

Caring & Connected Parenting

A Guide to Raising Connected Children
1 to 2 Years



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.

Connecting equals brain development

How you treat your baby influences how her brain grows and develops.

Just as your baby's body changes, her brain changes as she interacts with you. You need to set limits to keep her safe and to teach her.

Show your baby respect by not name-calling, laughing at or yelling at her. And don't allow others to do these things to her. You will enjoy the same respect from her as she grows, because you've taught her how to be respectful.

Connect with your baby.

A connected baby grows into a child who needs *less* disciplining. The more time you put in *now* to connect with your baby, the easier parenting will be for you later.

Your baby needs YOU to be PRESENT. He needs:

- Your eye contact and attention (your attention to phones, tablets, computers, etc. should be minimal)
- Your understanding of what he is feeling
- Responses from you that respect those feelings



Why does it matter?

Brain development means this for your baby:

- **How well he will be able to handle stress and his emotions.**
- **If he'll be able to form healthy relationships with others.**
- **How well his memory and attention span develop, which affects school success.**
- **How he will love and treat his own children one day.**

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 the **More about parenting** section on page 7.

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 7.

How to connect

Look into your child's eyes when you speak to her. Teach her the word, “eyes” and call her attention to your eyes when you speak.

Touch and cuddle with your child. A massage at bedtime helps her relax and feel your loving presence. Touch is good for you too!

Routines help with stress. Follow the same bedtime routine each night. For example, bathe, brush teeth, read a book and sing a lullaby. Keep meal and nap times close to the same time every day.

Sit down on the floor with your child and play. It shows her she matters to you. Relax, have fun.

Respect your child's feelings. Watch your child to learn how she is feeling. If she is in a quiet mood, be the same way when you approach or speak to her.

Let her release energy by taking her outside or to a playground. Children have lots of energy. To expect them to sit still for too long is not fair.

Keep “NOs” to a minimum. Make your home baby-friendly. Put away the breakable and dangerous items. You have invited this baby into your home to share it with you. Her confidence cannot handle being told NO all day.

Keep things positive. Instead of saying what not to do, tell him what to do in simple short words: “Color on the paper,” instead of “Don’t color on the wall.” “Look at me” may work to get his attention quickly.

Praise. Say “Good job!” “Good for you!” often. Praise helps a baby feel good about himself.

Smile at your child. It lets him know that he matters to you.

Use rhythm. Sing and dance with your child. Read nursery rhymes, books that rhyme and finger plays like *Itsy Bitsy Spider*. Tap or make noises in simple patterns that he can copy.

Help him identify feelings. Make faces: happy, sad and mad. When he copies your expression, say, “You look happy, (or sad or mad),” to help him know these feelings in himself.

Respond to his sounds and words. Use the same tone of voice and follow your child's rhythm. Encourage him to use words. Name the things you use and the things you see. The more he can say, the easier it will be for him to tell you what he needs — and for you to understand him.

A peaceful home. 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.

Let him do things for himself. A 15-month-old can feed himself, drink from a cup and use a spoon. Skills will improve with practice. Use sippy-cups to avoid spills while he learns. Ask your child to help you with simple tasks. It may take longer, but it makes him feel capable.



1 to 2 Years



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

Discipline is not punishment. Discipline means “to teach.” Your child is learning self-control and you are teaching him how until he can control himself. It is normal for him to test you over and over while he is learning the rules.

About stubbornness Children this age can be stubborn. They will say “NO!” to you. It's normal. Use a distraction and your sense of humor to get you through.

Young brains are for learning. Children learn most by imitating you. Your baby imitates everything, from the way you talk on the phone to the way you handle anger. If you yell, swear or hit, she learns to yell, swear and hit. If you react in a calm, respectful way, you teach her to act calmly.

About sharing Children at this age may share, but it's normal for them not to share. Your baby will imitate you eventually—so share with her! Children start to share around 2½ years, but even then they don't share all the time.

Respectful discipline

Be firm, but be kind.

Never shake. Never hit.

Hitting teaches a child to hit to solve problems and shaking can **SEVERELY** and **PERMANENTLY** damage her brain.

Distract or remove your child from things you don't want her doing. If your child is climbing up on the table say "STOP!", scoop her up and bring her outside to play or set up cushions on the floor.

If she won't let you change her diaper, have a special toy just for changing time to distract her—or change her standing up.

Give your child choices.

"Would you like juice or milk?" This helps her have some control and feel her independence.

To say "NO" is to set limits.

Choose the most important things to make off-limits and the most important behaviors to focus on. And do it consistently.

If your 18 month-old threatens to push the lamp over, the first time say, "If you try to push that lamp again I will pick you up and we'll go to the kitchen."

If she does it again, do what you said. Always be consistent and follow through. Try not to say you will do something that you can't or won't do.

Never threaten to hit!

Respect his love for you.

If you are leaving your child with a sitter, tell him ahead of time. Tell him you will be back. When you return, tell him you're back.

Children this age sometimes try to get attention with negative behavior.

Give him hugs and talk to him so he will not have to do negative things to get your attention.

If you sense negative behavior is building, change the tone by taking him on your lap, rocking and having a time out—together.

Avoid problems, plan ahead.

At the doctor's office or a friend's house, bring a travel bag full of toys, books and cereal that comes out just for these occasions. The new items will keep your child occupied for a while.

No one is perfect.

Every parent makes mistakes. Take the time to connect and discipline with respect and you and your child will both grow to be people you can be proud of.

If nothing works and you're afraid of what you might do

Call ChildHelp: 1-800-4-A-CHILD

(1-800-422-4453)

(Toll Free • Confidential • No Caller ID)

Bumps in the road

Temper tantrums

Temper tantrums begin around 15 to 18 months and continue up to three years old. Sometimes babies can't handle not getting their way. They want to be independent, but you and the world tell them what they can't do. Tantrums are normal. DON'T SPANK. You can stay calm. Walk away a safe distance and let the tantrum run its course or CALMLY pick up your child. Tell him, "We can't stay in the store," and take him to the car or outside. Ignore him until he's finished, then say, "It's hard when we can't do what we want." Pat his hair and hug him. You can be proud of your parenting.

Biting and hitting

Pick up your baby to remove him and say, "No biting. I will stop you if you can't stop yourself." Try giving him a teething ring to bite. Say, "Bite this. Only this."

Overly moody or cranky child

Is he overtired, hungry, teething or sick? If so, take care of him. If not, move to a new room, try a snack or snuggle with a book. If he continues and you are at your wit's end, remove yourself to a corner, sit, legs crossed, eyes closed, and breathe in slowly 1, 2, 3, 4; hold 1, 2, 3, 4; breathe out for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Repeat as needed.

Toilet training

Don't worry about toilet training yet. A baby's body and mind must be ready. For signs of readiness, see the next section about 2- to 3-year olds.

Sleep

If your child has trouble falling asleep or getting back to sleep, pat her back saying, "It's okay, I'm here. Time to sleep." Respect her desire for you and reassure her you are there, but also set limits and set a rhythm to her day and night hours. Keep things quiet and soothing to help her until she can soothe herself to sleep. If you play with her she'll learn that if she screams long enough you will eventually give in. See Sears, *The Attachment Parenting Book* in the Further reading and Sources section on page 37.

Food

Don't battle. You can't make a child who is seeking independence eat. Offer healthy snacks during the day. Serve finger foods and milk at meals. Stay away from junk foods and sweets.

Give yourself breaks.

Have your partner, friend or parent watch your child while you take a break. If you are on your own, connect with other parents and share care, coffee or a walk. Go in shifts.

What's next?

See *Caring & Connected Parenting: 2 to 3 Years* at 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

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.

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.

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.



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.



Loving-kindness meditation

Sitting comfortably, breathe in and out slowly as before.

While paying attention to your breath moving slowly in and out, call to mind someone who loves you or loved you just the way you are.

Picture yourself with this person and let yourself feel the feelings you have with her/him. Let these kind and loving feelings wash over you.

Be aware that you are loved for who you are, without having to be someone else.

Let yourself feel her/his arms around you. Feel yourself rocking as your breath moves in and out. Feel your heart beating. Feel the warmth of her/his love washing over all of you.

Stay with the slow breathing and the feeling of your heart beating and imagine that the arms have become your arms and you are rocking yourself.

Feel your own love and acceptance of yourself.

Think or whisper to yourself: "I am safe. I am happy. I am lovable."

When you are comfortable with this meditation, let thoughts of your child, your partner and others into your arms and imagine them bathing in the love that flows from your heart.

Wish for them, "May you be safe. May you be happy. May you feel loved."

*Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn's book **Coming to Our Senses**.*

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