

Parenting Survival Guide

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1. **Don't try to change everything at once!**
 - a. Focus on 'big' issues that ultimately will mean the most to your child's development of positive self-esteem and feelings of competence and usefulness.
2. **Focus on the donut, not the hole!**
 - a. When asked to describe a donut, most people say that a donut has a hole in the middle. But the important part about a donut is the good stuff that's around the hole.
 - b. Rather than focusing on the problems, it's important to focus on your strengths, your child's strengths, and building your relationship with your child.
 - c. When you focus on the problems, you lose sight of the important things. And noticing the important things can build everyone's self-esteem.
3. **What's important is not what the child knows, but what the child believes.**
 - a. The child's perception of reality is what must be understood if the child and behaviors exhibited by the child are to be understood.
 - b. Look at things through your child's eyes.
4. **Don't ask questions you already know the answer to.**
 - a. Questions can put the parent in a leading position. When you ask a question, children often shut down or try to say what they think they are supposed to say.
 - b. Generally, if you have enough information to ask a question, you have enough information to make a statement.
 - c. Questions usually convey non-understanding. (E.g., "Did that make you angry?" communicates a lack of understanding, even though you do understand that made the child angry. Instead you can state, "You feel angry about that.").
 - d. Reflecting feelings communicates that you understand and accept your child's feelings and needs (it does not imply you accept your child's behavior). It does show children you are interested and want to understand them. Moreover, reflective responses help children understand, accept, label, and communicate too.
 - e. On the contrary, if a feeling, desire, or need are expressed and go unrecognized, children may think that the feeling or expression is not acceptable, and they will be less likely to understand, accept, label, and communicate.
 - f. Questions go to the mind to be processed and evaluated; empathic statements go into the child's heart and soul.
5. **When a child is drowning, don't try to teach him/her how to swim.**
 - a. When a child is feeling upset or out of control, that is not the moment to teach, preach, or impart a rule. Reflective responding is the tool to use to respond to children's needs. Reflective responses help children to feel understood and can lessen anger.
6. **Be a thermostat, not a thermometer!**
 - a. Learn to RESPOND (reflect) rather than REACT. Your child's feelings are not your feelings and needn't escalate with him/her.
 - b. A thermometer merely reacts to the temperature, whereas the thermostat remains steady and controls the environment.

- c. When your child's feelings and behavior escalate, you can learn to respond in a helpful way, rather than reacting and allowing your feelings and behavior to escalate too. You can support your child's feelings or need, even if you can't support their behavior.
 - d. However, we are all human and everybody is a thermometer sometimes.
- 7. You can't give away what you do not possess.**
- a. As your child's most significant caregiver, you are asked to give so much of yourself, often when you simply don't have the resources within you to meet the demands of parenting. However, like flight attendants say, "You have to put the oxygen mask on yourself before putting it on your child. You can't help your child if you pass out first."
 - b. It's important to also remember to be accepting of yourself and forgiving of your mistakes. You are human. There is no such thing as a perfect parent. If you expect yourself to be perfect, it's likely you will expect your child to be perfect too and that is not realistic. You can't extend patience and acceptance to your child if you can't first offer it to yourself.
- 8. What's important may not be what you do, but what you do after what you did!**
- a. We are certain to make mistakes, but we can recover. It is how we handle our mistakes that makes the difference.
 - b. If you yell at your child or were "wrong" about something, it's good to admit it or to apologize for how you handled the situation.
 - c. You can explain what you wish you had done OR you can ask your child what they think you should have done or said differently to ____ (reach the outcome you were seeking; e.g., get out the door by 7:30).
 - d. Time in the car, at the dinner table, or at bedtime can be good times to discuss something you regret or wish you had done differently. It is also a great opportunity to model how to admit you are not perfect, how to apologize, and how to forgive and not let it negatively affect your relationship.
- 9. Where there are no limits, there is no security.**
- a. Consistent limits = secure relationship
 - b. When you don't follow through, you lose credibility and harm your relationship with your child. Trust is the foundation of a healthy relationship. When parents fail to follow through, the message to the child is, "You really can't count on me to do what I say."
 - c. However, when parents are rigid in their approach, both parent and child can end up hurt. Having some flexibility can be beneficial. Allow opportunities for re-do's.
- 10. Good things come in small packages.**
- a. Don't wait for big events for you to enter into your child's world – the little ways are always with us.
 - b. "Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you will look back and realize they were the big things!"
 - c. Live in the moment – today is enough!¹

¹ *Parenting Survival Guide* was created and adapted from *Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) Treatment Manual: A 10-Session Filial Therapy Model for Training Parents*, by Bratton, S., Landreth, G., Kellam, T., & Blackard, S.R. (2006). New York: Routledge.