

7 things you can do right now to be a better parent

For today's post, we're planning to share everything you need to know about parenting – to make you the perfect caregiver and help your kids become the best children on earth.

Just kidding.

You know that being a parent doesn't come with a clear instruction guide. (Despite what some parenting books would have you believe.) And it doesn't always come naturally, either. (Despite what you may be told.)

So while you may be bombarded with advice about raising children and being a caregiver, it can also be challenging to find quick and simple tips to implement right now.

But these seven ideas won't take months of work (and tears) to put into action. Try a few of our ideas today – or even right now – to help you grow into an even better parent. (Because we know you rock already.)

Take care of yourself.

Just like the flight attendant tells you to put on your own oxygen mask before

helping those around you, you must focus on you before spending all your energy on your children.

Put some time and attention into yourself. Date your husband and go out with friends. Exercise, eat right, and nurture your interests and hobbies.

"By better caring for yourself, you can better care for your children," says Sue Klingaman, early childhood mental health consultant at Robert Young Center.

Forgive yourself for mistakes.

We can't spend all our time dwelling on mistakes as a parent.

If you yelled at your son, apologize. And then move on.

If you keep losing your temper with your daughter, identify the root cause and fix it. And then move on. Worrying about mistakes you have made will only make you crazy. We all mess up sometimes. (Check out our tips for handling mistakes.)

"We're all human," says Jen Best, certified family life educator with Iowa State University Extension. Cut yourself a little slack – and then move on.

Be consistent.

The best thing you can do as a caregiver is follow through and be consistent with your children. If they believe you will change your mind, your kids will push you more. They will fight longer and harder.



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“Children need consistency to help them structure their lives,” says Jen.

Angie Kendall, director of development and communications, agrees. “Kids need and want discipline,” she explains. “They need someone to love them enough to set boundaries and expectations.”

So if you are waffling and giving into your child regularly, set the boundaries now and be consistent. (And remember that it’s equally important to talk to your partner and agree on boundaries. No one wants to be the bad cop.)

Be curious about your child.

Your child tells you so many things – but only if you pay attention.

Put aside the distractions and really watch and listen to your child. You could learn a lot, which could help you parent more effectively. All children are different, and they will show you what they need from you.

“It’s really about being a reflective parent,” says Jen. “Ask yourself, ‘why did this happen?’”

Ask yourself what skills your child needs to learn.

Instead of asking how to “fix” or stop a bad behavior in your child, ask what skill your child still needs to learn.

In other words, if you could wave a magic wand and your child could have a new skill, what would it be? And how could it help?

This can really turn your parenting model on its head. Because it’s not always about discipline or punishment.

“You wouldn’t send your child to his room for making a mistake tying shoes,” says Sue.

In the same way, patience, or managing disappointment are skills you can help your child learn. And children don’t necessarily need to be punished every time they don’t get it right.

Learning new skills takes time. Invest yours into the skills your child needs.

Focus on what matters.

As a caregiver, you have a lot on your plate. Your to-do list may be a mile long with a lot of important items – along with some unimportant ones.

So right now, put down the task list and ask yourself, “What really matters?”

Spend your time on those things, instead of the litany of tasks that fight for your attention every day.

This doesn’t mean that you should ignore your job and household responsibilities. But it does mean that laundry and email can wait. And the moments that pass while you are preoccupied with busywork are fleeting.

So ask your child how he did on his math test. Put aside all distractions at mealtimes. And spend uninterrupted time with your child (even if it’s only 10 minutes). These investments are worth more than folding laundry will ever be.

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Above all, show the love.

There are a lot of things you can and will give your child. But love is at the top of the list.

“It’s impossible to love your child too much,” says Jen.

You can love your child in a lot of different ways – but do it in a way that feels comfortable to you and is well received by your child. (And this may change over time.)

As children get older (and turn into teenagers), they may push you away. But know that the time you spend with your children – at meals, in the car, anywhere – makes a world of difference. And don’t ever forget how important it is to say, “I love you.”

now
what?

KEEP LOVING.

You love your children – which also means you want to be the best parent you can. It doesn’t take hours of researching or months of planning to improve your skills – it just takes a little practice. So, try something new to improve as a caregiver.

With just a few simple changes, you could feel more confident and your child could feel more secure and loved.

Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 9.24.14 The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention
2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse
3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

now what? Keep Loving.

