

# Child and Family Centre

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## Parenting Tips

Sometimes the relationship between parents and children gets so bad that there are more negative than positive interactions. Often times the result is that, the emotional connection between parents and children becomes very strained. The parents and the child develop resentment and anger towards each other and sometimes this is very strong and seems that nothing can be done to change things.

Sometimes parents just aren't spending enough free time with their children. You may need to change your schedule so that you can spend more time with your children. If parents are not willing to make these changes, you can expect limited progress towards strengthening the emotional ties with your child. In other words, if your relationship with your child has gotten to point where you have more negative than positive interactions, you are going to have to spend more of your free time in order to repair the relationship.

Parents must learn to separate the child's behaviour from the child. There is no such thing as a good or bad child. There are children who do good things and children who do bad things. Never withhold love, validation or physical connection as a punishment. If you are divorced or separated, never threaten the child with going to live with his/her other parent as a punishment.

You can use "I" statements to help separate behaviour from child. You must give the message that the child's behaviour is causing the problem.

- 1) Behaviour
- 2) Effect
- 3) Feelings

When you ..... (label the behaviour)..... it (give information about the effect) and I/he/she feels (name the feeling). For example, "When you are rude to other people, it hurts them and they feel bad."

You may have heard of the concept of "quality time". While this may sound cliché, it is a very important concept especially when repairing a strained relationship between parents and child. Small emotional connections can be made just by; sitting and watching one of your child's stupid TV shows with him or her, stopping what you are doing to actually, genuinely listen to him or her when they have a concern. You may be doing something

very important, but by stopping for one minute, listening to the child's concerns in a genuine fashion and then returning to what you are doing with an assurance that you will talk later can mean a lot to a child. Plan on going places together in the evenings or on weekends on a consistent basis. When you spend this kind of time together, it should not be tied to good behaviour. In other words, you are initially trying to rebuild your relationship with your child, you should not use spending quality time together as a reward or withdraw quality time as a punishment.

When a parent-child relationship is severely strained and very negative, the child may not respond to the above changes. We all react to change with wariness and defensiveness, but it shouldn't last long if you keep it up and are truly genuine in your intentions. It usually will not work initially because the child will want to prove to you that he/she is in control, and he/she will make life miserable or screw things up just to prove it to you. The child is mad and is getting power and revenge by not reacting to your genuine good intentions.

Seeing changes in your child using basic behaviour management (rewarding your child for good behaviour and having consequences for bad behaviour) will be very limited if you do not have a proper emotional connection. It is usually best to start by noticing and highlighting his/her good, appropriate behaviour. Pick times when you know he/she is likely to be good and give lots of verbal praise and reinforcement. Examples: "I appreciate when you are polite to other people. Thank you for doing that for me, it's really nice when you play or get along with your sister, it really makes me feel good when we can go out together and get along". Once again, it is vital that you are genuine, you have to feel these things and the genuineness must be communicated to your child. It must really come from your heart.

When reacting to your child's negative behaviour or "bad attitude", be cool, calm and low key. Try to avoid engaging in conflicts with the child over trivial misbehaviours or minor rule violations. Ignore what can be ignored.

It is very important that you manage your own stress/frustration levels: Stay calm when your child is misbehaving or displaying a "bad attitude". Keep your wits about you when reacting to misconduct. Think ahead and plan a calm, non-emotional reaction to your child's misbehaviour. If children are around a lot of fighting in the home or people always yell, scream and hit them when they are bad, this is how they may react with other children and adults when someone is doing something they don't like or if they don't get their way.

Finally, practice forgiveness at the end of the day. Forgive the child their bad behaviour, forgive others their misunderstanding of you in your care of your child and forgive yourself in the mistakes you are certainly going to make in trying to rebuild your relationship and manage your child's behaviour,

