

Jumpstart Your Parenting Skills

3 Tips for a Stronger Relationship with Your Child

Do you wonder what your child is trying to communicate through their behavior?

Do you wonder how to stop nagging and punishing in order to help your child engage in positive behavior?

Are you living in chaos and frustration?

This chapter is intended to help you enhance your relationship with your child and give you a starting point to begin the process of improving communication with your children by using positive parenting strategies.

The 3 tips I'm giving here are great for parenting children at any age, and they are the foundation for positive parenting.

My 3 Top Tips for Positive Parenting

1. Understand what your child is *REALLY* communicating

Behavior is communication. Your child doesn't do something just to do it. There is a reason why they are doing what they are doing. One reason your child may be acting out is because they want attention (good or bad).

If your child is misbehaving to get your attention, here are some things you can do:

- Give them a larger amount of attention when they do something well, or when they ask for your attention appropriately.
- Over-give attention to the good things. Give attention immediately, and then back off, making them wait for a certain amount of time.
- Ignore negative behavior as much as possible.

Another reason your child may act out is because they can't have something they want, or they can't do what they want.

Do your kids ever get frustrated and yell, scream, or stomp their feet when you tell them "no" to something they want? Do they continue to argue as to why they should get what they want?

If this is the cause of your child misbehaving, you can give them options of things they can have or do. For example, my son asked to watch a movie the other day, but the answer was "no." He cried and argued for a bit, but then I gave him options of other things that he could do. He picked one, and went on to do that activity.

If your child is misbehaving because they can't have or do something they want, here are a few things you can try:

- Ask why they think they can't have it.
- Give choices of what they can do.
- If they argue, tell them why they can't have something, and leave it at that. You can say you are going to ignore them if they keep arguing.

A third reason that your child may act out is that, when you tell them or ask them to do something you need them to do, they don't want to do it.

Have you ever asked your child to do something, such as turn the TV off, put down their electronic device, do the dishes, etc. and they reacted poorly? They may have run away, stomped, screamed, etc. **If your child is misbehaving because they don't want to do something they have been asked to do, here are a few things you can try:**

- Set up routines and schedules so they know what is expected.
- Write down your schedule for the whole day in a way that your child can see it and understand what comes next in their day.
- Set consequences if they don't do it. Ask for their opinion on what these consequences should be. Remember, they can offer an opinion on the consequence, but you have the power to make the final decision.

For Example: If your child has a hard time going to bed at night, making an evening routine can be extremely helpful. You can make a 'picture schedule' or 'written schedule' on paper, or you can download an app and use that. I like to use the app "Visual Schedules and Social Stories." In this app, you can create multiple different schedules such as morning routines, evening routines, cleaning your room, etc. The evening routine may include picking up their room, getting things ready for the next day, putting on pajamas, brushing teeth, reading, and then going to bed. Schedules can also be found online. If you Google "Evening routine schedule" or "Bedtime routine schedule," multiple schedules will pop up.

Finally, another reason that your kids may act out that we, as parents, hardly ever think about, is that they have uncomfortable feelings about their body and they may not understand why.

Sometimes, kids' bodies just don't feel right, and they don't know how to express their feelings about it, or they don't know exactly what's wrong or how to fix it.

For example: My son says that most of his clothes are uncomfortable and make him itchy. To fix this, I cut the tags out of the clothes that were bugging him. He also doesn't like wearing long-sleeved shirts, so we roll his sleeves or just buy short-sleeved shirts. His clothing discomfort was not something that he just came out and expressed to me the first time it happened. He cried and screamed every time he was asked to put a shirt on that was uncomfortable. It took some time before we were able to figure out what was bothering him.

The way you can tell if it's a sensory issue versus just a tantrum, is what happens when you remove the thing that's bothering them, or you give them the sensory input they need. If the misbehavior stops immediately after fixing what is bothering them, then it is a sensory issue. If they continue to misbehave, there is something else causing the behavior.

2. Control your reactions and plan your strategy

After you figure out why your child is doing what they are doing, think of what will benefit your child in the long run before you react.

Sometimes our instant reactions can be automatically negative, like being frustrated or angry, and that's normal. However, consider attempting to pause first to determine what is best for your child. Is it important for you to just punish your child for their behavior, or is there a way you can have them learn from the experience and discover what they can do better next time?

For Example: My 3-year-old often gets very overwhelmed with life. He will scream, cry, or hit when he is frustrated. When he does this, my first instinct is to put him in the corner and tell him he's in time-out.

There's something else I can do though. Instead of just punishing him, I can use a positive strategy to teach him how to manage his frustration and calm himself down before he gets to the point of screaming, crying, or hitting.

A positive strategy that I use in this situation is when I notice he is getting frustrated, I get down to his level and ask him if he would like to take a break and take deep breaths. Sometimes he says yes, and sometimes he says no. If he says no, I tell him that I need to take deep breaths and invite him to join me. He will then take deep breaths with me, or at least sit quietly while I take deep breaths. He is still learning how to calm himself, but sometimes he will come and get me when he is frustrated and ask to take deep breaths with me.

3. Be Consistent in everything you do.

No matter what strategy you choose, be consistent. Say what you mean, and follow through. Don't make threats with which you can't follow through. Kids aren't dumb. They know when you are making an empty threat and when you will actually follow through. Just remember that it will generally get worse before it gets better. Kids often do something for the reaction that they want. If it doesn't get them what they want, they may try it more just to see if they get the same result. Eventually, they will stop doing that behavior because it's not getting them what they want.

For example: When my son was younger and wanted candy, he would ask for candy. If he couldn't have it, I told him "Not right now." He would then cry and yell for several minutes. If I would have given in and given him candy, he would have learned that his crying and yelling got him what he wanted. I stayed consistent though, and now he is still disappointed when I tell him "no," but he does not argue, cry, or yell.

I would love to invite you to share your feedback as you try out these positive parenting techniques.

- Did you implement a technique?
- How did it work for you?
- Do you need additional support?

About the Author

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Samantha is a neurologic, board-certified Music Therapist, a Certified Habilitative Intervention Professional, and a registered Positive Discipline Parent Educator. She has been working with parents and children for 17 years and has 3 children of her own. Samantha's mission is to help parents and children develop deeper relationships through the use of positive parenting strategies. When she is not working, Samantha enjoys camping and other outdoor adventures with her family.