

SECRETS OF PARENTING

All Parents Want to Love Their Children

*If I have told you once,
I have told you a
hundred times.
Have you lost your mind?
What has gotten into you?
What were you thinking?
Why did you do that?
What a stupid move!*

*Have you heard yourself
saying these things to your
child? How would you feel if
someone said them to you?*

*When a child is born, most
parents feel warm and loving
toward their cuddly, depen-
dent baby. They may find
the new experience
overwhelming, but they
feel they can handle it.*

*But later, when the child
is cranky, when the crying
does not stop, or when he or
she becomes ill, grows up,
and begins to talk back,
then parents clamor for
information—now what do
we do?*

*The **secret of parenting** is to
give the child a loving foun-
dation of care and support
in the early years.*

**To thrive, every child needs to know
someone who is crazy about him or her.
(Bronfenbrenner, 1976)**

**We can't ignore children.
We have to give them warmth and love.
We can't burden them with adult stress.
They are not ready to handle it and have
not developed positive coping strategies.**

What's A Parent to Do?

Respond to your child's cues and clues. You must help your children develop trust in you. This means that your children know you will meet their needs. Learn to read your children's cues and clues so you can meet their needs. When children know they will be taken care of, they are less likely to be fretful. They can relax, and crying is reduced. This foundation is built in the first year of life, but it is critical for a lifetime. Children who receive warm and loving care are more likely to feel safe and secure with the adults who care for them. This gives them the ability to bounce back when stressed.

Accept your child for who he or she is, but expect success. Children are all different. They have different temperaments; some are easy-going, some are shy or slow to warm-up, some are more intense, and some experience difficulty with transitions. You can tell your children that you expect success, but you may have to tell them specifically what that means (such as, "complete your homework," or "pick up the toys on the floor in your room"). They don't know what you expect if you don't talk about your expectations. When you expect success, you help to build confidence because you are showing that you believe in your children.

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Listen to promote good problem-solving skills.

Sometimes children seem to argue just to argue. But they are learning how to build a point. What great lawyers and teachers they will make someday. Adults often want to tell children what to think instead of helping them wrestle with ideas so they can learn to think through tough things themselves. You can help your child learn with thoughtful, open-ended questions. Sometimes adolescents say, “You don’t understand.” Sometimes what they mean is, “You don’t listen.” Many adults don’t spend time letting a child’s idea unfold. Instead, they interrupt, trying to get the budding young adult to get to the point.

Provide routines and rituals. Family rituals are memorable to children, such as silly songs, expected holiday routines, set bedtimes, and Sunday morning pancakes. These are all rituals or routines. Routines make life predictable and understandable.

Be there. Be involved in your child’s education, but also be involved with your child at home. Ask about school, show an interest in your child’s activities, monitor his or her class performance, and ask when something does not seem right. Discussions about what’s happening in school, reading together, or spending mealtimes together are examples of involvement. When you are involved with your child, you are creating and building a relationship. Demonstrating love consistently and unconditionally is the single most important thing you can do to sustain your child’s confidence and sense of self-worth.

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service provides free publications about building a strong relationship with your child:

- *Helping Children Cope with Stress* (FCS-457)
- *Self-Esteem in Children* (FCSW-506)
- *Growing Together: Infant Development* (FCS-459)
- *Growing Together: Preschooler Development* (FCS-454)
- *Childhood Years: Ages 6 through 12* (FCS-465)
- *Parenting Teens* (FCS-422)

These and other publications are available from your county Extension Center, or they can be viewed online at the following Web site: www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/humandev/pubs/

References

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