

## **Understanding your child's needs:**

Children's needs and behaviours change as they get older and understanding these needs will help you better understand your child.

### **Babies:**

Babies behave as they do to get their needs met. For example, when they cry, they're trying to tell you that they need something – maybe they're hungry, need their nappy changed or feel tired. Older babies may show what appears like a 'stubborn streak' – spitting out food or wriggling away from a nappy change. All they are doing is trying to express their likes and dislikes in the only way they can.

When you're stressed you may feel your baby is being "deliberately naughty" or trying to provoke you. This is not possible. Remember you should never shout, scream, hit or smack a baby.

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### **School age:**

School age children are constantly learning and exploring their world. They may have lots of questions as they start to form their own views on issues. As they move towards being more independent, they may seem to push boundaries and become more challenging, a necessary part of growing up.



### **Teenagers:**

As children continue to develop their own identities in their teenage years, they might become more challenging – sometimes seeming “moody” or withdrawn or not as talkative and open as their parents would like. They might be more inclined to disagree with their parents or choose different views. Friends (and celebrities) will become a bigger influence and your child may not always do what you would like.



## **Building positive relationships:**

If parent-child relationships become damaged, it can affect the way a child feels or behaves. Finding ways to show unconditional love and affection to your child is important, but this can be easier said than done, especially when you're tired or juggling different needs.

Spend time with your child and learn together. This can help increase your child's confidence, strengthen your bond and also help you to better understand their needs.

**Self – awareness:** Being aware of and sensitive to our own needs and taking responsibility for them, is good for us and also helps us to be more nurturing to others. Understanding how our own childhood experiences affects us as adults/parents, and particularly in the way we respond to our children, is important too.

**Appropriate expectations of children:** Children flourish when what they can do matches our expectations of what they “should” be able to do. As adults we may either expect too much of a child for his/her age, which may not conform to the norms, or be the same as siblings. Or alternatively expect very little and underestimate what the child is able to do.

**Positive discipline:** Makes life more enjoyable for both parents and children and helps to build self-esteem in the family.

**Empathy:** Means tuning in to someone else's feelings, understanding their emotional point of view. We don't have to agree with what the other person thinks – just to be sensitive to the way they feel and to accept it. Try and find the feelings behind the words. Children who are treated with empathy and respect will learn to be empathic and respectful towards other people.

## **Top five tips:**

- Show your child you're interested in what they like. Think of enjoyable activities you can do together.
- Think of times when you have seen a positive change in your child's behaviour and anything you could learn from that experience.
- Ask your child for their views and be willing to listen. This can help you to see things from their view.
- Don't give up or be too hard on yourself if things don't immediately change. Focus on small steps and achievable goals.
- Be prepared to compromise and admit you're wrong.



### **How can you set boundaries:**

All children need love, guidance and to have rules and boundaries. Rules and boundaries help families to understand how to behave towards each other, and what's OK and not OK. But the best way to go about this will vary based on your child's age and stage of development. All children are different and develop and reach milestones at different rates.

#### **For all ages:**

- Keep guidance simple and consistent. Choices and consequences is a strategy that helps children learn to take responsibility for themselves, it keeps the adult/parent in charge whilst empowering the child. It is also an excellent way of defusing power struggles.
- If your child is behaving in a way you don't want them to, clearly explain what you want them to do instead. Use Dos and Don'ts; example, do talk quietly to each other, Don't shout or swear. Then give appropriate choices and consequences to that behaviour.
- Be available and make time so your child will come to you when they feel something is wrong or they are upset. Talk openly about feelings, an important part of growing up is learning to identify and name different feelings and find ways to express them in a safe way. We all express feeling and emotions in different ways; it helpful to be self-aware and to recognise these, role modelling your own feelings to children.
- Keep talking and listening to your child even if at times it feels like a challenge. Start listening from a very early age and set a pattern for life. One of the greatest gifts we can give each other is to listen. Being listened to really well, attentively and kindly encourages trust, honesty and openness. How we communicate; 35% = tone of voice, 10% = the words we use, 55% = our facial expression and body language.
- Review family rules as your child gets older and recognise the different needs of children living at home. For example, you shouldn't expect the same from your 12-year-old as you would from your four-year-old. When considering family rules, discuss this as a family. Keep it simple, not too many. Think about appropriate expectations and what's important to you and your family.

- Get support from friends and try any good ideas they have found helpful.
- If you are struggling and things are getting out of hand, get advice from your GP, a health visitor, or your child's teacher.

### **For babies and toddlers:**

- Introduce boundaries from an early age.
- Sympathise with how your child may be feeling – for example, saying “I know you are frustrated”, if your child is struggling to do something.
- Share your own feelings if you find it helps to relieve your stress – for example, “I know you're tired but I'm tired too”.
- Try to avoid using orders and ultimatums.

### **For school age and teenagers:**

- Be willing and give your child chances to show they can be trusted.
- Avoid criticism wherever possible. If your child has done something wrong, explain that it is the action and not them that you're unhappy with.
- Try to avoid getting trapped in petty arguments, there are rarely any winners!
- Consider ways to negotiate or offer choices as your child gets older

### **Rewards and Discipline:**

The word “discipline” is often used to mean punishment that the idea of positive discipline may at first seem strange. The word has the same origin as the word “disciple” – a follower, someone who is guided. Discipline is a way of guiding children, not for punishing them.

Only you will know what works for your child but here are some helpful points to think about.

- Praise children, even for the little things they do. Praise is the magic ingredient in relationships. It's a powerful way of encouraging and supporting. Showing that we are pleased, enthusiastic or grateful. Praise helps children and their behaviour. They respond better to compliments than to criticism, nagging or shouting. The glow of pleasure and pride they feel when their efforts are noticed helps them to remember what's wanted and to try again next time.
- Reward positive behaviour and consider asking what a good reward would be. Be consistent and discuss boundaries/consequences beforehand. Set up individual reward charts maybe for one or two tasks, for example brushing teeth or doing schoolwork. Also, Family reward chats like a kindness jar or Starry Skies. This helps everyone in the family pay attention to kindness and co-operative behaviour. It focuses everyone's attention on the nice things they are doing for each other; helping them to feel good about themselves; increasing the sense of belonging and being a team and reduces sibling rivalry. Children particularly need visual reinforcement to make things real.

- Avoid making rash decisions when you're angry. Take time to calm down, helps both children and adults when emotions are running high. It is a cooling off period that gives everyone a chance to calm down. It can be useful when a child is beginning to show signs of frustration; it helps to take a couple of minutes to reflect, which enables them to make better choices about how to behave.
- Talk to your child about the rewards and consequences of their behaviour and do it before rather than after. Children need fair, firm, kind and consistent boundaries/rules. Inconsistency leads to confusion. Children do not know what is expected of them, or what to expect of adults/parents; confusion leads to a sense of insecurity and often to difficult behaviour.
- Take time to really listen to what your children are saying and explain to them what you are feeling. Stay with them if they need your help to calm themselves. This supports their development of self-regulation. This is the act of managing one's thoughts and feelings to control impulses and solve problems constructively. As adults/parents we can support, coach and model our self-regulation to increase a child's ability to understand, express and modulate their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. This in turn helps support their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

WHAT WE PAY ATTENTION TO IS WHAT WE GET MORE OF.



## Keeping cool:

- Accept support This may be from your family, a friend or by using online forums. Knowing that there are other parents in the same situation can be a great encouragement.
- Don't overlook success If you have coped well with something difficult, be proud of what you've achieved. Celebrate your children's successes too.
- Make time for yourself This may involve doing things like exercising or listening to music. Treats can be as simple as a long soak in the bath, watching a DVD or going for a walk. If you live with a partner, agree a way to make sure you both get time off.
- Be as prepared as possible All children will be stressful at times so consider ways of dealing with this in advance. For example, if your child gets bored and irritable on long journeys, or waiting for things like doctor's appointments, take a couple of books or activities to keep them busy. Think about calming down activities, singing, blowing bubbles, blowing up balloons or sipping a glass of water.



### Make a Mind Jar:

#### For this you will need.

x1 empty jar with a lid and no labels.

Some hot water (be careful and ask a grown up for help) 2 tsp of glitter glue.

#### How to make.

Pour the hot water into the jar and add the glitter glue.

Put the lid on and shake the jar. Watch the bits of glitter swirl around – these are like all the thoughts and feelings in your very busy brain. See how when you keep the jar still the glitter starts to settle down – just like your thoughts and feelings will if you sit still and calmly breathe for a moment.

Top Tip! Next time you feel upset or angry give the jar a good shake – then sit, be still and wait for the glitter to settle. This will also help calm your mind.

- Get help This is a positive step to take and not a sign of weakness. If you're feeling stressed and anxious all the time seek some outside advice. A range of difficulties may get in the way of being a parent and it's important to get help. Talk to your GP or health visitor, model and don't do things that you wouldn't want your children to do.

## Who can I talk to:

Family Lives provides help and support on all aspects of parenting and family life and runs Parentline. 0808 800 2222 [familylives.org.uk](http://familylives.org.uk)

Cry-sis provides help for parents of excessively crying, sleepless or demanding babies. Lines are open seven days a week, 9am-10pm. 08451 228669 [cry-sis.org.uk](http://cry-sis.org.uk)

[www.kidsbehavior.co.uk](http://www.kidsbehavior.co.uk)

[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/) - Feeling stressed, anxious, low or struggling. Every mind matters is there to help.

Crisis Text Line: text SHOUT to 85258 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

The Mix offers a free, confidential telephone helpline and online service for young people: 0808 808 4994 free of charge, from 11am to 11pm every day. Or access The Mix online community.

Parents Helpline Enquiries, from Young Minds, offer advice about mental health in children and young people up to the age of 25. Helpline; 0808 802 5544

Citizens Advice can advise on things like employment, housing and income issues which can cause stress in families. [citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk) 01252 513 051 email via the website

<http://ow.ly/Uov650znnvG>

[www.change4life.co.uk](http://www.change4life.co.uk) – fantastic indoor fun and family recipes. 10 minutes daily shake up activities.

NSPCC Call 0808 800 5000 Email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) Or talk to us online at [nspcc.org.uk/help](http://nspcc.org.uk/help)

Childline 0800 1111 [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Child relaxation exercises; <http://kidsrelaxation.com/uncategorized/treehouse-relaxation-script/>

References:

Family Links



NSPCC website.