

Mental Health Aid

Speak with Dr. Bailey



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HOW TO RAISE HAPPY AND PRODUCTIVE CHILDREN

The best way to raise children is to be the same most of the time, spend peaceful and valuable eye-contact time with them, and set appropriate parent-child boundaries.

Consistency

The more predictable you are in your parenting, the less you will stress children out. Your expectations of them should be clear and the same most if not all of the time (e.g., you must behave respectfully, make your bed each morning before school, and have your bedroom clean by noon on weekends). If you create a routine for meals, play, work, and bedtime, then you are creating a secure individual. Secure children are more manageable, less moody, and generally happy. Foster and adoptive parents often witness the impact that consistency in parenting and providing structure (e.g., daily schedules) has on the self-confidence, moods, academic achievement, and overall happiness of children. Consistency in parenting includes parents working TOGETHER as a team. Set household rules and model teamwork for the children, otherwise, you can damage them. For example, if one parent follows household rules, while the other allows the children to break the rules, then the latter is teaching the children to behave disrespectfully and to become sneaky. Parents not working together can create behavioral problems such as rule-breaking behavior that begins at home, but eventually may show up in other settings (e.g., church, school...). If parents disagree about how to raise the children, then they should not argue in front of the children. They should meet away from the children and discuss their differences. If the problem is unresolved, then parents should seek the assistance of a licensed therapist with expertise in couples and or family dynamics.

Peaceful and valuable eye-contact time

When parents happily greet children upon seeing them for the first time each day, the children understand that they are valued. When parents play board games or physical outdoorsy games with children, they tend to talk more about what is important to them. The more leisure, pleasant (no fussing), and peaceful time that children spend with their parents, the more they trust and open up to them. Go fishing and take leisure walks. Identify the types of trees and flowers you see along the path, this teaches children how to slow down, pay

attention to their surroundings, and appreciate natural beauty on the planet. Get the heart pumping by jumping rope, racing (if you or they can), and laughing.

When parents are kind and listen intently to what their children have to say, they are decreasing the likelihood that their children will select friends and spouses who mistreat them. While setting standards for children, parents should be attentive and notice when children are becoming bored and make what they are working on more fun and more relevant to them. For example, parents should participate in ensuring their children's academic success by quizzing them on what they are reading and studying. Parents should make information more relevant to the children by offering real world examples of the concepts about which they are learning. When it comes to chores... If the children are resistant to them, parents should set a timer and have the children race to see if they can complete various tasks before the timer beeps. Yes, education and chores should be required of children, but they can be fun with your involvement.

Setting appropriate parent-child boundaries

Remember, you are raising the children, they are not equipped to raise themselves. Therefore, you must provide **leadership**. The best parents provide structure and consistent daily routines for their children. They make their expectations clear and consistent. Do not change your expectations depending on your mood, depending on whether you have time to pay attention, depending on whether you are on your cell phone, etc... No means no! If your children make several requests for the same things, then you have been inconsistent with them. Over time, you have trained them to believe that you are wishy-washy and will eventually give in if they persist. Correct this mistake today by sticking with what you know is best for your child. Otherwise, they are raising themselves and will make unhealthy choices with devastating outcomes. On the other extreme end are the parents who are irate and nasty to their children.

Good leadership is rational. Children do not truly respect parents who yell, fuss, and/or curse all of the time. They may fear them, but as soon as they are no longer in the room, the children are sneakily breaking rules. Besides, yelling and cursing will eventually cause health problems for parents, so stop increasing your blood pressure and causing heart problems. Relax and simply apply consequences for misbehavior. Sometimes taking treasured items away from children does not improve rule compliance for some children. Therefore, adding chores is also effective. Some children are lazy (especially some pre-teens and older). They really improve and aim to please when you add chores. Always give them a specific time span for completion of the chores or they will drag on and on for days. Parents! Check to ensure that your expectations have been met. No, you are not being a friend, but you are being a good parent by teaching your children to be respectful and good citizens. They will also think twice before committing future offenses if your consequences are aversive enough.

The most effective leadership in corporations and in households gets energetic around positivity and success. Make your children aware of the fact that you are watching and noticing what they do well. When they demonstrate positive virtues (e.g., helping siblings, being thoughtful, working hard) get excited (give them a high five or a hug), praise them in front of others, speak positively about them to others. If you place the greatest efforts into praise and sharing what they do well, then children will continue to attempt to please you with positive behavior. If you fuss and are irate most times, then they will give up and continue with negative behavior because from their point of view, you are never pleased with them. If you are setting rules and only sometimes applying consequences for rule-breaking behavior (depending on your mood or your attention span), then you are confusing the children and they will behave chaotically no matter where they are (embarrassing)!

Attempt to envision the following:

#1 Sarah is four years old. Her mother is sweet to her and demonstrates her adoration by giving her whatever she wants. She feeds Sarah whatever she asks for and there is no set schedule for meals, play dates, academic preparation, or bed time.

Likely outcome: Sarah is overweight, yet suffers from malnutrition. She also suffers from erratic and extreme moods. She has tantrums and hits her mother and screams at her whenever her mother responds to her requests with “no.” Although her mother is generally sweet to her, Sarah kicks and hits her because she is not used to any limitations being imposed upon her. She is attending her third preschool and is about to be expelled due to violence against the teachers. Sarah is emotionally dysregulated and will not accept “no” for an answer. If her mother does not begin to set limits and follow through with consequences for negative behavior, Sarah may grow to **disrespect** authority figures, underachieve academically (due to a lack of self-discipline), and engage in antisocial activity.

#2 Joseph is five years old. He lives with his grandparents because his parents are unable to maintain stable housing due to drug addiction. When he tells his grandparents that he misses his Mom and Dad, they hug him while telling him that he is better off without them because they are crack addicts who did not want him. They say “if they wanted you, they would clean up their act and get off of drugs.”

Joseph 6 years later: Joseph has repeated the fifth grade. He hates school and most things about his life. Although his grandparents have sacrificed a great deal in order to raise him, he is ungrateful and angry with them. He skips school and has begun experimenting with drugs. He is angry because his parents remain addicted to drugs and he believes he will be like them.

Note: It is important that foster/adoptive, divorced, and separated parents not speak negatively about a child’s parents or each other. Parents are the child’s DNA makeup. The children will inevitably believe that they are made of horrible genes and will become what their

parents are or were. Therefore, speak positively about the parents and/or one another and at least acknowledge that you too would miss your parents if they were not with you. Have them make gifts for their parents and write them letters expressing what they wish for their parents. It is alright for children to love their parents in spite of whatever they have done. Allow the children to resolve their strong feelings. This is healthy. Otherwise, the children may grow to hate their parents, hate you, and themselves. They will likely feel numb and empty and lack compassion for others.

#3 Daniel is five years old. He helps his father place sod grass on the lawn at home, he completes his chores before t-ball practice nightly, and enjoys practicing for the Kindergarten Poetry Recitation Contest with his mother. Daniel does not complain about having to complete chores and helping his parents because activities such as these have been part of his routine throughout his life. He is often chosen to lead in community and religious programs because he is so responsible and well-behaved for his age.

Now, let's look at Daniel ten years later: Daniel is a fifteen year-old sophomore in high school. He is class President and a star on the Golf team. His polite and respectful behavior toward teachers has resulted in him being selected by his school counselor for a scholarship to study abroad during summer months. He is generally a high-achiever, a leader, and an independent thinker. He is goal-directed in his behavior, and a team player in that he is considerate and works well in groups.

Essentials

Parents! We teach our children who they are. They learn how to view themselves through our actions toward them. Therefore, let's use a respectful tone toward them. Make clear expectations and maintain our expectations of them (e.g., completion of a short list of age-appropriate chores). Take the time to read bed-time stories loaded with moral and ethical teachings. Use time with them wisely because the years pass so quickly. Praise them for positive deeds, teach them how to be grateful for their lives, and create fun memories for them. Teach and be energetic around positivity. Tell funny stories about your childhood if there are any, make up songs about what you love about them, and make learning fun by quizzing them on their math facts as you run errands. By appreciating them (not spoiling them), they will appreciate you. Do not negotiate with your children (e.g., if you are well-behaved then I will buy you ice cream). Instead, surprise them with praise, your positivity, and occasional gifts. Each time you surprise them with gifts, define them as having been earned due to their demonstration of positive virtues (go to www.virtuekidsforchange.com). With such random surprises, they are likely to behave well most of the time so you will notice and praise them.