YOU CAN DO IT! PARENTS
helping children to be successful and happy

PARENT E-NEWSLETTER
HIGHLY EFFECTIVE, POSITIVE PARENTS

Parenting Strengths that Make a Difference

THERE is lots of advice and warnings about what not to do as a parent if you want your children to turn out all right.

"Don't be too strict."
"Do not be too lax."
"Don't protect your child from frustration."
"The more responsibility you take for your children's behaviour, the less responsibility they take for themselves."
"Do not let your emotions get out of control."
"Do not expect too much of your child, make your expectations realistic."

It can get a bit depressing to hear about all the negative statistics and problems this generation is experiencing and how little influence parents have over our children especially as they grow older in comparison to the influence of their peers and the media.

There is room for optimism. Research continues to show that parents exert a very powerful influence over their children's habits and behaviours whether they know it or not especially when their children never appear to be listening!

Research indicates that parents who are kind but firm in their style of parenting have kids that turn out to be good kids and successful in what they do.

> *Kind and firm* child rearing practice is the preferred and skilled form of parenting. Parents who raise their children in this fashion talk and reason with them about objectionable behavior, focus on the behavior but do not blame the child, set limits with clear consequences for rule violations, set punishment that is related to rule learning, not blame, sometimes frustrate their child when necessary, apply reasonable pressure to teach self-discipline and delay of gratification, never punish out of anger and frequently praise and show love.

We also know that emotionally happy children have parents who teach them self-acceptance.

Here's what Albert Ellis, founder of one of the world's most powerful forms of counseling and therapy, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, has written about how parents can communicate self-acceptance to their children.

> Teach children to never rate themselves in terms of their behavior and to separate judgments of their actions from judgments of self-worth. Encourage them to acknowledge and accept responsibility for their traits and behaviors –both good and bad- without evaluating themselves as good or bad. Help combat children's tendencies towards self-downing by reminding them they are made up of many good qualities (and some that are not so helpful) and that they do not lose their good qualities when bad things happen. Explain to children that all human beings are capable and likeable in their unique ways and, therefore, it is good for children to accept themselves unconditionally without having to prove themselves.

The current parenting research reveals that in order to exert a positive influence over children, parents need to have many different parenting skills or strengths that they call on when interacting with their children on a daily basis.

Here are 10 of the most important parenting strengths that constitute the parent muscle and wisdom needed to be a highly effective parent. Also provided are actions you can take to further develop one or more parenting strengths.

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Develop a positive parent-child relationship

- Spend extra "special time" with your child.
- Give your child plenty of physical affection (e.g., hugs and kisses).
- Actively listen to your child without interrupting.
- Refrain from using a negative tone of voice.
- Be emotionally resilient and calm when faced with your child's imperfections.

Communicate high, realistic expectations for your child's achievement and behaviour

- Communicate from time to time that you expect your child to do the best s/he can in school.
- Discuss expectations or rules for behaviour (e.g., speaking respectfully, homework curfew, drinking and the consequences for breaking rules).
- Recognise your child when s/he has worked hard and made good behavioural choices.
- Consistently enforce consequences (do what you say you are going to do).
- Examine homework and have your child redo work that is sloppy and reveals little application.

Provide your child with special responsibilities and involvement in decision-making

- Allow your child to "have a say" when it comes to making decisions about the ways things are done at home, including setting home rules.
- Offer your child opportunities to be in charge of something important (age-appropriate, e.g. taking care of family pet).
- Provide your child with choices as to when s/he is going to do something (e.g., homework before or after dinner).
- Include your child in planning special family events and activities.

Support your child's interests

- Encourage your child to pursue his/her own interests, rather than your interests.
- Find out what interests your child and provide experiences of these interests (e.g., if you have an artistic child, locate extra-curricular art classes and activities, or if you have a child with technical-mechanical activities, locate extra-curricular activities) that accommodate these interests (e.g., woodworking class).

Be interested and involved in your child's education

- Show interest in what your child is learning in different classes/subjects at school (e.g., ask questions).
- Get to know who your child's teachers are, and their names.
- Be available to help your child when s/he has a problem with schoolwork.
- Attend school events offered to parents, (e.g., parent-teacher association, Coffee Break).
- Join a school committee.

Motivate your child's learning

- For homework your child finds difficult or boring/ uninteresting, provide lots of praise when work is being accomplished.
- For homework your child finds interesting and pleasurable, avoid providing too much praise; instead, encourage your child's further learning and interest in the subject.
- Communicate your belief that with effort, your child can be successful in school.

Communicate character strengths and life effectiveness skills

- Discuss with your child how to get along with others (e.g., what to say and do to make friends, solve conflicts, and work in a group).
- Discuss/demonstrate for your child different resilience skills for staying calm (e.g., talking to someone, not blowing things out of proportion, exercising, focusing on the positive not the negative, physical relaxation).
- Spend time during the year discussing with your child important values (e.g., trust, respect, responsibility, fairness, citizenship).
- Have a conversation with your child about the importance of confidence and ways to become more confident (e.g., While your child is preparing to participate in an activity that is new or difficult, say: "Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Don't worry too much about what people are thinking about you when you have a go. Be positive. That will help you to be confident.").
- Takes opportunities to discuss with and model how persistence (e.g., doing what you do not feel like doing) helps everyone be successful ("No pain, no gain.").
- Show your child how to be organised by planning ahead of time what he/she will need to bring to school, to plan his/her time when he/she will do homework and how to put things away so that they can be found when needed (and be sure to practice what you preach by being organised –on time with necessary material in hand).

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Emotionally coach your children

- When your children are upset, be aware of their emotions. Stay calm paying attention to their feelings so you can respond sensitively.
- When your children are upset, recognise this time as an opportunity to be close to them and to teach them about emotions.
- Listen to your children with a great deal of empathy without interrupting with advice. Communicate that you understand what they are feeling.
- Help your children find the words to describe how they are feeling inside.
- When you observe your children being emotional upset, first set limits for what is and what is not acceptable behaviour. Then, discuss ways to stay calm as well as different things they can do solve the problem they are faced with.

Be a positive person for your children

- Control your own negative emotions and stress through exercise, diet, recreation, relaxation, positive thinking so that they do not effect your children badly. Focus on what is going right in your life so you experience fun, excitement and pleasure.
- Plan for moments with your children when you are 100 percent involved with what they are doing and are not distracted by outside events (e.g., cell phone).
- Your partner and yourself should try to maintain high levels of energy and resolve conflicts with each other in calm and constructive ways including not blaming each other and expressing gratitude and affection.
- Be aware of what it means to be a parent and you try to instil in your family over time through things you do together an appreciation of the importance of good connections among family members.
- Set goals for what you want to accomplish both as a person and as a parent. You set about charting a course of action and overcoming obstacles that help you to accomplish my goals.

Teach your children self-acceptance

- Clearly indicate to your children that their self-worth comes from who they are (what's on the inside) and that their value does not come from what they achieve and what people think of them.
- Help your children appreciate their different strengths of character, different talents and aptitudes (e.g., musical, artistic, sport, technical-mechanical, academic) and clearly show by what you say that you view all of them as important.
- When your children have been unsuccessful or have been criticised, teased or bullied, help them to be "self-accepting" and to value themselves no matter what.
- Show your children that you accept yourself even when you have not achieved a goal you have set or when you have been criticised by someone for what you have done.
- Teach your children that everyone is made up of positive and negative parts and, therefore, because no one is perfect, they shouldn't rate others or themselves as either being totally good or bad.

Is it ever too late to develop these strengths? Fortunately, parenting does not come with a "use-by date". All parents learn from their experiences and as a result have great potential for how they go about their parenting.

Having well developed parenting strengths does not guarantee lifelong happiness and success for children. Sometimes, events beyond our control impact our children in harmful ways.

However, the more we use our experiences in parenting to help us develop these strengths – and the more we learn from discussions with others and from reading books and articles – the more likely the case that our children will be set on their way with sufficient positivity and momentum for them to develop their unique potential to live fulfilled and rewarding lives.

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