

THE 12 STEPS OF PARENTING

1. Always make an effort to show your children how much you care. Communicate that message to them in all interactions, especially when they are having problems.
2. Maintain a positive mental attitude about your ability to be a parent. Trust your instincts and know where you stand.
3. Teach your children the importance of values while they are young. Do not wait until your children come home intoxicated to tell them you will not accept drunkenness.
4. Do not rely on the police or your children's school, to be parents. ~~They~~ They are unable to care the way you do.
5. Set clear rules and limits for your children. Most do not have the ability to set rules and limits for themselves.
6. Maintain your own supportive relationships. Your children cannot meet your emotional needs, nor can they establish parent-child boundaries.
7. Make sure your home is a safe, secure and positive environment. This includes appropriate privacy for each family member.
8. Follow through with consequences for your children's misbehavior. Make sure the consequences are immediate and relate to the misbehavior, not your anger.
9. Do not prevent the natural consequences your children receive for misbehavior outside of the home. They will learn quickly if you let them.
10. Guide your children through life. They will often need help with homework, social situations, future plans, and complex feelings. Never give up trying to direct and redirect their energy.
11. Do not accept responsibility for you children's feelings or the outcome of their decisions. When your children succeed or do poorly it is their reward or consequence, not yours.
12. Your role as a parent is to provide a foundation for a life to be built, and that foundation is strongest with love, direction, and respect. Remember that your children are not less than and no greater than you.



1. Young children cannot collect information unless it is important to them. For example: When you say to a child, "Never, never, never run in the street.", they forget that "rule" when the ball rolls into the street. I heard a mother say to her child in the grocery store, "You got your hand stuck in the same part of the stroller yesterday. How could you be so stupid? Don't you remember?" Probably not. When the pain is gone, children forget. The place in which they put their finger looks like a place to do just that.

Too often during the summer we read in the newspaper about children who fall into the swimming pool. Do you think their parents didn't tell them? Of course they did, but the information was not important to them. We make rules but children cannot remember them because their job is to play and develop into thinking young people. We, all the adults in their lives, must be responsible for them - to watch and guide and gently remind them. We must provide safe places for them to play and not expect them to be responsible for their own safety.

2. Young children cannot share. Parents always look at me aghast when I say this. Developmentally, young children do not understand ownership. They think if someone takes something from them that either they won't get it back or it will be changed in some way. If you want your child to grow into a sharing adult, try not to demand sharing when it is not developmentally appropriate. Young children are basically egocentric - in other words - the world exists for them. You all have heard them say, "Mine, it's mine!" My grandson, Zac, who lives in our home, said, "This is my house and you and my mom and Grandpa live here with me." Ah, yes, if only he could make the house payments on "his" house.

Does all this mean you must have two or three of everything? Of course not. But be understanding. A better way to encourage sharing than to demand it is to say, "Ask her if you can use it when she's through."

Make sure if you ask a child to pass out cookies or crackers that you talk them through the task, "Let's see, there is a cookie for Zac and one for Sarah and one for you, too." Put their favorite things/toys up when others come to play and you know it is going to be difficult. Get a big box and stop at garage sales and get some toys to put in the box. Then, when company comes, get those toys out and say, "Here, these are my toys and all of you can play with them." They will look new to everybody.

At about four years old sometimes a child will start sharing but not until about six do they really start becoming much less egocentric.

3. Try to see each new stage as developmental. Too often as a child approaches a new stage of development we think the child is turning into a monster. Let me give you an example: At four your child seems to be able to walk, talk without yelling, and can be helpful with a sibling, etc. Then at four and a half they cannot walk - they fall and stumble. They cannot talk, they either yell or sometimes stutter and often use words you are appalled at. Then, they become five which is a very serene, together age. Remember each child is different at every age and there are many different personalities. But, in general, the more understanding you can be about developmental "stages", the more joy and delight you will experience as a family.
4. The most important thing to remember is that childhood is a very short, precious time. It is just a whisper - ask any grandparent. With tears they will say to you, "Oh, if I only could do it again." "If I had only spent more time." "If only I had laughed a little more and had not worried about the dust." I have never heard anyone say they wished they had dusted more often. Be kind and gentle with yourself as a parent. One hundred years from now, no one will know if you kept a clean house, but it will make a difference in the world if you spend quality time with your children.

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From Bay Area Parent Magazine