have fun doing it.

As parents, we have such an important role in making our children confident, successful, happy and healthy people. The best thing is that taking on that responsibility makes for tighter family bond and more happiness for everyone.