

# Caring & Connected Parenting

A Guide to Raising Connected Children

## Newborn to 1 Year



### Welcome to Caring & Connected Parenting!

*Parents who are respectful and caring while providing guidance and limits raise children who successfully manage stress, school and relationships. We tend to parent the way we were parented - unfortunate news for some of us. We may have been raised in domination type families in which fear of punishment kept us obedient or overly permissive families without structure and limits. Caring & Connected Parenting, based on the latest neuroscience research, helps you create a partnership family, one in which ALL members feel cared for, valued and respected.*

### It's the beginning of a new partnership

With the arrival of your new baby, you entered into a new partnership of learning. You're learning to be a parent and your baby is learning . . . everything. You're teaching each other how loving connections are made. It is your very important job to help your baby feel that she is safe—and means a lot to you!

#### It all starts right now.

Forming a lifelong, healthy relationship starts right now. Simple things—like touching, talking with or cooing to your baby—actually affect how her brain develops! Your caring and connected parenting protects your child's brain from harmful stress throughout his life.

#### Each parent is important.

If there are two parents in the home, it's important for your baby's health for both parents to connect with her. Children like the way each parent plays differently with them.

If there is violence between you and your partner—battering, insults, or yelling, this can seriously affect your child. Contact a local domestic violence agency or the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at 1-800-799-7233 [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org).



## You as a parent



#### The past meets the present.

We tend to parent the way we were parented. To some this is great news. To others, it means painful memories of abuse, neglect or loss affect our lives with our new families. Some of us may lose control or feel unable to connect to our children.

#### The first step.

The first step to creating a safe, healthy home for your child is to make sense of your past and see how it may be influencing your life. Depending on the intensity of your childhood experiences, you may need professional help—therapy—to make sense of things, to gain control over your actions and to heal. Get the help you need now.

If you're having difficulty parenting, or you're from a troubled background, see page 6 and the **More about parenting** section on page 8.

#### Learning from you.

From the time your child is born, she is watching and learning from you. You can be the type of loving, caring parent you want your child to become one day.

#### There is no perfect parent.

Everyone makes mistakes. The goal is to raise a child who feels loved, safe and valued—a child who cares for others and for herself.

#### Fathers need to be involved.

In families in which there is a father, research shows that children do better when dad is involved. A caring father's influence may protect a child from dangers later in life, like gang violence, drug abuse and casual sex.

Children learn most when their fathers are not overly bossy or critical and let them set some direction.

Fathers who don't make an effort to connect at these early ages may find themselves drifting away from their kids over time.

#### Take time away.

Primary caregivers need breaks and time away from caring to re-energize. If you have a partner, let your partner help with childcare from the beginning. If you are not the main caregiver, show you value the difficult job your partner is doing for your child. Honor your partner's need for a break.

If you are a single parent, it will help to network with other parents and trade childcare to get time for yourself.

#### Practice calming down.

Get and give massages. Touch is calming. So is meditation.

For simple meditations, see the **More about parenting** section on page 8.



## How to connect with your baby

### Babies need touch.

Babies need touch, just like they need food. The more you touch, hold and respond to your baby, the healthier, happier and smarter he'll be.

### Touch helps his brain develop.

It releases soothing hormones in him—and in you. Hold your baby close as often as possible. If using a baby carrier, follow the instructions carefully.

### Eye contact

Look into your baby's eyes often. It helps build a loving connection between you.

### What's your baby saying?

When your baby coos, he's asking you to chat. When he cries, he's asking you to feed him, keep him warm, change him or hold him—or he's telling you he's sick or in pain.

He is saying 'stop what you're doing' if he turns away from you, cries, squirms, opens and closes his hands, pushes you, or flails his arms. Over time, you'll learn your baby's language.

### A special personality

As your baby grows, you'll get to know his personality. What does he like to play with? How does he calm himself? Let those who watch your baby for you know what your baby likes and dislikes.

### Routines make her feel safe.

Feeling safe is good for her brain development. Follow a similar routine each day. For example, give your baby her breakfast, change her diaper, take her for a walk, play with her, take a nap, and so on.

### Talk, smile and sing!

Describe what you're doing as you're doing it. Read aloud, catching her eye as you do.

### Play every day.

Try the mirror-game: if your baby smiles, smile back; if she coos, coo back. Older babies love peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. You can let her lead the play when she's able.

### Repetition

Anything you do over and over teaches your baby "what the world is like." Lots of angry faces or lots of smiles: what will she learn about the world from you?

### "Match" your baby.

Watch your baby to see the state she's in and approach her in the same way.

- If she's alert and active, approach her in a playful way.
- If she's quiet or upset, approach her quietly.
- If she startles when you speak, try a gentler way of speaking.
- If she turns away- check yourself. Are you not allowing her a break?



## Newborn to 1 Year

Babies start life ready to learn. They listen to you and watch you from the moment they are born.

When parents are calm, in tune, and responsive, babies are free from stress and ready to learn about the world.

## What about discipline? It's good to know. . .

### Never, ever, shake a baby.

It can cause permanent brain damage and sometimes death. If you feel you might lose control, leave the baby in his crib and get help right away! Ask for help—it shows you care enough to be a good parent.

### Don't hit or yell at a baby.

Babies are needy and it can be hard to give so much.

But research shows that children who are harshly disciplined actually behave worse!

Respond in calm, loving ways and you'll help his brain develop in a healthy way. This will make things easier for you later.

### Help is available.

Having a hard time adjusting to being a parent? Get help from family, friends, neighbors or your religious community—or call a local parenting hot line.

### You cannot "spoil" a baby.

Answer your baby and you show her the world is a safe place. If she cries repeatedly and you don't answer, the stress will affect her—now and in the long term. A baby who never cries has learned that *what she does doesn't matter to anyone*.

A healthy baby *knows* she matters; her parents *show* her she does—by responding to her.

## Things to do

### Baby-proof your home.

Your baby is curious. He will explore as soon as he can move around, so put away the dangerous and fragile items. If you say “no” all day, your baby won’t learn by exploring. Save “no” for the dangerous things—touching stoves, chewing electrical cords.

For example, *if your baby is older than seven months* and chewing an electrical cord:

- 1) **Distract.** Move him to another, safe object, or move the cord.
- 2) **Say “STOP!” or “NO!”** if you can’t distract.
- 3) Once you’ve said “no,” **say it every time** he goes near the cord.
- 4) **Wait a bit before soothing** him so he learns the limit is real. Then hug away!

At nine months to one year, your baby is starting to understand “no” and he’ll test you to learn the limits. He’ll look at you before he reaches for the cord.

This is normal! Be consistent and calm. You’ll do this over and over and he will eventually learn. Later on, you may even see him pause as he goes to touch or shake his head and say “No cord!” Praise him for learning!

### Get in the rhythm.

Help your baby learn the rhythms of the day. Do quiet things before bedtime. Nighttime feedings should be quiet, with low light, to help her learn day from night.

Keep a fairly regular schedule with older babies, with meals and bedtime at about the same time each day.

Make a routine that leads to bedtime, such as tooth brushing, washing, story time, feeding, massage and bed. This helps baby’s brain set up rhythms.

### She’s not “manipulating” you.

If she drops a toy from the high chair over and over, she’s experimenting. She’s asking, “What happens to this toy when I drop it and what happens to my daddy when I drop this toy?”

At around five months old, a baby may cry to get you to come play with her. She is learning to communicate.

Instead of answering every single cry, you can sometimes give her something to entertain herself.

### The magic of distraction

If she pulls your hair, you can say “no pulling”—and distract her with a toy.

## Bumps in the road

### Depression

If you just can’t seem to smile, play with or respond to your baby, you could be suffering from depression. If it lasts over two weeks, get professional help—for your health and your baby’s.

Many new moms feel this way. You are not to blame and with help, you will feel better. Call **Postpartum Support International** for information at **1-800-944-4773**.

Babies can read a lack of interest in your voice, body movements and expressions. A repeated lack of interest from you can affect your baby’s development.

Massage your baby and have someone give you massages as well. Touch has amazing power.

### Child care

Find a qualified person who will follow your connected and loving parenting style.

Try to ease your baby into care, especially if you begin during the “stranger anxiety” stage, which can start at five months.

When you’re home with your baby at the end of the day, sit with her and connect.

### Television

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that children two years old

and under shouldn’t watch television. Children need to connect with you and television costs them valuable brain-development time and may expose them to frightening images.

### Sleep

It can be difficult for you to get enough sleep, but this stage won’t last forever. Some parents wake their baby to feed right before they themselves go to bed to get a larger block of sleep. During the day, nap when the baby naps.

At around four months, babies will begin to sleep for longer periods during the night. They will start to rouse and lightly cry at certain times during their sleep cycle, but, if given a chance, may learn to soothe themselves back to sleep.

A baby left to ‘cry it out’ will feel deserted and this is not healthy.

By six months, you may be able to let him soothe himself to sleep or, if need be, pat his back and quietly tell him it’s bedtime. If you get him up repeatedly, you make yourself part of his soothing needs and he might not be able to go back to sleep without your help.



## Is it colic or just fussiness?

### Fussiness happens.

Babies from three weeks to three months old often have a fussy period at the end of each day.

### Stay calm—it's not your fault.

Try a pacifier and swaddling. Also hold your baby in a side or stomach position while swaying and shushing in her ear. Still crying? You can calmly feed or change your baby to assure yourself there's nothing else you can do.

### Is it colic?

Colic, on the other hand, is crying that goes on and on and does not stop in spite of what you try. One of every ten babies can have colic. It can last up to four months but it will end. No one knows what causes it.

### Ways to deal with colic.

Limit the noises in your home. Try to make it calm for yourself and the baby.

Colicky babies sometimes pull up their legs and pass gas. If you're breast-feeding, try taking milk, caffeine and gassy foods out of your diet. If you're bottle feeding, ask your doctor about switching formulas.

Place the baby on your lap with her belly down and gently rub her back. Or try wrapping your baby snugly in a blanket, then holding and rocking her.

Move your baby using a baby swing, stroller or car. Use massage—it will soothe both of you.

## More ways to soothe a crying baby



- Burping
- Swaddling
- Riding in car
- Singing, talking
- Rocking, swaying
- Playing soft music
- Rubbing, patting, stroking
- Rhythmic noise and vibration
- Walking with baby in your arms, body sack or carriage
- Warm baths soothe some babies

Source: *The American Academy of Pediatrics*

## What's next?

See *Caring & Connected Parenting: 1 to 2 Years* at [saiv.org/parenting-guide](http://saiv.org/parenting-guide)



## More about parenting

### *Especially for people who had troubled childhoods*

You don't have to repeat the past. Cycles of violence continue from generation to generation until one person makes an effort to stop them. You can be that courageous person. Your children's and your grandchildren's lives can be different because of you. If you have suffered abuse, neglect or loss, you are likely to need a mental health professional to help you make sense of your life.

If you need help with your parenting right away

Call ChildHelp

**1-800-4-A-CHILD**

(1-800-422-4453)

(Toll Free • Confidential • No Caller ID)

If there is violence between you and your partner

**1-800-799-7233**

National Domestic Violence Hotline

[www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

### Writing down the past

Looking back can help you make sense of your feelings. Answering the following questions will help you understand more about yourself. It may be hard to put words to some of the feelings you will experience, but try as best you can. Record your answers in a personal notebook. Add any thoughts you may have over time. The more you understand about yourself, the more you'll see how your past experiences may be affecting your relationship with your family now.

1. What was it like growing up? Who was in your family?
2. How did you get along with your parents early in your childhood? How did the relationship evolve throughout your youth and up until the present time?
3. How did your relationship with your mother and father differ and how were they similar? Are there ways in which you try to be like, or try not to be like, each of your parents?
4. Did you ever feel rejected or threatened by your parents? Were there other experiences you had that felt overwhelming or traumatizing in your life, during childhood or beyond? Do any of these experiences still feel very much alive? Do they continue to influence your life?
5. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What impact did that have on your childhood, and how do you feel it affects your role as a parent now?
6. Do you recall your earliest separations from your parents? What was it like? Did you ever have prolonged separations from your parents?
7. Did anyone significant in your life die during your childhood, or later in your life? What was that like for you at the time, and how does that loss affect you now?
8. How did your parents communicate with you when you were happy and excited? Did they join with you in your enthusiasm? When you were distressed or unhappy as a child, what would happen? Did your father and mother respond differently to you during these emotional times? How?
9. Was there anyone else besides your parents in your childhood that took care of you? What was that relationship like for you? What happened to those individuals? What is it like for you when you let others take care of your child now?"

10. If you had difficult times during your childhood, were there positive relationships in or outside of your home that you could depend on during those times? How do you feel those connections benefited you then, and how might they help you now?
11. How have your childhood experiences influenced your relationships with others as an adult? Do you find yourself trying not to behave in certain ways because of what happened to you as a child? Do you have patterns of behavior that you'd like to alter but have difficulty changing?
12. What impact do you think your childhood has had on your adult life in general, including the ways in which you think of yourself and the ways you relate to your children? What would you like to change about the way you understand yourself and relate to others?

*The above Questions for Parental Self-Reflection are used with the permission of authors Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Mary Hartzell, M.Ed., from their book **Parenting from the Inside Out**.*

### Learning from your answers

#### **You can read it out loud.**

After a few days, read what you have written aloud to yourself. How do your answers make you feel? How have these experiences with your parents affected how you parent or think about parenting? What do you wish your parents had done differently?

#### **Write what you've learned.**

Write any thoughts you have learned about yourself in your notebook.

#### **Talk to someone you trust.**

Friends or trusted clergy may help. There are many mental health professionals who have been trained

to help with experiences like yours. They can help you to heal and stop being controlled by emotions from your past.

#### **What can you do about it?**

If some memories are hard to think about, or there are deeper issues, such as "fear of closeness, a shameful sense of being defective, or anger at your child's helplessness," contact a mental health professional to get the help you need to heal yourself and raise your child in a loving and connected way.

## 5 Steps to Self Control

- 1. Know your triggers.** Know your triggers so you can be prepared.
- 2. Listen to your body.** Do you feel your body tensing?
- 3. Stop yourself before you explode.** Say: “I choose to stay in control.”
- 4. Breathe in, breathe out, slowly.**
- 5. Take a time out yourself.** If you feel you’re losing control, tell your child “I need a few minutes” and go to a quiet room. Tense your muscles then relax them, shake your arms and legs and tell yourself: “I’m calm. He’s a child. I’m an adult. Everything is okay.” Think about why it’s difficult for you. Make a plan to respond differently.

Once you are in control...

- 1. Calmly state what you want.** “Please get the paper towels and we’ll clean this up.”
- 2. Reconnect with empathy.** Reconnect with your child when you are calm. If you’ve made a mistake and over-reacted by yelling, tell your child you’re sorry for acting that way. Think about what your child is feeling. Let him know you understand how you must have made him feel.
- 3. Self-reflect.** Ask yourself, “Why did I do that? How did my actions teach my child how to behave? Did it hurt her or set a bad example?” Review the five steps in your mind again so you can follow through on a planned reaction.



### There is no perfect parent.

We all make mistakes. Everyone gets lost at times. A caring parent keeps trying. The goal is to raise a child who feels loved, valued and safe—who cares for others as well as for herself.

### Understanding your body.

Be aware of the signals from your body. For example, if your child spills his milk, you may feel your body starting to react—muscles tightening, heart pounding, wanting to scream. You can learn to use these as signals that it’s time to stop for the moment, calm down or leave the room. Once you are in control, guide your child calmly.

For many people, strong emotions rise and erupt quickly. For some, this can result in lashing out, swearing, yelling, or spacing out and not being present for their children.

To be a connected parent, and to discipline with respect, you need to catch yourself before you erupt. Knowing your body’s signals is an excellent way to do this.

It helps you take charge of how your emotions are expressed—and how connected you stay to your little one.

### Remember:

If you can understand why and when your strongest reactions happen, you can gradually change them.

To help with understanding, take some time after you have cooled down and repaired a connection

with your child to write about how each part of your body felt in the situation that set you off—like the spilled milk. Ask yourself why you reacted the way you did and write down whatever comes to mind.

A past of abuse, neglect or loss can mean memories stored in our minds that enter into our lives with our own children. It is very serious when you react to your child in a way that causes you to be full of rage, overly anxious, spaced-out, depressed, neglectful or unable to connect.

### Know your triggers.

What gets you going? Is it spilling things, whining, neediness, or something else? Identify your problem areas and make a list.

### Train yourself.

It’s important that you catch yourself before you become out of control. Imagine yourself in a milk-spilling (or other) situation again. Imagine your heart starting to react, your muscles tightening, etc. STOP yourself and *substitute a new response or phrase*. Repeat in your mind over and over until your new way of responding becomes your automatic response.

## Other strategies

### Get help.

Repeated intense emotional reactions can harm your child. He can feel shame, loneliness, worthlessness, and humiliation. Get professional help to understand and gain control over your emotions.

### Observe and imitate.

In play groups, library hours, the park: watch other parents who set limits but treat their children with respect. Remember any positive relationships you've had in your life. What did you like about the way these people treated you? Is this something you can do for your child?

### Let go of your tough or cool image.

Growing up in an abusive home or unhealthy school situation can leave us with masks of toughness. Some of us learn it's okay to show tough, angry feelings but not gentle, loving feelings.

It may be embarrassing to kiss our children or tell them we love them. But let down your guard, snuggle, sing and it will feel good. People are made for this kind of love.

### Use your words.

State simply what it is you want. Some parents hit to get a child's attention. Instead, try taking a deep breath before you ask.

### Take time away.

Primary caregivers need breaks and time away from caring to re-energize. If you have a partner, let your partner help with childcare from the start. If you are not the main caregiver, show you value the difficult job your partner is doing. Honor your partner's need for time for her/himself. If you are a single parent, exchange care with another single parent.

## Change one thought at a time

Some people have destructive thoughts that repeat in their minds and hurt them and the people around them. These thoughts may even be in the voice of a parent. If you have hurtful thoughts, like those listed below, take a moment to consider where the thoughts may be coming from. And realize that you have a right to change them! When you hear a harmful thought, *interrupt* it. Then change it—literally.

### Do you have these thoughts?

### You can change them to these.

I am not worth anything.

I am a worthwhile person.

No one could ever love me.

I am lovable.

Nothing I do is worth anything.

Raising a child is worthwhile.

If I am myself, no one will like me.

It's okay to be who I am.

Why bother to change things?

Change will make me and my family healthier.

My child/baby did it to hurt me.

My child is just being a child.

All people are bad.

All people are imperfect.

Everyone is out to get me.

There are people I can trust.

Only I feel this way.

There are professionals who understand.

It's too late to change.

I can be a loving parent.

I'm "too damaged" to change.

I can change, I can get help.

## Relaxation and meditation

### Stressed or anxious?

If you are feeling stress or anxiety, go to a quiet place, drink tea, play a musical instrument or sing, talk softly, or listen to calming music.

### Get and give massages.

Touch is calming. We all need it. Most libraries have how-to books on massage that can get you started.

### Relaxation exercises to try.

You can actually learn how to relax. These exercises can help. If you do them every day, your body will learn the cues to start relaxing. Then, even when the baby is screaming, you can call on your body to relax.

### Simple meditation.

Sit in a comfortable, upright position.

Take a slow, deep breath in.

Hold for 1, 2, 3, 4, then breathe out slowly, counting 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Repeat, focusing on your breath.

Keep breathing slowly in and out.

Feel your belly rise with your in breath and drop with your out breath. Feel the air come into your lungs and leave your lungs. If a thought comes, notice it and let it go with your out breath. Focus on your breathing. Breathe in peace. Breathe away stress.

### Relaxation Exercise.

Sit comfortably with your back straight and hands in your lap. Breathe in slowly and deeply and release your breath slowly. Focus on your breath coming in and going out.

As you breathe, tighten the muscles in your toes, hold for a moment, and then release.

Continue the same way up your body. Slowly tighten up, hold and release your calves and thighs.

Do the same for your belly, back and chest. Now focus on your arms, shoulders and neck. Now do your ears, lips, cheeks and forehead.

Keep breathing slowly. Let worries fly away with your breath as you release it. Try it with eyes open or closed.

### Guided Visualization.

Think of a quiet place you like such as a park, seashore, or woods. Linger there in your mind. Breathe in the air, imagining its scent as you breathe. Let the faint sounds wash over you and tell you that you are in a safe place. Feel the ground, water, or sand in your hands. Feel the texture as it runs through your fingers and falls back to the ground. This is your special place, a safe place, where you can be strong and whole. Relax with your sounds and smells, breathing slowly in and out.

Feel your belly rise and fall as your breath moves in and out. When you are ready, take another deep breath, exhale and come back to the room. You are back in your body, feeling peaceful and knowing you are safe and whole.

If you practice this daily, you will be able to call your special place to mind to calm yourself as needed.

