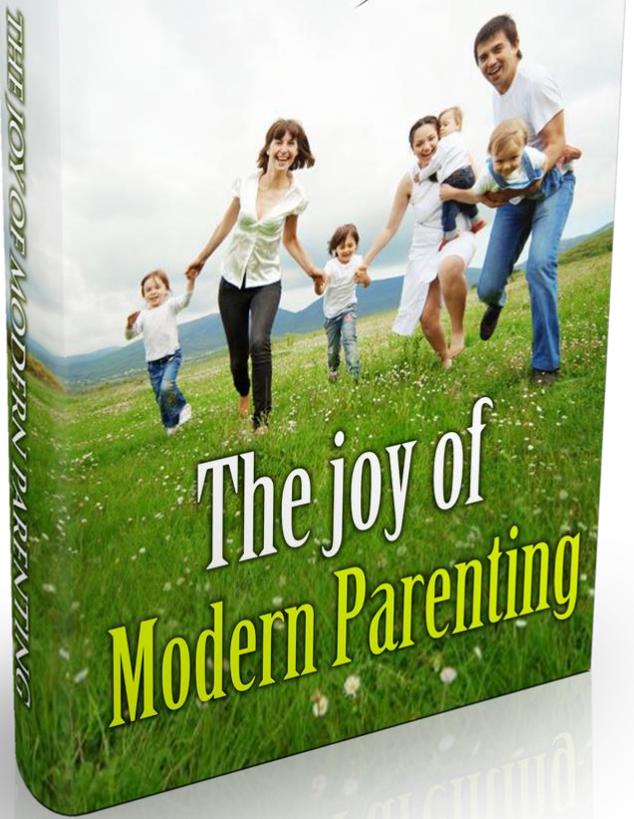


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The joy of  
Modern Parenting



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## Actively Listening to Your Child

Communicating with our children can be a difficult task at times. We feel like they're not listening to us; they feel like we're not listening to them. Good listening and communication skills are essential to successful parenting. Your child's feelings, views and opinions have worth, and you should make sure you take the time to sit down and listen openly and discuss them honestly.

It seems to be a natural tendency to react rather than to respond. We pass judgment based on our own feelings and experiences. However, responding means being receptive to our child's feelings and emotions, and allowing them to express themselves openly and honestly without fear of repercussion from us. By reacting, we send our child the message that their feelings and opinions are invalid. But responding and asking questions about why the child feels that way opens a dialog that allows them to discuss their feelings further, and allows you a better understanding of where they're coming from. Responding also gives you an opportunity to work out a solution or a plan of action with your child that perhaps they would not have come up with on their own. Your child will also appreciate the fact that maybe you do indeed understand how they feel.

It's crucial in these situations to give your child your full and undivided attention. Put down your newspaper, stop doing dishes, or turn off the television so you can hear the full situation and make eye contact with your child. Keep calm, be inquisitive, and afterwards offer potential solutions to the problem.

Don't discourage your child from feeling upset, angry, or frustrated. Our initial instinct may be to say or do something to steer our child away from it, but this can be a detrimental tactic. Again, listen to your child, ask questions to find out why they are feeling that way, and then offer potential solutions to alleviate the bad feeling.

Just as we do, our children have feelings and experience difficult situations. Actively listening and participating with our child as they talk about it demonstrates to them that we do care, we want to help and we have similar experiences of our own that they can draw from. Remember, respond - don't react.

## **Celebrate Your Child's Uniqueness**

Just like a snowflake or a fingerprint, every child is unique in their own special way. Every child has a unique way of feeling, thinking, and interacting with others. Some children are shy, while others are outgoing; some are active, while others are calm; some are fretful, while others are easy-going. As a loving and nurturing parent, it's your job to encourage them to embrace their uniqueness and celebrate their individual qualities.

Allow your child to express themselves through their interests. They may find a creative outlet in theatre, dancing or art, or they may be exceptionally talented in the sciences. Encourage them to embrace what they like to do, what interests them, and what makes them happy. Help them realize that they don't need to worry about being 'like everyone else.'

Teach your child to make positive choices, and praise them for good deeds, behaviors and positive traits they possess. Encourage them to become actively involved in their community, and introduce them to activities that promote a sense of cooperation and accomplishment. Be firm, yet fair, when handing down discipline for misdeeds or misbehaviors, and make certain the rules and consequences for breaking the rules are clearly defined. Show a cooperative, loving and united front with your spouse when it comes to discipline.

Accept and celebrate your child's uniqueness. Remember that your child is an individual. Allow your child to have his or her own personal preferences and feelings, which may be different from your own.

And finally, encourage your child to be true to themselves by doing the same. Show your child how to make positive choices with the choices you make, and that nobody is perfect and you too make mistakes. Show your child that mistakes can be a great learning experience, and that they should not be ashamed or embarrassed about making them.

## Connect with Your Child, but Don't Overdo It

We all want to connect and be involved with our child. Children of involved parents generally feel more confident, assured, and have a higher level of self-esteem. They excel in school and do well in extracurricular activities and with their hobbies.

But is there such a thing as too much involvement? It's imperative when you're becoming involved with your school-aged child's activities and academics that you recognize the line of what being too involved can be.

Remember, you're becoming involved in your child's life. It's important that you don't intrude too much upon it. Children need their space and privacy and they need to be able to develop their own skills, talents and abilities. In our eagerness to help our child succeed, it's tempting to step in and start doing things for them because you feel they are doing them incorrectly or inadequately. But remember, you had to learn too, and this is their chance to learn on their own.

Be there to encourage and support your child, and offer praise at a job well done. But also remember to step back and allow your child to learn from their own mistakes, and to develop their own way of doing things. We all know from our own life experiences that there's always more than just one way to do something, and just because your child is doing it differently than you would doesn't make it wrong. Who knows, it could present a terrific opportunity for you to learn from your child as well.

In addition, try not to become too overbearing or nosy when it comes to their social life. Be available for them should they need to talk and encourage them to share their troubles with you so you can help them sort through a problem. But if they say they don't want to talk about it or they just need some time to figure things out for themselves, respect that need by letting them know you're available whenever they need you. This is an important part of growing up, and allowing a child to figure his or her own way through things is an integral part of that process.

## **Control Your Anger, Don't Let it Control You**

Anger can be a paralyzing and debilitating condition. But it can be a terrifying and degrading experience for your child if you're taking your anger out on them. Physical and verbal abuse of a child can have lasting and lethal implications, so it's crucial that as a parent, you do whatever is necessary to keep your anger in check.

As a parent, you have a wonderful opportunity to undo the wrongs that were done to you as a child, if you had an angry and abusive parent or parents. Parenting can be very curative, it can demonstrate to you where your troubles lie, and it can inspire you to fix them. Perhaps your past is filled with unresolved hurt and anger. If so, take the necessary steps to heal yourself. If you don't, you could unwillingly and unthinkingly harm your child. Studies have shown that children whose mothers often expresses anger are more likely to be difficult to discipline. Identify problems from your past and honestly look at current situations that are angering you. Maybe you aren't fulfilled at work; perhaps you and your spouse are having relationship troubles, or maybe you have other personal issues or unfulfilled goals that are bothering you. If all your child ever sees is your angry face and hears an angry voice, that's what they'll most likely grow into as well.

It's important to 'pick your battles' when parenting. Accidents and nuisances don't warrant the energy and agony it takes to get angry. But misbehaviors such as a child hurting themselves, others or property demand a firm, quick and appropriate response from you. You will probably have to continually remind yourself that the small stuff isn't worth getting worked up over. And remind yourself also that you're the one in control of your anger; don't let your anger control you. Put yourself in time out, take a deep breath, walk away, and do whatever you have to in order to get a grip on yourself before addressing the situation, if you feel your anger coming on strong.

## **Do as I Say and as I Do**

Children learn to imitate at a very young age. It's how they learn to behave, care for themselves, develop new skills, and communicate with others. From their earliest moments they watch you closely and pattern their own behavior and beliefs after yours. Your examples become permanent images, which will shape their attitudes and actions for the rest of their life.

It's important to be responsible, consistent and loving with your child. This also holds true for the relationship you have with your spouse, your parents, and other family members and friends that are also a part of your child's life. Own up to mistakes when you make them, and communicate openly and honestly with all family members.

It's also important to take good care of yourself. When we're focusing on what's best for our child, it's easy to neglect our own needs. Your child and your family are counting on you physically and emotionally, so it's imperative that you teach your child by example that taking care of yourself helps you to take care of them and the rest of your family. This shows your child that not only do you love them and the rest of the family, but you love yourself as well. This is an important step in teaching your child about self esteem. It may involve getting a sitter and treating yourself out to dinner and a movie, or doing another favorite activity on your own. This teaches your child that you are not only their parent, but your own person with your own interests and needs, and also gives them a chance to show you how well they can do without you with them for a while.

It's also important to nurture your relationship with your spouse. Let your child see that you communicate in a positive and healthy manner with one another, and show love and affection for one another, so your child can begin to learn early on what a healthy marriage should be like.

You'll soon see your child patterning many of his or her behaviors after your own. So make sure that what you say and do around your child will help build a strong sense of security and self esteem.

## Encouraging Play Encourages a Child's Development

We've all heard the phrase, "Oh, that's child's play." It implies that something is easy, frivolous and unimportant in the overall scheme of things. But to a child, child's play is essential to their mental, social, emotional, and physical development.

We all know that children like to play. But what we may not know is the importance of play in a child's life. Play is essential to every area of a child's growth and development.

Play provides a means for energy to be put to use. It strengthens and refines small and large motor skills, and it builds stamina and strength. Sensory learning develops mostly through play. Play is significant to physical development in that without it, the body could not grow and develop normally.

Children possess a natural curiosity. They explore, learn, and make sense out of their environment by playing. Parents and educators alike can support this learning activity by ensuring age-appropriate toys, materials and environments are available to the child.

Play enables children to know things about the world and to discover information essential to learning. Through play, children learn basic concepts such as colors, counting, how to build things, and how to solve problems. Thinking and reasoning skills are at work every time a child engages in some type of play.

Children learn to relate to one another, negotiate roles, share, and obey rules through play. They also learn how to belong to a group and how to be part of a team. A child obtains and retains friends through play.

Play fulfills many needs including a sense of accomplishment, successfully giving and receiving attention, and the need for self-esteem. It helps them develop a strong sense of self, and is emotionally satisfying to them. They learn about fairness, and through pretending, learn appropriate ways of expressing emotion such as anger, fear, frustration, and stress, and discover ways of dealing with these feelings.

So encourage your child's play. Color pictures, make finger paintings, build buildings and imaginary cities with blocks, and build a tent in the middle of the living room to go camping! And as we all know, childhood is fleeting, so let them enjoy being a kid while they are one!

## **Expect Only the Best from Your Child**

Expect the best from your child. If you expect the best behavior and performance from your child, it's often what you will get. Children pick up on our beliefs about them, form a self-concept that matches that belief, and perform accordingly. If we expect them to be lazy, they'll be lazy, which will confirm our expectations for them, and the cycle toward failure is started. If, on the other hand, we expect our kids to be successful, productive, creative, and responsible, and honestly believe it to be true, then our children can't help but rise to the occasion and confirm our best opinions of them with their positive actions. So expect nothing but the best from your children and watch them fulfill your expectations.

Praise your child often when they perform a good deed or accomplish a new task. Set simple, clear and consistent rules so your child knows exactly what is expected and the consequences of misbehaving or breaking the rules. Maintain a consistent daily routine for your child as much as possible, and make sure your child gets lots of physical activity and time to play and socialize with their friends. Encourage your child to learn how to make appropriate choices, and encourage your child to do things for themselves. Allow your child to talk about strong feelings, which will help them work through their anger and frustration.

Above all, be a positive role model for your child, as their strongest educator is your example. Take care of yourself, and expect the best from yourself. Make appropriate choices and be firm, yet fair, when disciplining your child. Make sure to spend lots of quality time with your child, and encourage them to become involved in activities that foster cooperation and a sense of accomplishment. If you have great expectations of your child, you'll be greatly pleased in the end.

## Get Involved in Your Child's Activities, Hobbies and School

It's probably no secret that children who have involved parents are more happy, healthy, and well-adjusted, and excel at their educational and extracurricular pursuits. It can increase their cognitive development, keep them motivated, strengthen the parent-child relationship, and have a direct positive influence on their overall academic achievement. In turn, it can also help parents achieve a positive outlook on their parenting, increase their own self confidence and self-esteem, and most likely feel more satisfied with their child's educational experience at school.

But where do you get involved? With today's busy schedules between home, work, and school, it may feel like the average family has very little quality time to offer. However, different options and levels of commitment are available to fit every parent's availability, and with some careful planning and dedication, you can make it a positive experience for both yourself and your child.

First of all, discover what your child is most passionate about. Maybe you've thought about volunteering for the school bake sale to raise money, but your child is actually more actively involved in her local Girl Scouts troop. If that's the case, then get together with the other Girl Scout parents and see what you can contribute to help the troop. Maybe you could organize a bake sale to benefit their next summer outing.

It's also important to consider what skills, talents and abilities you can bring to the table. Maybe your child's school is in desperate need of your help organizing a fundraiser, but your skills in sewing and designing might better serve the school if you were to help make the costumes for the school play. Remember, you want this to be a positive experience for both of you, and if your child senses that you're not happy with what you've chosen to become involved in, then they likely will not be happy either.

But the bottom line is to get involved and stay involved. Children of involved parents are less likely to get into mischief, have emotional problems, or have trouble in school. You benefit by connecting with and staying connected to your child. It's a win-win situation for you both.

## **Learn from Your Mistakes and So Will Your Child**

Everyone makes mistakes. Granted, some mistakes are more significant than others and harder to get over, but they are a part of life. How individuals deal with those mistakes is significant to their self-esteem. Children who are taught from an early age to admit to their mistakes understand that it's not a crime to make one, and they seem to have the ability to cope much better with them. They recognize that a mistake was made and admit the error. Most importantly, these children also develop a strategy to change the mistake and not do the same thing again.

The process of making and learning from mistakes is an extremely valuable life skill for everyone, because learning involves risks. Children don't succeed every time they take a risk, but they try something new and most likely learn from it as a result.

Children with low self-esteem deal with making a mistake quite differently. More often than not, these children use the experience to devalue themselves. Instead of looking at the error as an opportunity to learn, these children interpret the experience as a reason to quit and never try again. They view it as a devaluing and humiliating experience.

You can help your child cope with mistakes by first making sure they understand that everyone makes mistakes, even you. Own up to your own mistakes to teach them there's no shame in making them. Make sure they understand that it's okay to make mistakes. This presents a great opportunity to tell your child what you've learned to do differently the next time. Then, offer strategies to turn mistakes into learning opportunities. In the process, you can provide your child with an opportunity to enhance their self-esteem and accept responsibility for the mistakes they make. Help your child to realize that the mistake is the problem, and not them. Then help them develop a positive plan for the next time around, and what they'll do differently the next time to avoid making the same mistake again.

## Make Quality Time with Your Child Count

In today's busy world, work, household chores and social activities all put a strain on your time with your child. But as you well know, it's imperative that you spend quality time together. It helps strengthen the bond between parent and child, and lets your child know you can be trusted and counted on. Children who spend quality time with their parents often do better in school, and excel in extracurricular activities, hobbies or sports. And though it can be 'scheduled' to a degree, it's something that happens when you least expect it. Therefore, it's important that you do spend as much time as possible with your child in a relaxed atmosphere and do things together that you both enjoy.

But you're asking yourself, "Where am I going to find the time? My schedule's crazy enough as it is!" Well, for something as important as your child, you need to start digging around in that crazy schedule and find the time. Prioritizing is the key.

Here are some helpful suggestions on how to make the most of your time and find quality time where you least expect it:

Look at your household chore list and decide which ones can be left undone or be done imperfectly in order to make more family time. You might also want to consider leaving certain things until after your child has gone to bed to make the most of your time together.

Make some of your everyday routines together count. Sing some favorite silly songs on the way to daycare, or use that drive to and from school as a great opportunity to discuss what's happening in your child's life.

If you have more than one child, realize that each of them needs your individual attention. You may really have to juggle things around to make this happen, but try to be flexible and creative when spending time with each of your kids. And no matter what, don't skip those individual times with each child. When you do that, you show them they're lower down on the priority list than the dry cleaning or the grocery shopping.

Children thrive on stability and routines, so plan your quality times so that they can take place regularly. Maybe you can walk the dog together on weekend mornings, take a shopping excursion together, have a scheduled night each week for a sit-down dinner together, or make a trip to the park.