



Positive Parenting

Caregivers of young children may feel that no two days with a child are the same. Some days, things seem to work: we can get up and get out the door in the morning without too much of a struggle. Other days, it can feel like we are moving mountains to achieve even the smallest steps, like convincing an unwilling child to end a tantrum or put on their shoes.

Much like we teach children to tie their shoes or ride a bike, we also need to teach them how we'd like them to behave. The word “discipline” has its roots in Latin and originally meant “to teach.” We are our children’s first teachers. When children behave in a way that we don’t like, they give us an opportunity to teach them how to behave well, as tough as the task might seem.



There are many excellent resources available on positive parenting techniques. Many of the suggestions below were adapted from [Simply on Purpose](#), a positive parenting guide developed by Ralphie Jacobs.

What is positive parenting, and how can it help?

The main concepts behind positive parenting are that all children are born good and they want to do what is right. When we look for the good and reinforce the types of behaviors we want to see in our children, they will feel good. **When children feel good, they behave well!**

The opposite is true as well. When children feel badly, they don’t demonstrate good behaviors. Any behavior that gets a child our attention will increase, whether that attention is positive or negative. When children show behaviors that we don’t like (such as whining) and we reinforce them with our attention (for example, by saying, “Stop whining!”), they learn that those behaviors are how they get our attention.



That behavior is reinforced, so children are likely to do it again, especially if another behavior (like playing quietly on the rug) doesn't get a reaction from us.

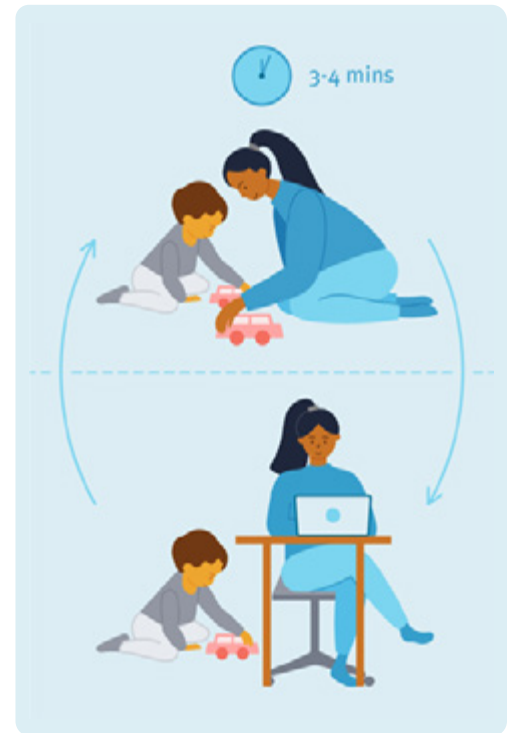
In the end, the strongest reinforcer of any behavior is an adult's attention. So, water the flowers, not the weeds! If a child demonstrates a behavior that you like, praise it specifically. Notice when a child behaves well and tell them!

10 Positive Parenting Tips:

1

Reward behaviors you want to see with attention

If a young child is sitting and playing quietly with toys, take a pause for 3-4 minutes and sit beside them. Ask them what they're playing, and ask which car (or doll, or block) you can use. Follow their lead and allow them to direct the play. After a few minutes, say that you're going to finish your work and that you'll check in soon. You've shown them that playing quietly on the floor gets your attention.



2

Reward good listening with special activities

When you ask toddlers, who typically have trouble with transitions, to put their shoes on, and they happen to do it the first time they are asked, say "Thank you so much for putting your shoes on right away! You were so quick that now we have time to read a story before we go outside."

3

Reward gentle touch with recognition & praise

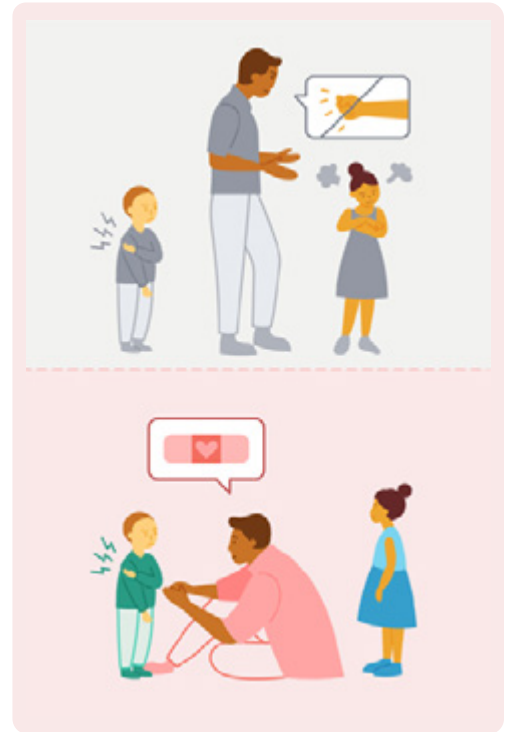
When an older sibling who's struggling to adjust to a new baby touches the baby gently, say, "I love seeing you use gentle hands with the baby. You're such a kind big sibling!" This not only reinforces a desired behavior, but also tells the child how you want them to behave in the future. ("You're such a kind big sibling" rather than "Don't hit the baby!")



4

Avoid naming unwanted behavior

When the same sibling chooses to give the baby a bop on the head, resist the temptation to give negative attention by correcting the bad behavior. This moment is an opportunity to teach empathy and kindness. Don't react to the child who hit; instead, go to pick up and comfort the baby. Tell the baby, "I'm so sorry that you are hurt. Let me give you a kiss." Later, when the older sibling is calm, you can read books about using gentle hands and talk about how happy it makes you when they give you hugs and kisses. When the child is calm, show them a pillow or cushion they can hit if they feel the need to use rough hands. Tell them what a great big sibling they are. Avoid naming and framing the behavior you don't want to see. Instead of "Don't hit the baby," try "I love when you use gentle hands."



5

Praise the directions that were followed

When you ask a child to come into the room for dinner and they stomp the whole way, say "Thank you for coming when I asked!" The child is doing what you asked. Later, when they are calmer, the child will remember that you were calm and in control.

6

Praise good behavior

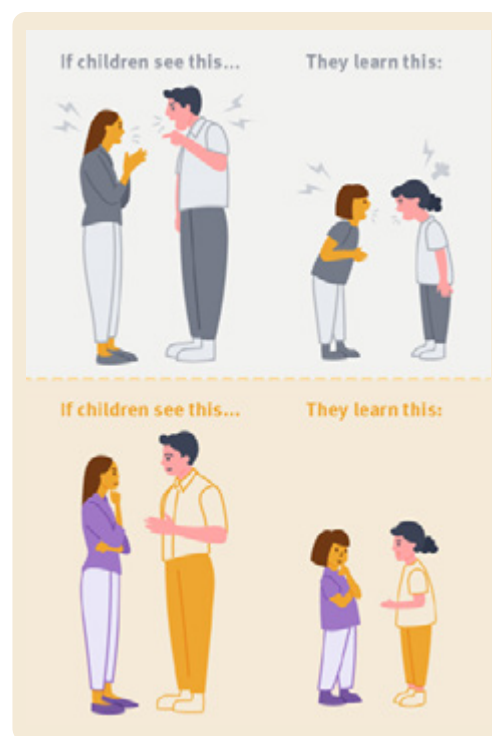
If a child is holding your hand in a parking lot or while crossing a street, tell them what you see. "I love it when you stay right next to me!"



7

Model the behaviors you want & show respect

Although it can be challenging, stay in control of yourself. Children learn the most from watching the behaviors of the adults around them. Modeling good behavior is more powerful than telling children what to do. If you want children to speak to you kindly, speak to them and to others around you kindly. If you want your children to respect you, show them respect.



8

It's always okay to take a break!

When we become frustrated and yell, it teaches the children in our care to yell when they are frustrated. Spanking doesn't work for the same reason. When we are angry and we hit a child, that child is more likely to behave aggressively.

Staying in control can be tough. It's okay to tell children, "I need a moment to take some deep breaths, and then I can come back and help you." When you feel yourself losing your temper or having the urge to yell, try putting your hand on your chest. Take deep breaths slowly, and feel your chest rise and fall.

9

Routines are key

Help create routines around mealtimes and bedtime. Routines help children feel safe and secure, and promote good behaviors. Children feel good when they know what to expect!

10

Just have fun!

Look for ways to have fun with the children in your care. When children feel connected to caregivers, they are more likely to listen to them. Fun and connection can happen in small moments throughout the day. Have a staring contest, give toys or stuffed animals silly voices, or see who can put on the wackiest clothes.

