



Top Tips for Parents

YOUR GUIDE TO POSITIVE PARENTING

Introduction

Changes To The Law

In September 2006, the law on physical punishment was changed. If a parent harms his/her child through physical punishment, the defence of reasonable chastisement will now only be considered if the harm is seen as minor:

Everyone accepts that children must learn right from wrong and develop the ability to get on with others. However, it is important to remember that you do not have a right to physically punish your child and you should, therefore, consider other methods such as positive parenting.

Being a parent is a wonderful thing; however, it's not always easy. Hopefully, the information in this booklet will show you how you can use techniques to guide, nurture and encourage your child and build your confidence as a parent.

We want our children to behave well, and to:

- have respect for themselves and others;
- be polite to others;
- know how to behave in different situations;
- be able to concentrate and pay attention;
- share and to take turns;
- know how to win and how to lose.

But children often behave quite differently, and we may feel annoyed, frustrated and embarrassed.

This booklet suggests a few ideas to help you with your child's behaviour.

Parents of teenage children or children with a disability may face additional challenges and pressures, which are not addressed within this booklet. However, details of organisations that may be able to help can be found on the Family Support NI website (see page 18).

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Top Tips for Parents

Usual Behaviour

Children may:

- have tantrums;
- shout and scream;
- hit siblings, parents, friends;
- not do as they're told;
- break things, spill things, squash things;
- not listen or concentrate.

This is not unusual. Children are learning what happens when they have a tantrum, hit another child, say rude words.

Children will always push against boundaries. They are checking out what their parents will draw the line at, what they can and can't do. This helps them understand what is acceptable and what isn't.

Parents work out their own ways of looking after their children. There is no simple recipe; it takes time for children to learn how to behave, and for parents to work out the best way of getting the best out of their child.

What makes children behave in challenging ways?

Children do not usually misbehave just to upset or annoy their parents. There is often a reason behind a child's behaviour:

It may be:

- they are upset or anxious about school;
- they feel jealous of their brother or sister ;
- they want their parent to listen to them;
- they want their parent to spend time with them.

Behaviour patterns can get stuck. At some point most children will misbehave to get attention. If a parent doesn't pay much attention

Tips for Helping with Children's Behaviour

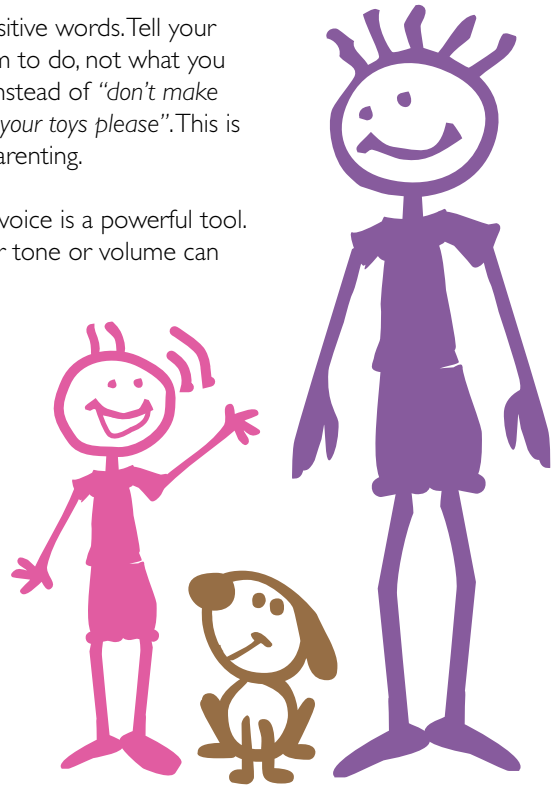
Tip 1: Talk and Listen

As we know, all children are unique.

Getting to know your own child, and knowing what makes them angry or agitated can help you prevent angry or upsetting situations before they happen.

Talking and listening to your child helps them to understand what's going on:

- **Language:** Try to use positive words. Tell your child what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to do. Instead of "don't make such a mess" try "tidy up your toys please". This is an example of positive parenting.
- **Change your tone:** Your voice is a powerful tool. Sometimes changing your tone or volume can be enough to stop a fraught situation or get your child to do what you want. This can work equally well with older children. If you react or speak in a completely different manner to which they expected they might be surprised.



Tip 3: Understand Changes As They Grow

Children's needs and understanding change as they grow, and what might be expected of a four-year-old can't be expected of a two-year old:

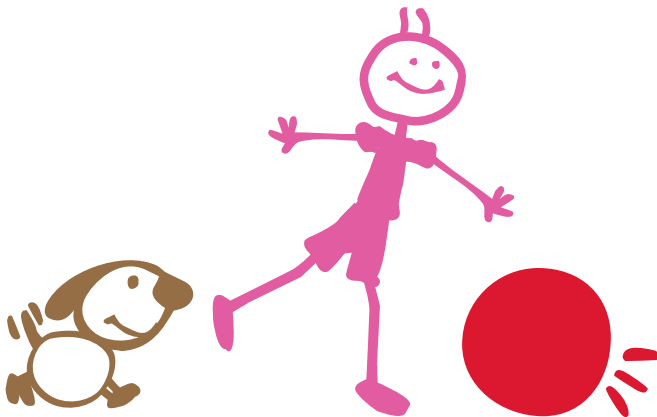
- **Exploring:** Young children find out about their world by touching, shaking, tasting, pouring, squeezing...the list is endless! This isn't naughtiness, but a way of learning about their world. Make your home 'toddler proof' by storing valuables and breakables away from your child so they can explore safely. The mess of life with a toddler can be exhausting but think of all the learning they're doing!
- **Independence:** Part of growing up for your child will be pushing against the boundaries and becoming an individual. You can help them by letting them do as much for themselves as possible – for young children, keep toys at a child's height, let them dress and feed themselves.
- **Encouragement:** Your child will learn what's ok to do from you, so give lots of praise and attention to good behaviour. If you only pay attention to your child when they misbehave, they'll learn to misbehave to get your attention.



Tip 5: Reward and Notice Good Behaviour

Sometimes it is easy to ignore your child when they are behaving well, and only notice them when they are misbehaving. Children love their parents' attention, and if they have to behave badly to get it, they will. Give them lots of praise when they are behaving well, rather than focussing on misbehaviour.

- Rewards do not have to be material things.
- Real praise and encouragement is the best reward as it can boost a child and build self-esteem and confidence.
- Try not to stress over the little things. If you are praising things they are doing well, and ignoring the small niggles, your child will learn that unacceptable behaviour no longer gets them the attention.



Tips for Helping with Children's Behaviour

Tip 6: Build Self Confidence

Building your child's self confidence will help them to try out new things, make friends and cope with the upsets and problems they meet as they grow up.

- **Finding out:** Give your child the chance to face new experiences and challenges with your support.
- **Love:** Tell your child that you love them; it's great to smile, cuddle and kiss them.
- **Independence:** Don't try to solve every problem for your child – sorting it out for themselves can be a boost to their confidence.
- **Praise:** As a general rule, try to give five times more praise than criticism.
- **Avoid comparisons:** All children are unique. Don't compare your child to other children and share that with the child, they will grow up to compare themselves unfavourably with others.



Tips for Helping with Children's Behaviour

At the supermarket checkout

- "I try and find something else to interest her before we get to the checkout – sometimes I even sing just to keep her from asking for sweets!"
- "When he's sitting in the trolley I pass him things to put on the counter and he really likes that."
- "We plan something 'nice' to do together after the shopping, as we shop, like watching a favourite DVD or going to the park."



Playtime

- "I put his favourite toy away when other kids come round – it saves them fighting over it."
- "If she's really got herself upset, I try and take her somewhere else so she can calm down – she still has to know she can't fight, but it's better doing that somewhere quiet."

Family Support NI Website



www.familysupportni.gov.uk

All families face challenges at some point. At these times, Family Support NI can help families find the support they need to help them address these challenges.

Family Support NI is a searchable online directory which provides a wide range of useful information not only to parents and families, but also to young people and front line staff. The directory contains details of a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community family support services throughout Northern Ireland, such as:

- Family Support Hubs;
- child contact centres;
- mental health services;
- disability support;
- domestic/sexual abuse;
- caring responsibilities;
- finance;
- housing.

Comments

We would like to hear from you. We are interested in your views about this booklet.

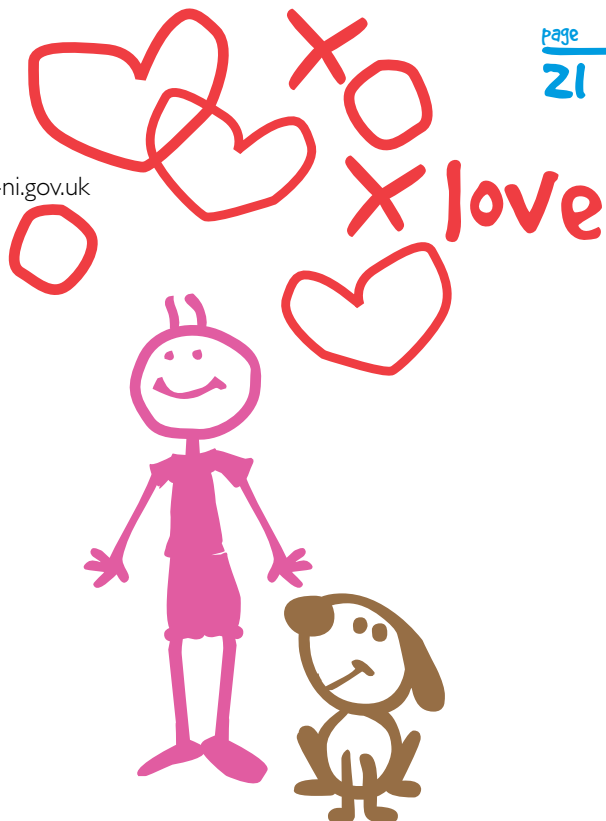
- Have you found it helpful?
- What in particular has been of help/interest to you?
- What additional information should we consider making available?

Please forward your comments by post to:

'Top Tips for Parents'
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or email: fcpdadmin@health-ni.gov.uk

or tel: 028 9052 0530



This booklet has been produced by the Inter-departmental group on positive parenting.

The Group consisted of representatives from government departments and other organisations with an interest in children and families.

Permission has been given by the Family and Childcare Trust and the Welsh Assembly for the use of material included in this booklet.

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