

Positive Parenting Tips for Summer

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For 180 days a year, school counselors work with students on how to express their feelings in appropriate ways, how to deal with their anger and how to cope with stressful situations. But what happens when school is not in session, especially during the extended summer break? As a parent, you are the most influential person in your children's lives, and how you work through family issues can have a positive influence on behavior throughout the family as well as the school. Following are some parenting tips to work on throughout the summer months.

Sibling conflicts: Stay on the sidelines of sibling arguments (unless there is bloodshed) and help your children learn to appropriately express their negative feelings. At my school, students learn to use the "magic sentence." The sentence includes phrases such as "I feel" "because" "I want you to" and "I am willing to." Example: "I feel angry because you called me a name and I want you to stop. I am willing to stop calling you names."

Using the magic sentence requires practice and parental guidance. It may feel contrived at first, but if your children and you get into the habit of thinking and stating your feelings rather than acting out, you'll find it opens up the lines of communication and decreases outbursts.

Encourage your children to listen to other people's magic sentences and then repeat back to them what they understand they heard. If they think they heard, "You said you don't want me calling you a frog face -- even though you really are one. And you want me to stop, but I won't until you do" then they may have to listen (or repeat it again) until they get it right.

Discipline: Children develop security, increased self-esteem and have fewer behavioral problems when in an environment that provides consistency, rules, consequences, praise and positive acclamation. Consistency means your behavior as a parent is absolutely predictable; this is key. To a child this means, "Every time I throw a fit in the store, Mom or Dad will leave the store." If you give in once, it's like a slot machine that pays off. Winning once is addicting. If the slot never paid, no one would ever put money in.

Having rules in print is important. When the child breaks a rule, the parent can point to a printed sheet and ask, "What is the rule?" This takes the heat off the parent as the bad guy and places it on the "rule." Rules must be clearly stated and reasonable for the child's age, developmental level and emotional stability. In some situations, the rules can be created with the child, which creates buy-in. For example: The rule might read: "Marie's bed time is 8 p.m." When Marie tries to negotiate for a later time, the parent asks the child, "What is the rule?" and the answer is clear.

Also choose consequences that fit when rules are broken. Coming home late from a friend's house should result in your child not being able to see the friend for a few days. Missing a trip to the amusement park as punishment does not fit this offense. Praise is also important. Look for the good in your child and praise it. Sometimes parents must look hard to find something to praise, but you still should look for it. Also work to build your child's self-esteem through positive acclamation, such as "You know Billy, I love you because you're my son, but I really like you because you're you." Messages like these really help in building self-esteem, especially when they are unearned and

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spontaneous. Your child always will appreciate them.

Parental conflicts: Two wonderful words can be used when your child wants to engage in an unending argument with you or chooses to defy your authority. They are "nevertheless" and "regardless." For example:

Parent: John, please pick up your room and then feed the dog.

Child: But Mom, Sarah never has to do any chores.

Parent: Nevertheless, I want you to pick up your room and feed the dog.

By using these simple argument deflectors you can avoid the confrontation and negotiation and keep the child's focus on the issue. These deflectors can be used to avoid arguments in almost any situation. In resolving conflicts at home, especially those regarding how thoroughly your children have accomplished their chores, it helps to specify the task while being direct and to the point. In this way, there is no confusion. You will have the greatest success if you keep the statements short and direct, and your child will feel more successful upon completion. As always, don't forget to praise a job well done.

Family meetings: At least one night a week should be set aside for family meetings. These should be open forums in that everyone should have an opportunity to tell how they feel. A family meeting isn't the time to punish or discipline but rather to listen to your children's feelings and concerns and to ask them to listen to yours. Only through open, honest communication can a family increase its positive relationships and grow together.

Parenting is hard work. There is no instruction manual for children when they are born. Therefore, we must try new things, hone our skills, learn from and support each other and give ourselves a break when we have rough days. It helps to have a positive attitude.

Remember these two phrases from Janet Lane and Henry Chester. Lane says, "Of all the things you wear, your expression is the most important." Chester says, "Enthusiasm is the greatest asset in the world. It beats money, power and influence."

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