

Ten Things You Can Do at Home

1. ***Focus on strengths.*** When your child brings home a test, talk first about what he or she did well. Then talk about what can be improved. Praise specific strengths. Don't just criticize things that were done wrong.
2. ***Follow up with consequences for misbehavior.*** Sometimes parents say things in anger that don't curb the behavior in the long run. You might say, "Because of what you did, no television for a month." Both you and your child know that after one or two days the TV will go back on. Decide on consequences that are fair, and then carry them out.
3. ***Ask children how they feel.*** When you ask your child about his or her feelings, the message is that feelings matter and you care.
4. ***Find ways to stay calm when angry.*** It's normal to get angry or irritated sometimes. Learn to recognize "trigger situations" and do something about them before you lose control. Try taking deep breaths for a few moments. Consider having a "quiet area" where people can go when they are upset. Or you can just stop talking and leave the room for a while. Sit down as a family and talk about what everyone can do to stay calm.
5. ***Avoid humiliating or mocking your child.*** This can make children feel bad about themselves. It can lead to a lack of self-confidence and, in turn, problems with schoolwork, illness, and trouble getting along with friends. Unfair criticism and sarcasm also hurts the bond of trust between children and parents. Be mindful of how you speak to your children. Give them the room to make mistakes as they learn new skills.
6. ***Be willing to apologize.*** Parents need to be able to apologize to their children if what they said was not what they meant. Calmly explain what you really wanted to say. By doing this you're being a good role model. You're showing how important it is to apologize after hurting someone. You're teaching that it's possible to work through problems with respect for the other person.
7. ***Give children choices and respect their wishes.*** When children have a chance to make choices, they learn how to solve problems. If you make all their choices for them, they'll never learn this key skill. Giving children ways to express preferences and make decisions shows that their ideas and feelings matter.
8. ***Ask questions that help children solve problems on their own.*** When parents hear their child has a problem, it's tempting to step in and take over. But this can harm a child's ability to find solutions on his or her own. A helpful approach is to ask good questions. Examples include, "What do you think you can do in this situation?" and "If you choose a particular solution, what will be the consequences of that choice?"
9. ***Read books and stories together.*** Reading stories aloud is a way to share something enjoyable and learn together about other people. For example, stories can be a way to explore how people deal with common issues like making or losing friends or handling conflicts. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian to recommend stories on themes that interest you and your children.
10. ***Encourage sharing and helping.*** There are many ways to do this. Together you and your child can prepare food in a homeless shelter or go on a fund-raising walk-a-thon. You can help out elderly neighbors or needy families. This teaches children that what they do can make a difference in the lives of others.