



PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #24

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Tips for Becoming a More Effective Parent

Parenting brings out the best and the worst in people. Our lives change significantly when we become parents. We want to learn about parenting so we can do the best job possible with the experience, knowledge, and resources that we have. Our job of parenting changes as our children grow and mature, and we have to adjust to the needs and ages of our children. According to Jack Canfield, co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, "...most parents truly want to be loving, kind, compassionate, accepting, honest, and fair with their children. The problem is that most parents have never had a course in the specific methods and techniques of interaction, communication, and discipline that produce compassionate, caring, honest, and fair parenting."

Nine Principles for the Parenting Journey

- ✚ **Develop a vision for your family:** As parents, it's important that we hold a vision of the kind of parent that we want to be and that we strive to achieve that vision in our daily lives.
- ✚ **Learn about children:** Through learning about our children, and about children in general, we develop a perspective that leads us to be more responsive, effective parents.
- ✚ **Cultivate a spirit of optimism about your children:** Believing in our children and enabling them to find their own answers are two of the greatest gifts we can give them.
- ✚ **Understand that parents are always growing:** We learn how to be parents as we go along.
- ✚ **Learn to trust struggle and imbalance:** Periods of imbalance—times we feel confused and unsteady—can be essential to our growth as parents.
- ✚ **Work toward a balance of needs:** A family rhythm that balances each person's unique needs with the needs of the family

as a whole, creates mutual respect and harmony.

- ✚ **Teach children to feel safe, strong, and good about their world:** One of the most powerful things parents can give children is an open, optimistic, and safe connection to the world.



- ✚ **Be human when you're not yet the parent you want to be:**

All parents get frustrated, and all of us make mistakes. Recognizing our errors and learning better techniques teaches our children valuable lessons about being human.

- ✚ **Build a supportive community:** All parents need and deserve a community to support them in the critical work of nurturing and teaching the next generation.

Source: Davis, Laura and Janis Keyser.
Becoming the Parent You Want To Be, 1997.

This may be a difficult time to be a parent. However, every generation of parents encounters anxieties and worries about parenting, and the challenges are not impossible. With some guidance and a genuine desire to become a better parent, most people can become more effective in the vital role of parenting. According to David Elkind, Ph.D., author of Parenting Your Teenager, "If we try to respect our adolescent's uniqueness—his or her own

special talents and abilities—we are on the right track. If we set limits with firmness and love, and don't worry about [their] not liking us, we are moving along at a healthy pace. And, if we can, at the same time, fully support the young person's own lifestyle choices, we are reaching our destination as parents." We will never reach perfection, but we can continually work toward becoming better, more effective parents.



Strategies that Effective Parents Use:

- **Establish family identity** by discussing family pride and loyalty. Parents can set the stage for healthy family identity by discussing ways children can take pride in who they are and reasons to be loyal to their family.
- **Individualize chores** as a way of developing cooperative and responsible behavior in children. Consider the child's age and ability when assigning household chores. Change chores as children grow older. They can be expected to do chores for themselves as well as those that help the whole family.
- **Model responsible behavior** by controlling anger, showing compassion, and teaching discipline. Demonstrate and practice the kinds of behaviors children are to follow. Through our example, we instruct our children every day; they behave the way we behave whether we are aware of it or not.
- **Listen effectively** by establishing eye contact and giving verbal and nonverbal clues that show you are involved in the conversation. Look at your child's eyes as she talks to you; avoid making judgments; remain quiet while she talks, then check for understanding.
- **Create a caring, cooperative home environment** by planning, taking turns, solving problems, making decisions, and sharing as a family. When appropriate, involve children in decisions that affect the whole family, like choosing what to prepare for dinner once or twice a week.
- **Teach children social skills** by expecting and modeling polite and respectful behavior toward others. Discuss appropriate public manners such as being quiet at concerts, plays, or other performances. Expect children to treat others with courtesy.
- **Promote daily routines** by setting specific times for eating, sleeping, getting up, going to school, doing homework and chores, etc. Established routines become habits, so parents do less nagging and reminding.
- **Enforce family rules** by directly stating expectations. State the rule in a positive way to show children what they will gain if they behave appropriately. Make the rule short and to the point—"Homework before TV", for example.
- **Impose consequences** quickly after the rule is broken. Consequences should also be directly related to the behavior. For example, failure to do homework before watching TV would result in no TV for one evening even after the homework is finished.
- **Praise positive behavior** by catching children doing something right and approving of their behavior. Let the child know exactly what you like about his/her behavior. "I like the way you helped your sister pick up the toys without being asked."
- **Spend quiet time each day** with your child when he can have your undivided attention for a few minutes. This builds a meaningful relationship and provides a time to talk about things of importance to him. If this habit is started when he is young, it will remain an essential part of your relationship even when he moves through adolescence and into his teenage years.