

# Free Expert Parenting Guide

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### The 5 "Do's" of Parenting:

1. **Call attention to any given outcome by their *effort*, not the result.** An example of this is "You hustled and didn't give up at your game today" or "You stopped playing video games to help me set the table, I appreciate that and will remove some of your chores this evening." An example of what not to do is "You won" or "They like you". Remember, the results are often out of their control, and we do not want to attach the child's worth to the result only. Model a healthy mindset by exposing the things within their control, such as effort, and ability to cultivate a hopeful attitude. This teaches them to place their focus on their skills, rather than the unpredictability of an end result. Certainly reinforce good behavior, but be careful to praise the unique effort rather than the win.
2. **Nurture your own friendships.** If you're worried about being selfish with personal time, drop the guilt. Studies show that parents spending time with their own pals actually models a good example for their children. Maintaining friendships helps teach the value of social relationships. Also remember, you're a much better parent when you are happy. Take care of yourself, reduce stress, and watch your patience level thrive!

3. **Show gratitude.** Modern studies show that gratitude and happiness are strongly linked. Practice gratitude with your child or teen on a daily basis. Remember, appreciation lists shouldn't consist solely of toys or tablets. Teach your children to focus on being thankful for nonmaterial things, such as sleeping in a warm bed or taking an art class, to develop realistic perspective.
4. **Do what you say you're going to do, and don't do what you say you're not going to do.** Credibility is the name of the game. If you are unpredictable or flimsy, your child or teen will not know an appropriate response; Studies show this lays a rocky road for emotional development. Build up parenting credit by being honest, if you have not done so already. Recent studies show that being honest about negative things is equally beneficial. It provides a trusting relationship between you and your child that they can rely on. Take 10 seconds to assess the realistic nature of a promise to ensure you can undoubtedly deliver.
5. **Buy gifts generously but sporadically as the need arises.** Gifts are a great expression of parental love and create a very warm bond between parent and child, but you need to administer them gradually enough in order to harvest the maximum amount of appreciation and emotional benefit out of them. Look at toys or gifts as tokens that they have earned, rather than a quick way to be happy. There will be greater satisfaction on the part of the child or teen if there has been personal effort attached. Reinforcing positive behavior is huge, and gifts are a great way to do it, but all in moderation. The term “satiation” refers to too much of a good thing getting stale, so give lovingly but rarely enough to maintain the excitement for an earned special occasion.

#### The 5 “Dont’s” of Parenting:

1. **Don't bicker, argue or fight with your partner in front of the children.** Even minor arguments can be terribly traumatizing to the undeveloped brain. They don't have the reasoning wisdom to think, “They're just having an argument right now, later on they'll make up and get along fine.” During the argument children or teens fear the worst, and actually believe that it is likely that “mommy daddy are going to break up and they are going to get

abandoned!” I have had children and teens who've actually told me they think that! In addition, the children tend to think that "mommy and daddy are fighting because it's my fault because I'm bad”, and it creates low self-esteem.

2. **Don't Protect Kids From Failure.** This goes against our fundamental parental instincts, but it is important that we do not block their opportunity for triumph over defeat. So many children are rescued, coddled, or protected from this very prevalent part of life, and this actively prevents them from learning how to overcome or persevere. And then we wonder why they feel the need to be “perfect” in the teen years. Imperfections are a part of who they are and it is never too early to teach them how to embrace reality and press on with skills and creativity when things do not go according to plan. A wise psychologist once said, “No life is free from adversity no matter how healthy or wealthy you are.”
3. **Don't deny them the right to feel or express feelings; *even negative, aggressive or angry ones.*** I understand that it is frightening and unsettling to hear your child or teen upset, but doing so will cause them to be repressed and potentially cause all sorts of mental health problems and self-rejection. Accepting the not-so-glamorous parts of life is of paramount importance. Teaching or modeling self-acceptance begins with you listening and genuinely accepting whatever organic feelings they have. No judgement, no quick fix, just unconditional understanding and acceptance. This does not mean that you are “condoning” them wanting to punch someone or throw a chair, but it is OK to provide that judgement-free space for them to feel whatever comes up for them. Bonus Parenting Tip: It will lead to them sharing more openly in the future if they feel they will not be judged or ridiculed for sharing personal feelings.
4. **Don't reinforce bad behavior.** Duh! But let me explain. Shining the light on un-welcomed behavior can often backfire. The key here is to give a reaction when you want an action repeated and to *ignore things you don't want to continue.* For some kids, a bad reaction is better than no reaction. If they are in search of Power, Attention, or Revenge, a negative reaction from a parent or teacher will register as a reinforcer! Reinforce the good and ignore the bad.

5. **Don't assume they will be "like this" forever.** I hear disgruntled parents say all the time that they just "want their child or teen to be friendly, happy and healthy". Can't we agree that this is pretty much the universal desire for parents of any age group? The science behind childhood reveals their exploratory nature. They will explore a bit and then adapt accordingly to their environment. Too often we let their "exploring" scare us and we peg them as a certain type of child, when in reality they are simply testing the waters briefly. Do not read too much into it. Guide them in their exploration. This is why it is so important to follow simple guidelines to manage their everyday environment. They will respond accordingly. A child or early teen typically does not reason abstractly by saying things like "it is probably in my best interest to study because this will foster good habits for college". Before a certain age, unconditioned kids and teens are unapologetic hedonists (a being that avoids pain and seeks pleasure.) In other words, what feels the best (candy, skipping school, etc.) is the best in their eyes. But do not fear, this phase of life is temporary. Ah, sweet relief. Modern studies show that the decision making part of the brain (Prefrontal Cortex) develops in the early 20's. This means everything you have taught them will explode on the scene and their forethought, and maturity will increase dramatically. Do not assume that they will be "like this" forever.



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