

Encourage cooperation

You can give your child a limited choice; for example, choosing which coloured jumper they would like to wear or which of two vegetables to have for dinner. You are still in charge of the choice, but you are helping your child learn to take responsibility for their decisions. It can also help avoid unnecessary battles.

Create family traditions

The things you do together as a family create a sense of belonging and can build strong, long-lasting memories. A tradition doesn't have to be complicated, expensive or just for the 'big occasions'. It could be as simple as 'Every Saturday we go to the park', or whatever your family loves to do!

Give yourself a break

It's important to find time for yourself but it's not always easy. You may need to be flexible, but aim to keep aside ten minutes for yourself each day. If you have a partner, plan in time together. Normal adult conversation matters and it helps to chat

about feelings and thoughts with someone you trust. Is there a family member or friend who could take care of your child for a couple of hours or even an evening? Don't be afraid to ask. You will be a better parent if your own needs are met.



Life as a parent is a rollercoaster but it's the ride of a lifetime, so fasten your seatbelts and hold on tight!

Katharine Hill



Care for the Family aims to create resources that help to build firm foundations for family life and help those who face family difficulties.

Resources

Attend a local *Time Out for Parents – The Early Years* course cff.org.uk/courses

Read the *Sixty Minute Family* by Rob Parsons cff.org.uk/shop

Visit the *Parenting* section of our website cff.org.uk/parenting

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Top Tips For Parents

The Early Years



When we become parents, we want to be the best mum or dad we can be! But sometimes we may wonder how. Here are some tips to help you give your child the strong foundations they will need as they grow up.

Tune into their needs

Caring for your child in warm, sensitive and consistent ways gives them a great sense of security. When you respond to their crying or distress, you are helping them learn that they are loved and understood. They are learning that home is a safe place and as you respond with love to their feelings and needs, you are helping them learn to manage their own emotions.

Love them and let them know

Don't assume they will automatically know it. Regularly tell them 'I love you' and show it by doing things together. The positive things you do for your child are like deposits in their 'emotional bank account'. Kind words, encouragement, having fun together, singing and playing all put 'money' in. When there is enough in the bank, a child will cope better with the everyday difficulties that come along – some 'money' has gone out but there is still plenty in there. Our aim as parents is to keep their bank account regularly topped up.



Make time to play with them

Play is a vital part of a child's early life. It helps to develop their social skills, creativity and language. It boosts their self-esteem too. Discover what they enjoy doing and set time aside to play together.

Appreciate their unique personality

Children have individual personalities and different temperaments. Your child may be strong-willed or easygoing, shy or adventurous, outgoing or quieter. Getting to know their temperament can help you understand their behaviour and respond positively to them. It's good to remember that your personality may not be the same as your child's, and that what works for you or for another child may not work for them.

Let them know you're listening

This might mean stopping what you are doing and getting down to their eye level. You can encourage your child to express their feelings or ask gentle questions. Children often act out their feelings because they can't put them into words and they can take a long time to tell you something, so remember to be patient. You are building foundations for good communication as they get older.

Create routines

Routines bring stability and security to family life for young children. A consistent bedtime routine, for example, helps a child manage the transition between a busy day of activities and settling for a good night's sleep.

Watch what you say

Words have a long-lasting effect on a child's self-esteem. When we praise them or encourage them we build them up; critical and harsh words have the opposite effect. Let them overhear you praising them, not negatively comparing them to a brother or sister.

Give them boundaries

Setting limits for your children teaches them what is and is not acceptable behaviour. Try to be consistent and make sure your expectations are realistic for their age and level of maturity. It helps to think about why your child is behaving in a certain way. Could they be shouting or crying because they are tired or hungry? Understanding what lies behind their behaviour can guide your response to them.

You don't have to fight every battle and you can encourage good behaviour with praise.

Discourage behaviour you don't want to see by using distraction and follow through with consequences that you have already explained. Time out or time in are strategies to help children calm down and think about their behaviour. The goal is to restore the relationship. 'It's your behaviour I didn't like, but I still love you.'