



Five Weeks on Demand Parenting Skills Workshops (PSW) Syllabus

There is no such thing as a perfect parent. Parenting will be the hardest job you'll ever do and the most important job you'll ever do.

When living and relating to our children, we want to be able to love our children as well as discipline them. We also want them to love themselves. The goals of discipline and the goals of love are one in the same.

The ability of a child to care about getting enough sleep, to be cooperative and to be honest comes from the way they are cared for. For example: Children learn how to care about themselves through the experiences that they receive from their caregivers. And only a person who cares about himself can care about other people.

Introduction:

Effective discipline is a challenge for every parent. Parenting is in effect being in a relationship, and we all know that relationships require constant work.

One of the reasons that parenting is a challenge is because each one of us has an inborn set of qualities that can be described as temperament. Each of us also possesses our own intellectual and physical capabilities. Yet, how these qualities and capabilities are developed depends almost wholly on how we are treated.

Recently psychologists have become interested in what they call the "resilient" child: The child who, despite being exposed to many stresses and disadvantages, still grows up to be a happy and productive person. Studies have found that some "productive factors" were present in those children's home life that lead to their healthy development. These children had experienced steady love and guidance from at least one person during their early years. These were children who learned that there was someone they could count on both for love and limits.

The study proved that parents can actively shape an environment in which their child will prosper. It solidly supports the idea that with the right kind of nurturing children can overcome even the most serious stresses.

These workshops are designed to help parents build skills to understand and communicate with their children. You will have homework assignments due each week. You will do in class worksheets that are designed to help you with your homework assignments. The homework assignments are designed to give you practice learning the parenting skills that we discuss in class.

Week 1: Understanding children's behavior and misbehavior.

If you can remember how you felt as a child when you were disciplined, you will understand your own kids better. You can benefit not only from the mistakes your parents made, but also from what they did that was effective. Take a few minutes to answer the questions in this handout, then you can share some of your answers.

Misbehavior

One of the main reasons children misbehave is to get their parents' attention. The kind of attention they usually get is negative attention, in the form of anger and disapproval. But to a child this is better than no attention at all. This is why it is important to comment on the things your children do well, or the behaviors you want to see and to spend quality time with your kids every day. Whether it be reading to them, playing a game, or watching a video together. This way they are less likely to feel they have to act out to get noticed.

Once parents decide that they do not need to be controlling (for example: that they can set limits and let the children decide and learn from the consequences), then there is no purpose for becoming annoyed and angry. Once parents recognize how children can use emotions to manipulate adults, then the parent is in the position to influence their children (see handout on anger).

Week 1 Homework - Misbehavior

During the coming week, analyze your child's misbehavior according to one of the four goals:

1. Attention 2. Power 3. Revenge 4. Inadequacy

1. Describe what your child did.
2. Describe your feelings and exactly how you reacted.
3. Describe how the child responded to your reaction.
4. Using the four goals of misbehavior, decide what must have been the purpose of the child's behavior.

Handouts:

Expectations Inventory
Adult Feelings Chart
Exercise-Discipline Inventory

Week 2 Emotions and Developmental Levels

Anger Emotional Displays

By clarifying what we think, feel, and want, we can learn to use our anger in more constructive ways. It's amazing how quickly we are ready to enter combat without knowing what the war is about. Our most powerful position in implementing change is to begin to observe our patterns and discover new options for changing our behavior.

Once parents recognize how children can use emotions to manipulate adults, they are in a position to influence their children. Parents can get out of the vicious cycle by refraining from reacting when children try to use emotions to manipulate them. We know that becoming responsible for one's own feelings is a necessary part of growing up.

Children have four goals of misbehavior:

1. Attention
2. Power
3. Revenge
4. Display of inadequacy

To help a child who feels inadequate, parents must eliminate all criticism, and focus, instead, on the child's assets and strengths. The parents must encourage any effort to improve, no matter how small it seems.

Once parents decide that they do not need to be controlling, for example: that they can set limits and let children decide and learn from the consequences, then there is no purpose for becoming annoyed and angry.

Understanding more about your child and yourself as a parent.

Emotions are a necessary aspect of who we are. Consider what life would be like without emotions. There would be no sorrow and no conflict, but there would also be no joy, closeness, or love. Like a world without color, life would be dull without emotions.

Typically, we regard emotions as magical forces, which invade us from the outside. We say things like "He made me so angry" or "She's going to drive me crazy". What we don't often realize is that each of us is responsible for our own emotions.

Our emotions are based on our beliefs and purposes. **We feel as we believe.** If we believe that people are friendly and trustworthy, we create positive feelings to bring ourselves close to other people. If we believe that people are unfriendly and untrustworthy, we create hostile feelings to keep them away.

Parents, teachers, and other caregivers have an important role in teaching children self-regulation.

Babies cry, toddlers have tantrums. At some point, parents expect their kids to start managing their feelings without epic meltdowns.

Learning to regulate emotions, though, is a complex process. “Emotion regulation calls on so many skills, including attention, planning, cognitive development, and language development,” said Pamela Cole, PhD, a psychologist at Penn State University who studies emotion regulation in early childhood.

Children develop those skills at different times, psychologists say. Their ability to manage negative feelings depends on genetics, their natural temperament, the environment they grow up in, and outside factors like how tired or hungry they are. But parents, teachers, and other caregivers all play a critical role in helping children learn to manage their feelings.

Plan options: When your child is calm, talk about some ways they can handle a tricky situation. Imagine they pushed a classmate who had a toy they wanted to play with. When things are calm, talk about different choices they could make next time: They could tell the teacher, ask the classmate to take turns, or find something else to play with. This process can help your child develop problem-solving skills.

Act it out: Once you talk about possible options, it’s time to practice. “Role play and rehearse,” Kazdin said. Take turns pretending to be your child and their classmate. With practice, kids will begin to apply those new skills in the real world.

Punish less, praise more: It’s tempting to give consequences for bad behavior. But strict punishment makes behavior worse, not better. “When parenting is harsh, children who have trouble managing their emotions tend to react by becoming more aggressive,” Lochman said. “The research shows that you should have four or five positive interactions for each negative reprimand.” In other words, caregivers should spend a lot of time on positive, praise, and rewards for good behavior.

Be a team: For kids who are struggling to learn emotion regulation, consistency is key. “It’s really important for parents, grandparents, teachers, and other caregivers to work together to address a child’s self-regulation problems,”

Lochman said. “Sit down to chat and plan a coordinated approach to handling the child’s behaviors.”

Check your expectations: Don’t expect your child to behave perfectly, especially if they’re genuinely scared or stressed, Cole said. When they’re afraid or anxious (like getting vaccinated or starting school for the first time) they might not be able to access the self-regulation skills they use in more low-stakes situations. “In a highly stressful situation, children need more adult support,” she said. Take the long view: Most children learn to manage big feelings by the time they’re in elementary school. But that doesn’t mean their emotional development is finished. Executive functions—skills like planning, organizing, problem solving, and controlling impulses—continue to develop into young adulthood. When you feel frustrated by your child’s behavior, remember that emotion regulation takes time.

Week 2 Homework – Emotions and Developmental Levels

During week 2 analyze your children’s emotional displays:

- A. During times of emotion for your child, how did you respond to your child?
- B. How did your own feelings influence your response to your child?

Handouts:

Developmental Stages
Stages of Adolescents
Child feelings chart
Anger Inventory

References:

American Psychological association
<https://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/emotion-regulation>

Week 3 Encouragement

Beginning in the earliest days of our lives, we develop beliefs about who we are, who and what other people are, what is important in life, and how we should function so that we can belong. We live by our beliefs; they characterize our life-style.

Yet, our own basic beliefs are often faulty. Why? Because our interpretations of our experiences are often inaccurate. We formed our most basic beliefs when we were very young. At that times, our limited experiences caused us to misjudge and overgeneralize. Even as infants, we were forming the biased opinions and beliefs, which now guide our lives.

It is important to understand the factors, which contribute to the formation of our children's beliefs through their lifestyle. One we are aware of these components, we are in a better position to influence our children positively. Four major factors influence our children's beliefs (as they have influenced our own). These factors are:

- 1. Family atmosphere and values**
- 2. Gender roles**
- 3. Family constellation**
- 4. Methods of relating**

Family atmosphere is the pattern of human relationships set by parents. The atmosphere may be competitive or cooperative, friendly or hostile, autocratic or permissive, orderly or chaotic. The family atmosphere provides a model of human relationship for children.

Gender roles played by parents are guidelines for their children. From father to mother, children see what the roles of men and women are considered to be. Children base their attitudes toward their own gender on their observations of their parents.

Family constellation or the psychological position of a child in a family is often related to the child's position among siblings. For example, first born, second born, etc. Each child had a different position in the family and perceives all events from his or her own viewpoint. Competition among siblings is another important influence on personality development. Intense competition with a sibling influences personality formation.

Another important factor influencing children's lifestyle is the parents' attitude and behavior toward children and themselves. A parent's method of relating may be consistently autocratic, permissive, or democratic, or they may be inconsistent and fluctuate between these attitudes and behaviors.

Exercise:

Read the five statements made by children to express their feelings. I'd like you to write down what feeling you might use to describe what the child is experiencing based on their statements.

1. "I hate Sam. He always gets picked for the football starting lineup."
2. "I miss grandma. I wish she didn't live so far away."
3. "Tony invited everybody but me to his birthday party!"
4. "The art teacher doesn't like my drawings. Oh, well, I didn't like art anyways."
5. "There's no way I'm going to the beach this summer. I look like miss piggy."

Encouragement: Building your child's confidence and feelings of worth.

One of the most important skills for improving the relationship between parents and children is encouragement. Encouragement is the process whereby you focus on the assets and strengths of your children to build their self-confidence and self-esteem. Encouragement helps your children believe in themselves and their abilities. Parents who encourage help their children accept and learn from mistakes; they help their children develop the courage to be imperfect.

Helping your children build their feelings of self-esteem, may require you to change your usual communication and behavior patterns. Instead of focusing on the children's mistakes, point out what they do that you like or appreciate. This will require you to change to a positive approach.

When mistakes are not tied to personal worth, they are less overwhelming. Then the child can see errors as areas for growth rather than personal catastrophes; they can be faced and worked through.

One method to help you avoid dumping your angry feelings on your children is to breathe deeply and then count to ten. If you reach ten and still feel agitated, leave the room.

You are not obligated to stay engaged. Hitting your child or yelling hurtful things only teaches children that hitting or yelling is the thing to do when they get angry. For example, tell your child, "I'm really angry right now. I'll talk to you about this when I calm down."

A second method for expressing anger constructively is a technique called "owning your feelings." Made popular by Thomas Gordon in his book "Parent Effectiveness Training". An example of this formula is:

"When you _____, I feel _____. What I want is _____."

Here are some examples:

"When I see your wet towels on the floor, I feel furious because it tells me that you think I'm your maid. What I want is for you to hang the towels up."

"When you don't do your homework until the last minute, I feel concerned. What I want is for you to plan your time better."

When we own our feelings, we can even express strong emotions without damaging our children's self-esteem.

"I dislike it when you leave your toys all over the living room floor!"

"I resent it when you tell me you'll come straight home after school and you show up late."

Owning our feelings teaches kids anger is a normal and natural part of life, and that it can be expressed in healthy, constructive ways.

We're going to do an exercise to give you some practice in creating "I" statements. "I" messages communicate clearly how you feel about a specific situation, without blame, while letting your child know what you want. I'll read a statement and you can fill the blanks.

Role Playing

1. Mary Jo is continually leaving the lights on when she leaves the room. Her mother asked her repeatedly to turn the lights out when she leaves the room.
2. Craig has friends over after school. They hang out in his room and blast his stereo. His mother has asked him to play it at a more reasonable level, and he persists at keeping the volume loud.
3. Jeffery is responsible for walking and feeding the dog. His father has reminded him numerous times about his responsibility. Spuds, once again, is sitting by the door with a desperate look on his face.
4. Carolyn uses the last piece of toilet paper in the roll and doesn't replace it with a fresh one. Her mother has hounded her about remembering to put a new roll out.

Week 3 Homework - Encouragement

This week, find ways to encourage your children. In each instance, notice what happened, how you encourage the child, and the child's response. You can take notes and share your experiences with your partner or a friend.

Handouts:

Communicating for Connection
The Characteristics of Children Under Stress
Helping Children with Feelings

Week 4 Reflective Listening

As far as discipline and communication go, matching our expectations to our children's abilities depends on two things.

1. **Understanding what is appropriate to the child's age and stage of development.** All normal children share certain predictable sequences of growth; these are physical, emotional, social, and intellectual. By recognizing that a two year old is incapable of sharing, that a six year old cannot be held accountable for keeping his room clean without his mother's help, or that an eleven year old needs approval from his friends, we can better understand the developmental stage our child is in. If we match the developmental stage with an appropriate discipline, we are more likely to be successful.
2. **Understanding what is appropriate to your child as an individual human being.** Every child is a unique human being with a distinct temperament and his own way of learning and growing up. With temperament, as with age, there are predictable qualities that children with different temperaments share. For example: What works for one child may not work for another. We can experiment by using different techniques of reflective listening to find out what works best for each particular child.

Listening to our children requires letting them know that we recognize the feelings behind what they are saying and what they are not saying.

We know that a person who is upset tends to lose perspective. By listening reflectively, we can help a child think through an upsetting problem. That is, we can reflect and clarify the child's feelings to help lay a foundation for the child to resolve the problem. When we use "open" responses rather than closed responses, we are letting our children know that we are listening and care. Here is an example of reflective listening:

Child: "I hate Billy and the other kids for not coming over to play with me. There's nothing to do."

Closed response: "Well, that's part of life."

Open response: "It sounds like your feeling left out."

Reflective listening is one way to provide a sort of mirror for your child to see himself or herself more clearly. In other words, it gives the child "feed-back". Reflective listening means that we produce open responses, which reflect the child's feelings and meaning. If you concentrate on asking yourself the question, "what is my child feeling?" you will find your reflective listening response comes much easier.

Practice using reflective listening.

Here are some examples of feeling word that you can use to respond to your child.

Angry
Bored
Anxious
Hurt
Put down
Sad
Worried
Rejected
Can you think of some more?

Listening, as it is, is a difficult thing. And to think of listening to your child seems a daunting task. Is it important to listen to your child? Add to that the fact that when the child needs to be listened to, you may have another 1000 things running on your mind wanting you to just jump off your seat right now.

However, research states that listening to your kids makes it more likely that they listen to you (which most of us want). When a child feels listened to, he is more likely to listen, and having been understood, he will understand your point of view too. It helps parents and children form stronger bonds and relationships and builds their self-esteem.

The Basics of Listening to Your Child

Talking and listening to your child hold a lot of importance. It helps your child build a bond with you and develop his trust in you. Listening improves the bonding in a relationship and builds a child's confidence. Not many parents have the skill to 'listen', but with a conscious effort, they can develop it. And slowly, with practice, you can master it as well.

When you are trying to talk or communicate with your child, you should:
Encourage your child to open up to you by talking.

Be patient and listen to your child while he puts his feelings and thoughts across. Respond in a sensitive way to everything that he says, good or bad. Focus on body language and actions so as to understand the non-verbal forms of his communication.

How Can You as a Parent Improve Your Listening Skills?

Listening is not an easy task. As a parent, you will feel tempted to raise your voice and tell your child they are wrong. It takes a lot of patience to really hear out someone, let alone a child, as you may get to hear something that you are not happy about.

Your child may say something that challenges your view or beliefs, or you may hear something that will make you want to change, or it may disrupt what you think. And

that is why it is important to develop listening skills in yourself first, before getting your child to talk to you. And how do you do this?

Practice active listening and focus on what the child is trying to say without forming or expressing any opinions.

Place yourself in your child's shoes, imagine how you would have reacted in a given situation that your child is in.

Be present physically and mentally. When you get your child to talk, be fully in the moment. The dishes can wait, so can your phone calls. Let your child know they have your undivided attention.

Observe your child's body language and decode the non-verbal things your child is trying to say.

Show curiosity and have an open mind. You should not be judgmental when it comes to listening to anyone.

What are the Negative Effects of Not Listening to Your Child?

Without you being even aware of it, your day-to-day behavior affects your child in many ways, shaping his or her future personality. As parents, you influence your child's life intentionally or unintentionally or both.

From the tone of your voice to the words you choose, your child learns the skills necessary to interact with you – as parents are essentially a child's first teacher. Children who are not heard become the ones who never listen. They will always be under the impression that they are unworthy of your time and attention.

Whatever they do, think, or feel is negative. They lose confidence and self-esteem, which can be detrimental to their development as young adults. A child who is often judged or criticized loses interest in sharing and communicating and ends up being bottled, alone, and aloof.

Nine Tips on Talking to Your Child:

Some kids are naturally expressive, and they talk everything out, while others may need a lot of encouragement to be able to speak with you. The first thing is to be open to listening and give your child your unfocused attention.

Here are some tips on getting your child to talk to you and be open to listening:

Set aside Some Quality Time: Set aside a time when you both can talk to each other without any interference. If face-to-face talk seems difficult, go for a walk, and take some time to chat. Else, take your child for a drive and let them sit in the back seat and have a conversation.

Avoid Pre-set Boundaries: Be receptive and open to all kinds of feelings without getting angry or frustrated. Remember that conversations will not always be positive, but also include negative topics like anger, fear, and anxiety.

Put Yourself in Their Shoes: Remember that children do have the same maturity as adults do. Think of the times when you were a child and how difficult it was to communicate when you have so much going on in your mind but do not have enough words.

1. Patience is the Key

Do not be in a hurry to respond. Let your child finish talking and then respond sensitively. When your child is talking, do not jump in or interfere. Never try to put your words in your child's mouth. Do not yell.

2. Do not Lecture Your Child

Refrain from lecturing. Lecturing is one way of putting your view across, while an engaging conversation fosters their own thinking process and conclusions.

3. Make Inspiring Conversations

Make the conversations, inspiring for your child. Stories are a perfect way to inspire young kids. Always emphasize the positive.

4. Beware of Language

Use language that your child will understand. Avoid using words that they may find difficult to comprehend. Avoid using slang or complicated words – talk in the same way as your child does.

5. Listen Carefully

Let your child know that you are listening to them. Repeat what they say and make eye contact. Show your interest in the conversation. Being actively involved in the conversation is extremely important to let your child know that his views and opinions matter.

6. Do not Judge your child

Do not judge, criticize, blame, or get angry over something that your child has done or said. Work together as a team to solve your problems.

Take Away

When you listen to your child, you get to know what they are thinking, feeling, and going through. Childhood is a difficult phase, and with limited vocabulary, children often find it difficult to communicate their feelings.

It is imperative that children be heard so that they do not bottle up their feelings. It also means that your children will listen to you more because they have been heard. This opens up avenues for healthy conversations, which are fruitful and bring parents and children closer.

Questions from Parents

1. Can children express all of their emotions?

Yes, they can. They may not do it like you and me but they do it in their own way.

2. Could it hurt my child if I don't listen?

Yes, most likely it will, even if they do not show signs of the hurt. They might become withdrawn. They might not learn to express themselves.

3. How can I listen better to my child?

Set aside a few minutes a day. Let them tell you anything. Create a safe space for communication.

4. Can not listening to my child, result in behavioral issues?

Yes, it can. When they feel unheard, they might change. They might get aggressive to get attention.

Week 4 Homework – Reflective Listening

Practice using reflective listening in your communication with your children. Take notes and share your experiences next week.

Handouts:

Effective Listening
Seeing Your Children
Commenting on What You See

Reference: Being the Parent
<https://www.beingtheparent.com/why-is-it-important-to-listen-to-your-child/>

Week 5 Effective Communication

Exploring alternatives and expressing your ideas and feelings to children.

Last week we learned the skill of reflective listening: how to help children feel understood by making open responses to their communication of emotion. Through your reflective listening, children can clarify their feelings and consider a problem more rationally. Sometimes they can discover their own solutions simply by being heard by an understanding adult.

There are other times when children need help in considering various courses of action. Sensitive adults can help them explore alternatives and choose solutions that make sense to them.

The process of exploring alternatives should not be confused with giving advice. Giving advice, such as “Do this” or “I think you should” is not helpful for the following reasons:

- 1. Advice does not help children to solve their own problems. It invites them to be dependent on you.***
- 2. Many children resist taking advice. They are either skeptical that your advice will work, or they don't want to do what you say.***
- 3. If your advice doesn't work, guess who is held responsible.***

To help a child explore alternatives means to assist the child in identifying and considering the options available to solve a problem. The steps to exploring alternatives are:

- 1. Use reflective listening to understand and clarify the child's feelings:***

“You're angry”

“It seems you feel”

Can you think of some responses that you used with your children during the week to clarify their feelings?

- 2. Assist the child to choose a solution. Help the child evaluate the various possibilities.***

“Which idea do you think is the best one?”

“What would you like to do?”

Listening to a child's ideas about solving a problem doesn't mean that you have to agree with the exact plan that they describe. Reflective listening is a tool to help you and your child communicate better. It lets the child feel that you are understanding him or her.

Giving your child the opportunity to think about solutions to his or her problems helps build their sense of Autonomy. This means giving the child the means to be self-reliant.

To influence your child, you must be able to communicate in a manner, which makes it likely, that your feeling, meaning, and intentions are being understood. In many families, parents do not expect children to listen; they expect to have to repeat every request at least once. Their children have trained them to repeat every message.

Parents sometimes create conditions, which invite their children not to listen. For example: when we talk without expecting to be heard, we are training them to tune us out at other times.

When talking with your children, it is helpful to think in terms of "You messages" and "I messages".

The "you" message lays blame and conveys criticism of the child.

The "I" statement simply describes how the child's behavior makes you feel.

For example: "I feel concerned when you wear your good clothes out to play because they wear out quickly. I would like you to put on old clothes when playing outside because we can't afford to buy new ones."

I messages express what the sender is feeling. They are specific. Before expressing your feelings of displeasure to the child, consider this:

It is usually not the child's behavior per se that is displeasing you; but rather the consequences the behavior produces for you, how it interferes with your needs or rights.

For example: you are in the kitchen making dinner. Your children are playing in the other end of the house laughing and having a good time. Their noise doesn't bother you. Then the phone rings. Now their behavior is interfering with your own needs; you feel angry because you cannot hear what the other person is saying.

Let's practice some more "I" Statements. I'll start a statement and you finish it with an "I" Statement.

1. "I feel... when you don't answer me when I call you. What I would like is..."
2. "I feel... when you leave your toys all over the floor. What I would like is ..."

3. "I feel... when you yell at me. What I would like is..."
4. "I feel...when you refuse to go to bed. What I would like is..."
5. "I feel...when you hit other children. What I would like is..."

Week 5 Homework – Effective Communication

Practice using "I messages" and help your child explore alternatives.

Handouts:

I Statements Template
Parenting Phrases to Soothe and Support
Tips for Parents

About the facilitator:

Dr. S. Judah is a clinical psychotherapist who has worked as a clinician for over 30 years and has provided a broad range of accessible clinical support and education for residents of California. Her goal is to provide clinical and educational support that reflects the diversity of California.