



Creating Great Relationships with Kids: Keeping It Real

There's nothing sweeter than a family hanging out together, having fun, and building memories to last a lifetime. But we all know that scenario doesn't play out every day. When it doesn't, it's worth the effort to find out what all the fuss (literally) is about! Raising children soars to the top of important things to do, but no one says it's easy.

Setting Limits That Stick

Parents must set limits for kids; otherwise they'd be bringing home stray puppies on a regular basis and eating cookies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And when limits are broken, the dreaded D word—discipline—rears its ugly head. Rethinking what discipline means sometimes helps. The definition is to teach or guide, and what good parent doesn't understand the value of that? When discipline is fair, consistent, and in keeping with the developmental age of children, respect and love grows, it is not diminished. Children eventually understand that parents are trying to keep them safe and teach them what is acceptable and what is not.

Catch Them Being Good

This tip is simple yet powerful. It's only human to notice the bad stuff—the behaviors we want to stop or correct—but all kids do a lot of good things, and those good things will increase if they are noticed and reinforced with a smile of appreciation! Get in the habit of asking yourself a few questions at the end of the day. Did I smile or frown more?



Did I hug or bug more? Smiles and hugs are contagious, and they quickly create an environment that feels loving and fair.

Give Second Chances

Children make mistakes. When you think about it, they have a lot to learn, and the rules can be a bit confusing—it's okay to pour water in the bathtub but definitely not okay to pour water on the floor. When kids make mistakes, they may need a second chance. A two-year-old soon learns she can't use the wall as her personal canvas. A school-ager may play his music too loud until he realizes he's disturbing the entire family.

Give Choices When You Can

Giving children choices makes them feel smart and competent. It gives them an opportunity to solve problems, too. "You choose which doll you take to Grandma's." "It's your money to spend, so you get to decide if you buy the paint set or the basketball."

Create a Great Environment

Growing children need environments they can thrive in. If a baby is toddling around the house, place the glass vase out of reach from exploring hands. Limit the number of preschoolers invited to a birthday party. Help your school-ager complete his homework. Avoid morning madness by getting up early, putting out clothes, and organizing backpacks the night before.

Follow Through

This might be the hardest task of all for busy parents. Children can be pretty persistent if they want that bag of M&M's at the checkout counter. But if you've said no, it's important to stand by that decision and make a quick exit. If you've called your school-ager in for dinner,

expect him to come on the first call, not the third or fourth just before you blow your cool.

Set a Good Example

Those little eyes are always watching. Eat nutritious food. Be kind to the store clerk who is having a bad day. Turn off the TV, and enjoy reading and other creative endeavors. Instead of telling kids to go outside, reinforce the value of nature by going outside yourself for a walk or a bike ride.

Practice Listening

Ever notice how kids get louder and louder if they think you're not listening? Get in touch with how good it feels to be listened to by spouses, bosses, and friends. It means you don't have to keep repeating yourself or your behavior. Stop, listen, and establish eye contact with your child. Now that feels good!

Create Family Closeness

Do routine things together like cooking or gardening. Read to children and cuddle them close. Hold their hand when you're walking down the street. Days are much less chaotic when kids are kept on schedules they can count on. Pass down family stories sure to make everyone laugh. Children often forget you were once a kid. Raising children can be stressful, and it takes a lot of time, but in the end the years go by in a flash.

PERSONAL PARENTING

Painting Rocks for the Fun of It!

Kids like to paint rocks. They can start when they're old enough to hold a paintbrush. All you have to do is provide a few small differently shaped rocks, some brushes, and tempera paints. The object is to let kids paint anything they want. They may paint a rock solid blue or make it look like a rainbow or even start a collection of pet rocks by creating ladybugs, lambs, and frogs.



Safety First

There are many toys and other small things around the house that children can choke on. If you're in doubt, there's a simple solution. Anything that can fit through the tube of a toilet paper roll is too small for a child under age 3 to play with or have access to.

Fruit Kabobs

- 1 cup vanilla or lemon yogurt
- 2 cups canned or fresh fruit chunks

Children love threading the fruit onto toothpicks or skewers. It's even more fun to dip into yogurt before eating. Adapt this recipe for younger children by spooning cut-up fruit into a bowl and covering with the yogurt.

Making Lists

Challenge children with this imaginative thinking game. Encourage older children to make their own list, but help younger



children by writing the words for them on a sheet of paper. Later, they can “read” the list to you.

- *What do you need to pack for a camping trip?*
- *What can you do with a pile of rocks?*
- *How can you earn money to buy a present for someone?*

- *What does a bird need to build a nest?*
- *What ingredients go into a chocolate cake?*



Need a little help?

For parents who need a little help motivating their children to spend more time outside, check out the book *I Love Dirt! 52 Activities to Help You and Your Kids Discover the Wonders of Nature* by Jennifer Ward. This book is aimed at young children and filled with simple ideas. It is, writes Ward, “a call to parents, educators, and caregivers to help recover one of the greatest joys in childhood: spending time outdoors in nature. In five minutes, you can take children outside and turn their world around.”

The book is divided into seasons and features chapters such as “Wiggly for Worms,” “Move Over Clover,” “Butterfly Café,” “Stone Age,” “A Thinking Place,” “Snow Me Some Fun,” and “Winter Garden.”

Peekaboo: A Game of Object Permanence



During the latter half of their first year, babies enjoy simple games like peekaboo. They're learning an important concept called object permanence.

Up until now, if something left their field of vision, they thought it was gone. But as they develop, they're capable of forming mental images of faces or objects that are out of sight—so, of course, they look for it and are delighted when it pops back into their field of vision!

The most common way to play is to hide your face behind your hands, remove them, and say “peekaboo!” Try hiding a teddy bear behind your back, then bring it forward and say “peekaboo!” Or cover your face with a scarf and let your little one take the scarf off. You're still there—hurray!

Returning to the *Great* Outdoors



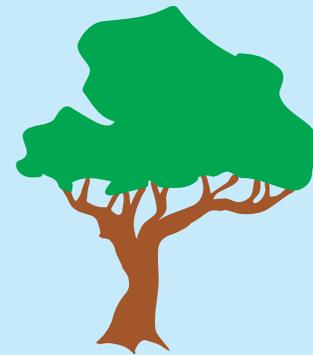
Researchers have found that if children could design their own outdoor play spaces, they would be filled with trees, plants, water, dirt, mud, rocks, and a variety of insects and animals. Looking under a rock for a roly-poly is still intriguing for kids. And just the thought of climbing a tree or living in a tree house is a childhood fantasy worth daydreaming about. A bunny may hop by or a butterfly may light on a flower. When kids are outside, the element of discovery is always just around the corner!

As a parent, think back to your favorite places as a child. Chances are you wanted to be outside. For a variety of reasons, children's outside playtime is dwindling and spaces for outdoor play are being altered. But there are many things parents can do to get kids moving in the great outdoors.

Hands-On Nature Experiences:

It's vitally important that children have personal interaction with diverse natural settings.

- Experience the wind while flying a kite.
- Build a simple structure from tree branches.
- Stargaze and learn about constellations and galaxies.
- Observe bugs and birds, bunnies and bees.
- Feed birds and ducks.
- Build trenches with sand and water, and dams with sticks and stones.
- Walk with children outside in different kinds of weather.
- Enjoy a picnic at the park or in your backyard.



The Importance of Outdoor Play

Research shows that contact with natural surroundings:

- Develops imagination and a sense of wonder, and wonder is a key motivator for lifelong learning
- Strengthens emotional health
- Offers an opportunity for solitude



- Helps children develop independence
- Offers greater freedom to run and shout and manipulate the environment--no "walking feet" or "inside voices"
- Is a total sensory experience for children—they see, smell, hear, touch, and sometimes even taste it
- Provides interaction with materials that help them learn rules and principles that operate in the world