

# TEN SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PARENTING

**Suggestion #1:** *Regardless of your child's behavior, let them always believe that you are their cheering section.*

For some children, you may be the only true cheering section they have. Research shows that many of the pains, sorrows, and disappointments in life can be handled well with good emotional health *if* there is the anchor of unchanging parental love and belief in that child's background.

The 3 essential beliefs to give your children are:

1. I like myself
2. I can think for myself, and
3. There is no problem so great that I can't solve it.

The 6 essential messages for your children are: *I believe in you, I trust you, I know you can do it, you're listened to, you're cared for, you're very important to me. We love you and we are here, not to rescue you, punish you or do it for you, but to stand behind you.*

Remember — loving and believing in your child is not the same as always loving or approving of his or her behavior.

**Suggestion #2:** *Be consistent; follow through.*

Not meaning what you say and failure to follow through gives children 2 messages: (1) You and other adults cannot be believed, and (2) If you or another adult does follow through at a later date of time, the child will feel betrayed because it will go against what his or her experience has taught them to expect. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do what you said you would do, when you said you would do it.

**Suggestion #3:** *Avoid the impulse to NAG!*

Be careful about telling a child to do or not do something over and over again. What does nagging really do? *It makes the problem yours! Why should your child be concerned about being on time for the school bus, or having his supplies when you're worrying about it?* Also, how many times have you or other parents complained that your children never listen to you? The first time you're told something, you're receiving new information. The next 10 times, it's a re-run. How often do you have to hear the same thing before you stop listening?

**Suggestion #4:** *Understand that when you use discipline you can expect the "con game."*

Appropriate discipline shows kids that they've done wrong. Knowing what they have done wrong gives *them* ownership of the problem, ways to solve it and leaves their dignity intact. Set up consequences that are logical, realistic and tolerable to your child. Does this mean, if it works, use it? No. If it works, and the child's dignity is intact and their self-esteem is not injured, then use it. Ask yourself: "Would I want this used on me?"

The 3 cons you can expect to be used to try to get you to change your mind are:

*Con I: begging, bribing, crying*

*Con II: anger and the guilt trip*

*Con III: the dreaded "sulk"*

Use the assertive, non-aggressive, non-giving-in approach. The powerful, broken-record approach. Use "when" instead of "if." "If" is just another form of bribery and opens the door to manipulation. It's also an invitation for your child to refuse to cooperate and/or argue with you.

**Suggestion #5:** *Avoid power struggles; teach choice making with responsibility.*

Avoid power struggles by making it clear that their behavior is under their own control. Whether we want to acknowledge it, children ultimately have the choice over much of their behavior.

Encouraging positive choices can eliminate nagging and help avoid threatening, intimidation, shaming and belittling a child. (“Do this now or else.” “This is the last time I’m going to tell you this.” “You always do that.”) Positive choices can be started very young. Give your 18 month old the choice of red or blue pajamas (but not the choice of when to go to bed). Later, allow your child the choice between a larger selection of school or play clothes and so on. Expand the choices as your child grows older.

**Suggestion #6:** *Understand the value of active listening and use it daily. It can help stop a multitude of possible problems.*

Don’t use the roadblocks to real communication: giving directions, preaching, blaming and so on. Instead, listen more and talk less. Use clarification and perception checking.

**Suggestion #7:** *Teach problem-solving strategies.*

1. Define the problem
2. Explore alternatives
3. Discuss probable results
4. Make the choice
5. Obtain a commitment
6. Evaluate

**Suggestion #8:** *Recognize what are really stages of normal development.*

Remember the terrible two and threes? They strike again during the teenage years. If it’s not moral or life threatening, let your child make choices. However much you disapprove, you are saying: “It’s O.K. to be you.” If they can gain that identity with safe choices, they will be less likely to make unsafe choices.

Make sure your child realizes that when they were younger, they did things because you told them to. Often now, they are not doing what you want them

to do, just because you told them to do it. Help them realize that they’ve really grown up when they do what you want them to do. IN SPITE OF the fact that you told them to do it.

*Remember, your influence decreases with age, while peer influence increases at an equal rate. Have you taught them to think for themselves?*

**Suggestion #9:** *You don’t have to eat the elephant all at once and it is permissible to take the experimental approach.*

Nobody can solve the whole world’s problems at once, not even all the problems of one child. Don’t try to change more than 3 target behaviors at one time. Discouragement and frustration can be a major hurdle in trying to parent, especially when trying to change a difficult behavior. Adopt the attitude of conducting an experiment. If one solution doesn’t work, don’t give up, try another one, and another one, until you get the one that works for you.

**Suggestion #10:** *Take care of yourself as well as you try to take care of your child. Be as forgiving of yourself as you should be of your child.*

The beliefs and messages you give your children should be the same as those you give to yourself. You can like yourself, believe in yourself and know there is no problem so great that you can’t solve it.

**Closing notes:** *Compare video games to parenting. There is immediate feedback of your responses. It never gives up on you. It never gets angry; it just calmly applies the appropriate consequence. You can argue with it until you’re blue in the face and the video game will ignore your inappropriate behavior. It even gives positive reinforcements when you need to keep your motivation going.*