

Good parenting

Factsheet for parents and teachers

About this factsheet

This is one in a series of factsheets for parents, teachers and young people entitled *Mental Health and Growing Up*. The aims of these factsheets are to provide practical, up-to-date information about mental health problems (emotional, behavioural and psychiatric disorders) that can affect children and young people. This factsheet looks at the reasons behind why it is important to use good parenting skills from an early age. It also gives practical tips on some of the best ways to discipline a child, while maintaining a happy, healthy relationship with them.

Introduction

Parenting is an important part of loving and caring for your child. Good parenting is about providing a warm, secure home life, helping your child to learn the rules of life (e.g. how to share, respecting others, etc.) and to develop good self-esteem. You may have to stop them from doing things they shouldn't be doing, but it is just as important to encourage them to do the things you do want them to do.

Why is parenting important?

Rules are an important part of everyday life. They make it possible for us to get along with one another. If children do not learn how to behave, they will find it difficult to get on, both with grown-ups and with other children. They will find it hard to learn at school, will misbehave and will probably become unhappy and frustrated.

What helps?

It is important to make sure that children feel secure, loved and valued, and to notice when they are behaving well. The trick to this is to find strategies that work well for you and your child. Here are some ideas:

Be consistent

If you don't stick to the rules your child will learn that if they ignore them, you will probably give in.

Give lots of praise

Let your children know when they have done something well and when you are pleased with them. For example, give them a hug, give them a kiss and tell them how great they are. You need to do this straight away.

Planning ahead

It helps if you and your child know the rules for particular situations before they happen. Don't make them up as you go along (e.g. if bedtime is 7.00 p.m., make sure you both stick to it).

Involve your child

Sit down with your child and talk to them about good behaviour. You might be surprised about how much you both agree on.

Be calm

This can be difficult in the heat of the moment, but it does help. Be calm and clear with your commands, for example 'please switch off the TV' or 'it's bedtime'.

Be clear with your child

For example 'please put your toys away' tells children exactly what you expect them to do. Simply telling them to 'be good' does not. If your child can't understand you, they can't obey you. Keep it short and simple.

Be realistic

It's no good promising a wonderful reward or dreadful punishment if you are not going to see it through. It is much better to offer small rewards rather than punishments. For example 'when you have tidied your room, you can have an ice cream'. Don't expect miracles. If your child has only partly tidied their room, praise them for having started.

Sources of further information

- Parentline offers help and advice to parents bringing up children and teenagers. Helpline 0808 800 2222; textphone 0800 783 6783; www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- Webster Stratton, C. (1992) *The Incredible Years: A Troubleshooting Guide for Parents of Children Aged 3–8*. London: Umbrella Press.
- The *Mental Health and Growing Up* series contains 36 factsheets on a range of common mental health problems. To order the pack contact Book Sales at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG; tel: 020 7235 2351 ext: 146; fax: 020 7245 1231; e-mail: booksales@rcpsych.ac.uk or you can download them from www.rcpsych.ac.uk

The importance of your relationship

When times are difficult, it is easy to forget that you can actually have nice times together. Everybody can end up feeling angry and upset. So you need to plan to have good times together. For example, you could play a game, read or cook with them for 10 minutes every day.

How can it go wrong?

Your own experience of childhood is very important. If you were punished a lot, you may find yourself doing the same with your own children. Or you may be the opposite and find it hard to be as clear as you need to be.

If parents disagree about rules, their children may get mixed up because they don't know whose rules they should be obeying. They may just learn that if they can't get something from one parent, all they need to do is go to the other.

Parenting takes energy! It's easy to let things slip if you are depressed, tired, very busy or don't have any help with your children. Without rules, children can simply get in to the habit of behaving badly.

Where can I get help?

Talking problems over with other parents or friends is often useful. Talk to your child's teachers, as there may be a similar problem at school. It will help your child if you and the teachers can work together to agree on how to tackle the problem. Changing a child's behaviour is a slow, hard job, but it can be done.

You can ask your health visitor, school nurse or general practitioner for advice. If more specialist help is needed, they will be able to refer your child to the local child and adolescent mental health service. Specialists can help to find out what is causing the problem and also suggest practical ways of helping.

References

- Carr, A. (ed.) (2000) *What Works with Children and Adolescents? A Critical Review of Psychological Interventions with Children, Adolescents and their Families*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Rutter, M. & Taylor, E. (eds) (2002) *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (4th edn). London: Blackwell.
- Scott, A., Shaw, M. & Joughin, C. (2001) *Finding the Evidence: A Gateway to the Literature in Child and Adolescent Mental Health* (2nd edn). London: Gaskell.
- Webster Stratton, C. (1992) *The Incredible Years: A Troubleshooting Guide for Parents of Children Aged 3–8*. London: Umbrella Press.