

Q&As for Effective Parenting

What are your biggest parenting challenges? Discipline? Sibling rivalry? Maybe you want your child to be more independent or persistent. Here are answers to some of the most common parenting questions.



Encourage good behavior

Q: My daughter has been testing my discipline skills lately. How can I get her to behave better without nagging or yelling?

A: It helps to view discipline as teaching your youngster to behave, rather than about punishing her when she doesn't. First, be sure she knows the reasons behind rules. She'll be more likely to follow them if she understands what they're for. *Example:* "You have to ask before you watch TV or play video games so I can make sure you don't have too much screen time." When she breaks a rule, make the consequences logical. For instance, if she plays on your tablet without permission, she might lose screen time for the day. Finally, let your child know you noticed when she follows a rule. You could say something like, "You remembered to ask—that was responsible of you."

Routines that work

Q: I know sticking to a regular routine is good for my son. But I work two jobs, and it's not always easy. What can I do?

A: Children (and parents!) function best when they follow a familiar pattern each day. Try putting routines in writing—that may help you establish and stick to them.



Help your youngster make a daily schedule to hang on the refrigerator. *Examples:* 7:30 a.m., eat breakfast. 8:15 a.m., go to school. 7 p.m., do homework. Then, encourage him to refer to it throughout the day.

Post your work schedule on the fridge, too. Your child will know what time you'll be home and which days you're off. Then each morning, go over your schedules so he knows what to expect. *Note:* Your schedules make a good reference for sitters and grandparents, too.



Help siblings get along

Q: It seems like my daughters bicker more than they get along. Help! Is there a cure for sibling rivalry?

A: Children may fight or pick on each other to get their parents' attention. One way to limit conflict is to step out of the role of referee and let them settle minor arguments themselves. To head off future battles, give each child a little one-on-one time each day if possible. You could read bedtime stories to them separately, or play cards with one while the other is at soccer practice. Finally, encourage teamwork to reduce competition between your girls. Instead of racing each other to complete a chore, they could race against the clock, for instance. Or play board games where the kids compete against the grownups rather than against each other.

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Build independence

Q: *I want my son to be more independent, but sometimes it's just easier and faster to do things for him. Where should I start?*

A: The first step is to help your son realize he's capable of taking care of himself. Pick a task you'd like him to be in charge of, such as making his own breakfast on school mornings. Find a time when you're not rushed (perhaps on the weekend), and go through the steps together. You might show him how to make a smoothie or peel a hard-boiled egg, for example.

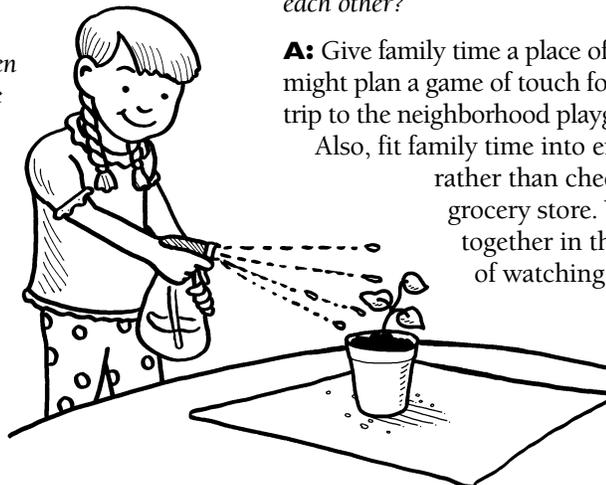
Another way to build independence is to let your youngster make more of his own decisions. Start with something small, like how to organize his belongings. Instead of saying, "Put your sports equipment in the hall closet," try asking, "Where's the best place to keep your gear?" Then, go with what he decides. You'll send the message that you believe he's capable of making good choices.

Promote persistence

Q: *My daughter tends to give up easily when a task is challenging. How can I help her be more persistent?*

A: Here's a secret: Kids who are persistent use problem-solving strategies when the going gets tough.

Say your daughter is struggling with her science project. Encourage her to think about what didn't work ("I poured too much water on my plants") and what she might try instead ("I'll use a spray bottle so the soil gets damp but not soaked").



Learning to brainstorm ideas will keep her reaching for new solutions rather than quitting.

Also, your child could think about times in the past when she overcame struggles. Maybe she had a hard time memorizing her lines for the school play, so she recorded herself rehearsing, then listened constantly—and nailed the performance. Remembering her successes can motivate her to persist.

Manage emotions

Q: *My son loses his temper when he gets angry. How can I help him control his emotions?*

A: To tame those temper outbursts, help your son learn to recognize the warning signs that he's becoming angry. Maybe he clenches his fists or feels like he's going to "explode."

Then, brainstorm strategies he can use to calm down when he feels himself losing control. He might close his eyes and count to 20 or walk away and do something quiet (like coloring) until he settles down.



Finally, have your youngster think of things he can say when he's angry instead of lashing out with words he might regret later. He could say, "I'm too angry to talk right now" and go in another room to calm down.

Find time for family

Q: *Life is hectic at our house. How can we make more time for each other?*

A: Give family time a place of honor on your calendar! You might plan a game of touch football on Saturday afternoon or a trip to the neighborhood playground on Wednesday evening.

Also, fit family time into errands. Tell each other jokes rather than checking your phone in line at the grocery store. Work on a crossword puzzle together in the dentist's waiting room instead of watching TV, or sing songs in the car as you drive.

Look for pockets of time at home, too. While dinner's in the oven, read your child a story or ask her to show you her dance routine.