

Caring & Connected Parenting

A Guide to Raising Connected Children

2 to 3 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 with your toddler. It's as important as ever...

Your toddler is wondering: "Am I wanted?" "Am I lovable?" The way you respond gives him the answer, so take time to connect with him every day.

Tune in to your child.

If he is quiet, speak to him in a quiet voice. If he is involved in something, sit nearby and watch—without directing.

Look into your child's eyes when you talk and listen to him. When you give directions or requests, ask him to look at you while you speak.

Continue with routines at bedtime and use consistent meal times and schedules.

Hug and kiss your child.

Play with your child, sing, dance and read books—have fun!

Let your child explore.

Children are little learning machines. Put them in old clothes and let them play with water, paint and sand.

Let your child help.

He can carry light items to set the table. This helps him feel good about himself.

Talk about feelings with her.

Name them: happy, sad, mad, hurt, excited, scared. Acknowledge them: "I see you're mad, but I don't want you to get hurt jumping off the couch." Ask your child how she feels with words or draw faces with emotions and ask her to point. Ask her to tell you what the characters in books are feeling.

Eat with your child, but don't expect her to sit through the entire meal. Let her play nearby while you finish.

Be consistent and predictable.

If biting is not okay one day, it's not okay the next. Have a fair and reasonable consequence, and follow through with it.

Help her learn new words.

Say the words for things she uses every day. Encourage her to use words for familiar things. "Tell me what it is you want: a cracker or some milk?" Praise her efforts.

Encourage friendships.

Find ways to let your child be with other children her age.

Admit it when you're wrong.

Apologize if you've made a mistake. It teaches your child how to say sorry and that we all make mistakes. If you fight in front of the child, which is stressful to her, let her see you apologize.

Teach a task.

Break the task into small parts. Show each step slowly. Then repeat each step with her. Let her try alone with coaching. Repeat any step you need to or let it drop if it seems frustrating. Praise any success, "Good job!"

Let her think of solutions.

Turn an accident into a time to learn: "The dog's bowl spilled. How can we clean up?"

Teach the caretaker.

If you leave your child with a caretaker, be sure he or she follows the same ways of connecting. It is important for your child to feel safe and valued.

Praise your child's efforts.

If he picks up toys, say "Good job cleaning up!"

Use dolls or drawings to recreate an upsetting event

as you describe it. Include the child's feelings in the telling. This helps him make sense of the event, manage stress and feel understood.

Go over the events of the day with your child.

Let him help with words or movement. As he learns more words, ask him to add to the stories. It helps him make sense of what he sees and does each day.

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

Two year olds are quick and need you to watch them.

They learn by trying, but they aren't always safe.

Take time for yourself.

You don't have to give to your child every minute of the day. Help her to find ways to play by herself.

Hitting teaches him to hit.

Teach respect by showing your child respectful ways to handle problems.

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

Rules and limits are good for your child. They help him to develop self-control. Be sure both parents agree on the most important rules and limits.

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.

Discipline is guidance

Calm yourself first. Check in with your body to be sure you're calm before you discipline.

Don't get into arguments.

Acknowledge your child's feelings and move on. Remember: you're the teacher, not the two year old.

Distract like a magician.

"Is that your teddy over there?" you say, as you scoop up the candy with your other hand and hide it in a drawer. Lectures and nagging won't work. Move the TV remote if it's too tempting.

Stay connected at time-outs.

Time-outs are for calming down, not shaming. Bring him to a quiet place with books, a blanket and YOU nearby. Play soft music or sing softly in the background. You want to provide a feeling of safety for true calming to take place.

"No hitting. No hurting."

Use short phrases for important or repeated things.

Set limits.

A 2-year-old will test your reaction. He may look at the light switch with a daring gleam in his eye. Set the limit: "Keep the light on." If he shuts it off again say, "If you turn the light off, I will move you." Do it. Move the chair away from the light switch as well. Be consistent.

Show him the way.

Take his hand gently and say: "Pet the kitten gently, like this."

Label the behavior, not the child.

Never call a child "brat," "stupid" or anything you wouldn't want to be called. Laughing at her when she makes a mistake or scaring her on purpose (because you think it's funny) is harmful to her.

Give warnings.

Before you start something new or leave a place say, "In five minutes, we will leave the playground. Pick the last thing you want to do before we go." If you are leaving your child, prepare her ahead of time. Tell her when you are back.

How to calm her down.

If she's excited, first approach in an active way then bring the energy level down. If she's very active, have her 'shake her sillies out' by following your example. Slow down the pace gradually, then get on the ground and whisper, "Let's be quiet as a rock."

Say it, mean it, follow through.

Don't tell your child you'll do something that you can't do as a consequence. If you're too tired or too busy this time to follow through, you send confusing messages to your child.

Limit choices.

"The red shirt or the blue shirt?"

Bumps in the road

Temper tantrums and aggression

Watch from a safe distance.

If you need to protect your child, scoop her up and bring her out to the car or someplace safe.

Don't take it personally.

Tantrums are normal. Ignore it and let it run its course. When your child has calmed down, hug her and tell her you understand how upset she is and some day she won't need to have tantrums.

Hitting and grabbing

Talk to your child before you meet with other children. Use feeling words to go over how the other children feel when he hits them or grabs things from their hands. Tell him if he hits or takes toys you both will leave, and follow through. Remind him you'll do it every time to help him get control until he's able to not hit or grab himself. Praise him for sharing.

Other bumps

Crib climbing

If you use a crib:

Plan A: Make it harder to climb out; lower the mattress if you can.

Plan B: Make it easier to climb out to prevent injury; lower the rails and use cushions beneath. Make the room safe. Gate the entrance and any stairs. Have a basket of books or safe quiet toys near the bed.

Taking care of your health.

If your experiences with your child are "out of control" or you are worried about your reactions to your child, ask yourself, "Why did I do that? How did that help my child?" If the answers are troubling, talk to someone you trust or a professional. Or call a local parenting hot line.

Naps

Children at this age take one nap a day. If your child has trouble going to sleep at night or waking up, shift the nap to an earlier time, soon after lunch. When children get up from naps they can sometimes be confused. Keep things quiet and calm, hold him until the world makes sense to him again.

Night terrors

If your child thrashes and screams at night you may want to stand nearby and wait it out to be sure he is safe. Waking the child may cause more screaming.

If this happens frequently and you're concerned, tell your child's doctor.

Toilet training

Is your child ready?

Start toilet training when your child shows signs of readiness.

Some signs are when your child:

- Doesn't like being wet or soiled.
- Knows she is going. She tells you, makes grunting noises or pulls at her pants.
- Stays dry for four or more hours.
- Likes to put things where they belong.
- Has stopped saying "no" to everything.
- Shows interest when you use the toilet.
- Can pull her pants up and down.

Starting toilet training.

Let your child sit on a potty chair in her clothes at first. Show how you use the toilet. Read books about a child potty training. When she is comfortable, let her sit without clothes. The next week, dump her diaper into the potty. (Try leaving the bowel movement in the potty and not flushing it away until later, when she isn't there.) If she's ready to try for herself, bring the potty outside or into the play area. Remind her every hour to try. Praise her when she goes.

Don't make a big deal out of accidents.

Have your child use the potty before a nap or put a diaper or training pants on for nap and at night. If things aren't going well or your child is worried, stop training for now. Try again in a month or two. For more on toilet training read books by T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.



What's next?

See *Caring & Connected Parenting: 3 to 4 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

1-800-4-A-CHILD

(1-800-422-4453)

ChildHelp: The National Child Abuse Hotline

(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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SAIV is a project of:
The Center for Partnership Studies
P.O. Box 51936
Pacific Grove, CA 93950
www.CenterForPartnership.org

Caring & Connected Parenting:
A Guide to Raising Connected Children
was created in cooperation with SAIV
The Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence
www.saiv.org