NSPCC

NEED-TO-KNOW GUIDES

Positive Parenting

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

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We know how challenging it can be to balance all the demands parents have to cope with. That's why we've put together some tips to help. All children need boundaries and discipline, and this guide helps you develop what works for you and your child.

EVERY FAMILY IS DIFFERENT, SO MAKE THIS GUIDE YOUR OWN

You can make notes on it, customise it – whatever works for you.

Positive parenting uses techniques that work well for every child. These techniques build on your child's wish to please you, the importance of listening, and, above all, loving your child – leading to a better-behaved, happy child and less-stressed parents.

All parents can come under pressure or stress from time to time, and it can even lead them to want to smack their children – although many parents regret it later. But physical punishment is never an effective way to discipline your children.

Remember

Positive parenting techniques are much more likely to work and leave you feeling more positive about your parenting.

Understanding your child's needs

Children's needs and behaviours change as they get older, and understanding these needs will help you better understand your child. Lots has been written about the needs of children and advice for parents, and we cover some of the key areas here. If you'd like more detailed advice you can talk to the NSPCC helpline.

1. Babies

Babies behave as they do to get their needs met. For example, when they cry they're trying to tell you that they need something – maybe they're hungry, need their nappy changed or feel tired.

Older babies may show what appears like a 'stubborn streak' – spitting out food or wriggling away from a nappy change. All they are doing is trying to express their likes and dislikes in the only way they can.

When you're stressed you may feel your baby is being "deliberately naughty" or trying to provoke you. This is not possible. Remember you should never shout, scream, hit or smack a baby.

2. Toddlers

All toddlers test limits and have tantrums. Research shows that a child's brain is still developing during this period so there are limits to how much they're able to control their emotions. Remember that behaviour in toddlers which is often seen as naughty is actually quite normal and part of growing up.

3. School age

School age children are constantly learning and exploring their world. They may have lots of questions as they start to form their own views on issues. As they move towards being more independent they may seem to push boundaries and become more challenging, a necessary part of growing up.

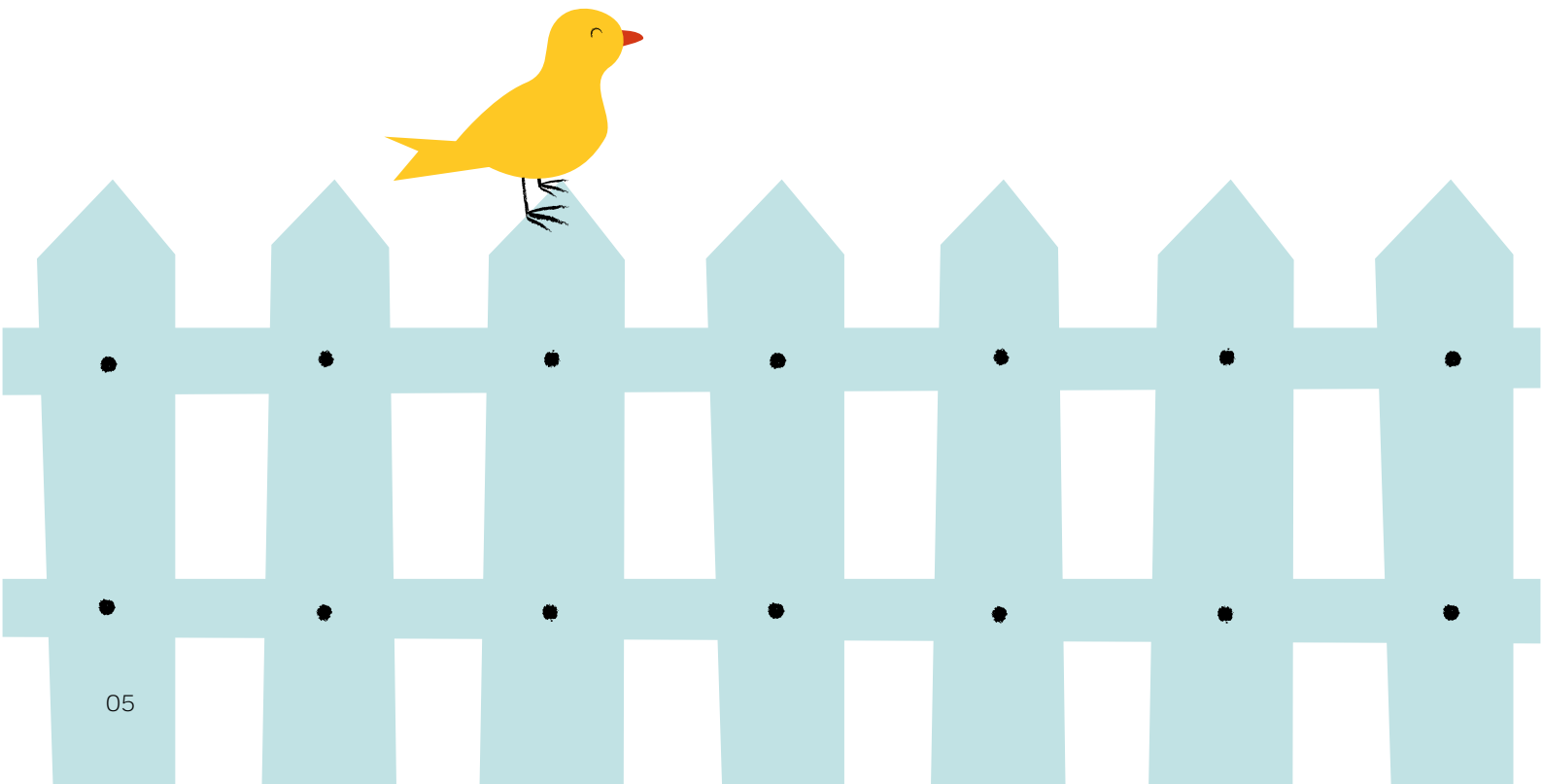
4. Teenagers

As children continue to develop their own identities in their teenage years, they might become more challenging – sometimes seeming "moody" or withdrawn or not as talkative and open as their parents would like. They might be more inclined to disagree with their parents, or choose different views. Friends (and celebrities) will become a bigger influence and your child may not always do what you would like.

As children get older, they can experience difficult emotions. Some children find it hard to talk to their parents about feelings and may want to speak to Childline (**0800 1111**, **childline.org.uk**)

How can I set boundaries?

All children need love, guidance and to have rules and boundaries. Rules and boundaries help families to understand how to behave towards each other, and what's OK and not OK. But the best way to go about this will vary based on your child's age and stage of development. All children are different and develop and reach milestones at different rates.



Top tips...

for all ages

- Keep guidance simple and consistent.
- If your child is behaving in a way you don't want them to, clearly explain what you want them to do instead.
- Be available and make time so your child will come to you when they feel something is wrong or they are upset.
- Keep talking and listening to your child even if at times it feels like a challenge. Start listening from a very early age and set a pattern for life.
- Review family rules as your child gets older and recognise the different needs of children living at home. For example, you shouldn't expect the same from your 12 year-old as you would from your four year-old.
- Get support from friends and try any good ideas they have found helpful.
- If you are struggling and things are getting out of hand, get advice from your GP, a health visitor, or your child's teacher.

for babies – toddlers

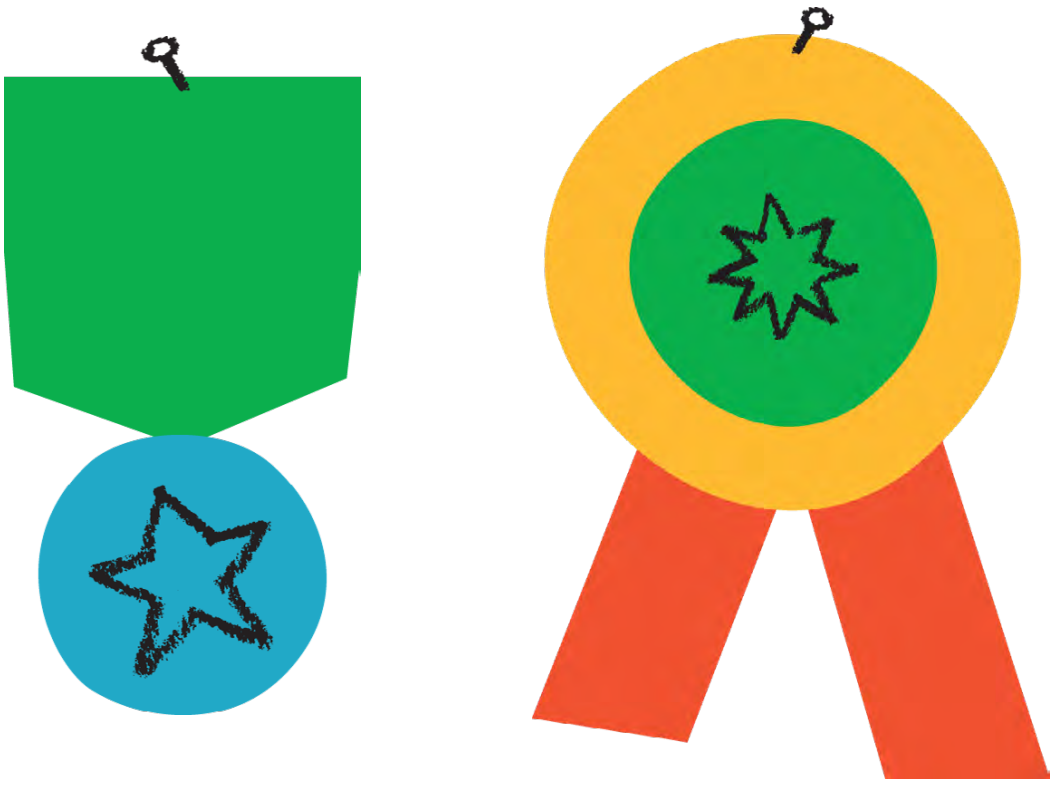
- Introduce boundaries from an early age.
- Sympathise with how your child may be feeling – for example, saying "I know you are frustrated", if your child is struggling to do something.
- Share your own feelings if you find it helps to relieve your stress – for example, "I know you're tired but I'm tired too".
- Try to avoid using orders and ultimatums.

for school age – teenagers

- Be willing and give your child chances to show they can be trusted.
- Avoid criticism wherever possible. If your child has done something wrong, explain that it is the action and not them that you're unhappy with.
- Try to avoid getting trapped in petty arguments, there are rarely any winners!
- Consider ways to negotiate or offer choices as your child gets older.

Rewards and discipline

Different parents will have different views about the best ways to encourage children to change their behaviour. While some younger children may respond well to reward charts and some older children may respond to the offer of being allowed to stay out a bit later, other children won't.



Only you will know what works for your child but here are some helpful points to think about.

- Praise children, even for the little things they do.
- Reward positive behaviour and consider asking what would be a good reward.
- Avoid making rash decisions when you're angry.
- Talk to your child about the rewards and consequences of their behaviour, and do it before rather than after.
- Take time to really listen to what your children are saying and explain to them what you are feeling.
- Be a role model and don't do things that you wouldn't want your children to do.

Smacking is never a good idea

Ideas on bringing up children have changed, and we now know a lot more about the effects of smacking. Smacking can hurt children's feelings – making them resentful and angry, and damaging the relationship between parent and child. This makes parenting and discipline harder in the long run, not easier. Smacking can get out of control.

This also comes back to being a role model. If you smack your child, they may think this is acceptable behaviour and treat other people in the same way. Children may avoid being smacked by lying or hiding how they feel. And they may become withdrawn – not developing independence.

When you give out love, you get it back. When you give out harsh punishment – screaming, yelling or hitting – this means you are eventually likely to get anger and resentment back.

Finding the right balance of rewards and discipline is a key part of positive parenting.

Keeping Your Cool

It's important to find ways to relieve your stress and manage your anger. Lots of things, not only your child's behaviour, can make us feel stressed – from family relationships to managing a work-life balance, health, housing, unemployment and much more. You want to be the best parent you can but being stressed is stressful!

When stress takes over, it can make you lose your temper and say or do things you later regret. You might find yourself saying something hurtful or smacking your child; and living in a stressful home can also impact on your child's feelings and healthy development. But you can avoid this by managing stress and anger.

- **Accept support**
  This may be from your family, a friend or by using online forums. Knowing that there are other parents in the same situation can be a great encouragement.

- **Make time for yourself**
  This may involve doing things like exercising or listening to music. Treats can be as simple as a long soak in the bath, watching a DVD or going for a walk. If you live with a partner, agree a way to make sure you both get time off.

- **Get help**
  This is a positive step to take and not a sign of weakness. If you're feeling stressed and anxious all the time seek some outside advice. A range of difficulties may get in the way of being a parent and it's important to get help. Talk to your GP or health visitor.

- **Be as prepared as possible**
  All children will be stressful at times so consider ways of dealing with this in advance. For example, if your child gets bored and irritable on long journeys, or waiting for things like doctor's appointments, take a couple of books or activities to keep them busy.

- **Don't overlook success**
  If you have coped well with something difficult, be proud of what you've achieved. Celebrate your children's successes too.

Look after yourself

Being a parent is so important, and while it's common to feel less needed as children get older, or to feel more like a taxi driver or cleaner, you are the person your child will look to for help. Finding time for yourself is something you shouldn't overlook or feel guilty about. It may take planning but having a break can help you to be the best parent you can be.

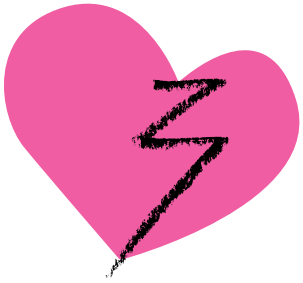
Building positive relationships

If parent-child relationships become damaged, it can affect the way a child feels or behaves. Finding ways to show unconditional love and affection to your child is important, but this can be easier said than done, especially when you're tired or juggling different needs.

Spend time with your child and learn together. This can help increase your child's confidence, strengthen your bond and also help you to better understand their needs.

Top five tips:

- Show your child you're interested in what they like. Think of enjoyable activities you can do together.
- Think of times when you have seen a positive change in your child's behaviour and anything you could learn from that experience.
- Ask your child for their views and be willing to listen. This can help you to see things from their view.
- Don't give up or be too hard on yourself if things don't immediately change. Focus on small steps and achievable goals.
- Be prepared to compromise and admit you're wrong.



Try this:

Now that you've read our top tips, why not add some notes of your own?

Every family is different, so use this page to make this guide your own.

FUN THINGS YOU CAN DO TOGETHER:

POSITIVE CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR THAT YOU'VE NOTICED:

WHAT MIGHT HAVE HELPED THAT CHANGE TO HAPPEN?

Who can I talk to?

All parents can feel stressed or unsure from time to time, or just need someone to talk to. But don't worry, there are lots of places where you can get different kinds of help. We've put together a list of some of the different places you might find helpful, and you could also talk to your **GP**, **health visitor** or your child's **school nurse**.

Parenting advice

Family Lives provides help and support on all aspects of parenting and family life, and runs Parentline.
0808 800 2222
familylives.org.uk

Parentline Scotland (Children 1st)
0800 028 2233
children1st.org.uk

Parenting NI Helpline
(Northern Ireland)
0808 8010 722
parentingni.org

Family information services in Wales provide information, support and guidance on all aspects of children and young people's services. Search: **gov.wales**

Parenting. Give it time is a website developed by the Welsh government offering practical parenting information, tips and activities.
giveittime.gov.wales

Cry-sis provides help for parents of excessively crying, sleepless or demanding babies. Lines are open seven days a week, 9am-10pm.
08451 228669
cry-sis.org.uk

Children are Unbeatable Alliance is a group of more than 400 organisations campaigning for children to have the same legal protection against being hit as adults.
childrenareunbeatable.org.uk

Citizens Advice can advise on things like employment, housing and income issues which can cause stress in families.
citizensadvice.org.uk

We're here for you, every day of the year

If you have any questions or worries, feel free to get in touch with us.

Our trained experts at the NSPCC helpline can listen to any worries you have about looking after your child, or any tough decisions you're facing.

Reading this guide may have also made you think about other children. Contact us if you're worried about any aspect of their safety, and we can help.

Call **0808 800 5000**

Email **help@nspcc.org.uk**

Or talk to us online at **nspcc.org.uk/help**

Something every parent goes through

Being a parent isn't easy, and no parent is going to get it right all the time. Even the most prepared parent can get flustered by their child having a tantrum in the supermarket or their teenager being rude at a family get-together.

We've got lots of practical advice and tips for positive parenting; techniques that work well for every child – encouraging better behaviour and making life at home happier for you and for them.

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