

Parenting Tips

0- to 3-Year-Olds

1. Model good behavior. Mind what you do and say. Children at this age mimic and watch everything you do.
2. Maintain a caring atmosphere. An impatient, angry, loud, or irritable parent tells the child such behavior is acceptable.
3. Discipline consistently. Use it as guidance, not punishment. Excessive permissiveness can spoil a child. Allowing tantrums can lead to a manipulative or passive-aggressive adult.
4. Care for your child's physical needs. Disregard or carelessness regarding health, safety, cleanliness, etc., breeds insecurity, which can later affect an infant's character.
5. Show that belongings should be respected, too. Young children learn quickly that if they break something, it will be replaced. This can lead to careless treatment of their possessions and bad habits later. Show how and why you handle your possessions with respect. Then give your child something special and monitor how the item is treated.

4- to 6-Year-Olds

1. Indicate how they're growing up and how they're not. Children take pride that they're growing up and they become ashamed when they're not. Point out instances of each: Highlight rewards of the former (getting to play with friends, dressing themselves, visiting grandparents) and consequences of the latter.
2. Teach perseverance. Encourage your child not to give up when trying something new or difficult. Stress how good it will feel when the task is mastered.
3. Play to succeed. Show your kids and others when playing sports and games how to be gracious winners and sportsmanlike losers.
4. Point out acts of kindness. When someone holds a door open or helps someone pick up a dropped item, explain to your child what they did and why.
5. Make manners fun. See how long your child can go without forgetting to say "please" or "thank you."

7- to 9-Year-Olds

1. Banish bullying. We've all said, "My child would never do such-and-such." But what if you discovered your child was a bully? Schoolyard tyrants have self-esteem and self-confidence issues. They have to dominate others to feel good about themselves. Explain to the child the importance of showing respect, set daily goals for respectful behavior, and lay down consequences for not meeting them.
2. Watch for signs of irresponsibility. If your daughter left her bike in the yard overnight instead of putting it in the garage and it rusted, have her repair it with her own money. Don't reward her carelessness by replacing the bike. Responsibility means taking care of your property, trying your best, and admitting and fixing your mistakes.

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3. Reward rather than punish. A pat on the back to kids this age is not a reward. Once a child understands that increased responsibility can lead to increased freedom and benefits, he or she will most likely comply.

4. Refuse to argue. Kids this age love to argue and parents rarely win. Calmly state what you want done and ignore the pleading, sighing, and eye-rolling.
5. Be an effective role-model. Make as few rules as possible, but stick to them like glue. Include your children, where possible, in the rule-making and respond quickly and calmly when a rule is broken.

10- to 13-Year-Olds

1. Strengthen their self-worth. Explain to your kids that they don't have to participate in dangerous or risky activities to be liked. They don't have to prove anything to anyone. Help them understand and appreciate the difference between right and wrong, and support them in their choices.
2. Go beyond looks. Kids soon learn that peer acceptance depends on how attractive or athletic they are. Children who lack either quality need to feel special and accepted. Helping your child develop skills, interests, and qualities of character will make them proud of who they are. Emphasize that they should make friends for positive reasons.
3. Keep communication open. This is the time when many parents throw up their arms and give in – or give up. Don't do this. It's precisely this time when communication lines should remain open. Be clear about the behaviors you will and will not tolerate, but use respectful and caring discipline techniques.

14- to 18- Year-Olds

1. Look at your expectations. Responsible behavior requires pursuing excellence. That's different from pursuing perfection. Help your teen by establishing a regular and quiet study time and area to work without distraction. If your child has trouble studying, school counselors or tutors can provide proven methods.
2. Discourage deceit. The older kids get, the more they may lie to avoid punishment. Trying to get a teen to fess up may only pressure him or her to lie more. Try this instead: Gather all the facts, establish your case, and present it. Explain that your child's trustworthiness has been damaged. Show how the teen can repair trust by being where he or she is supposed to be, being home on time, etc.
3. Clear up moral confusion. It's not uncommon at this age for a teen's moral code to clash with yours. Whose beliefs are correct? Explain that people can hold many different values: social, cultural, economic, religious, etc. But certain issues are universal standards that transcend all others: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Use the T.E.A.M. approach to discuss these core values: teach, enforce, advocate, and model.
4. Discuss your own accountability. Ask your teen if you may have ever sent mixed messages. If so, admit it and discuss it. Even at this age, young people want and need boundaries. Review your child's responsibilities to him or herself, to family, to peers, and to younger children who may see him or her as a role model.
5. Inspire change. Changes in behavior happen in incremental stages. Just as we build towers of trust brick by brick, so we build behaviors, thoughts, and actions. Stay the course with your teen, and he or she will be just TeRRiffiCC!