

10 tips for parents to help ensure your child is happy, healthy and successful

Parenting is the most difficult job in the world and there is no 'rule book' but here are 10 simple tips to help ensure that your child is happy, healthy and successful:

1. **Expect a great deal**
2. **Always be willing to be the solution**
3. **Say 'no' to your child**
4. **Know your child**
5. **Treat your partner well**
6. **Hitting and spanking doesn't work very well**
7. **Actions speak louder than words**
8. **Give them responsibility as they get older**
9. **Really listen**
10. **Tell your child they're great ... all the time**

Parenting is the most difficult job in the world and there is no 'rule book' but here are 10 simple tips to help ensure that your child is happy, healthy and successful:

1. Expect a great deal

If we don't expect very much from our young people it's highly likely that they are going to respond by not giving us very much. If we raise the bar, they will rise to the occasion and lift up and beyond our expectations. If we continue to lower it, they are only going to limbo under it.

2. Always be willing to be the solution

Sometimes parents forget that their children are just that – children. Adolescents, in particular, are going through a difficult time in their life and parents need to try to remember what a complicated period the teenage years were for them. Remember, you are the adult and as such there are times when it is entirely appropriate to cross the 'halfway point' and come to a compromise in an attempt to solve parent-child disputes.

Every parent, however, must decide on what issues are 'non-negotiable' as far as their child is concerned and once this stand point is made clear, their child should know and respect this decision. Trying to make every issue non-negotiable will lead to constant conflict and grief. Choose your battles carefully and be willing to compromise on some issues and things should run much more smoothly.

3. Say 'no' to your child

'No' is most probably the most important word your child will hear from their parents apart from 'I love you'. Children learn discipline, self-control and how to delay self-gratification when they are told no by their parents.

In recent years too many parents have strived to be their child's 'best friend'. Remember, your child has lots of opportunities to make a 'best friend', they have one set of parents.

Too often parents worry that their son or daughter 'won't like them' if they refuse them something. Unfortunately, the reality is that your adolescent child is not meant to like you all the time during this phase of their life. A key part of your job as a parent is to create rules and boundaries that will keep them as safe as possible and that they will push against – that's what being a teenager is all about!

There is lots of time in the future to develop a friendship with your child – adolescence is not that time – they need you to be a parent.

4. Know your child

Know as much about your child as they are willing to tell you and then try to find out some more. Make sure you set time aside to spend with your children and take an interest in their friends, hobbies and what matters to them. Don't be afraid to ask where they're going or who they'll be with – they may not want you to talk to their friends but do your best to find out as much as you can about the people they're hanging out with.

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5. Treat your partner well

Your child learns so much about how to relate to the world by watching how you and your partner communicate with each other – make sure you are the best role models you can be.

6. Hitting and spanking doesn't work very well

This can be difficult for some parents, particularly in moments of great frustration, but studies show that encouraged children tend not to need punishment – encouraging good behaviour and positive reinforcement is the way to go.

This does not mean, however, that the child rules the roost and that while they are destroying the home in a temper tantrum you are following them around the home trying to find things to praise them for in an effort to prevent further havoc!

Set clear limits on your child's behaviour, discuss rules and consequences clearly and when they follow these rules or do something that you would like to see more of, give them lots of descriptive praise to reinforce that behaviour.

7. Actions speak louder than words

Unfortunately, for many teenagers, their parents have very little credibility to begin with. If teenagers are threatened with consequences that are not followed-through, what little they had will be lost completely. Make sure that when you create consequences for breaking family rules, you are able to carry out the punishment. Grounding your child for three weeks is a long time for the child but much longer for you! Are you really able to keep up that sort of 24-hour guard over your child for that time period? When punishment is necessary, consequences need to be 'short and sharp' and easy for you as a parent to carry out effectively.

8. Give them responsibility as they grow older

It would appear that less and less young people actually do household chores, instead convincing their parents that they can't do this or that because of homework, music practice or sports practice and the like. Children need family responsibilities to learn where they fit in their family and subsequently in the wider community. We all have a role to play in the family and simple tasks like making the bed or doing the dishes help us to establish how important all the roles are, no matter how menial.

Feel free to pay your child pocket money if you wish but do not pay them for carrying out family duties. We should never reward our children for things that should be expected of them.

9. Really listen

When was the last time you really connected with your child? Not just talked to them, but really spoke and listened – just you and your child – no other family members, no mobile phone, television or other distractions.

We live in a very fast world that is constantly changing and it can be difficult to find the time to really connect with anyone, let alone our children. The next time your child wants to show you something, stop what you are doing and pay real attention to what they are saying and how they are saying it – you get so few opportunities to talk to your child in this way that you should grab every chance you get!

10. Tell your children they're great ... all the time

Australian media and society in general tell us constantly that the younger generation are worse than they've ever been before. So many Australian teenagers are doing wonderful things and we never celebrate them. Make sure you take every opportunity you can to let your child know how wonderful he or she really is!