

# section

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Strengthening Family Relationships  
Part 3

# Strengthening Family Relationships

## part three

### Building the Relationship

Building a positive relationship with your child is one of the most important parenting goals. Structure and routine at home, along with clear expectations and sustained house rules, are important to the creation and continuation of that relationship. Together you can teach your child organizational skills, how to follow commands and directions, and encourage problem solving. Reaching a sense of accomplishment together will be a wonderful experience for you both.

Rules – Relationship =

Rebellion

Rules + Relationship =

Success

# relationships

## Developing Empathy

Empathy is a vital skill for successful relationships. Help your child put himself or herself in another's shoes and see the world through his or her eyes. Try to model this behavior by acknowledging and accepting your child's feelings:

- Avoid telling your child how he or she should feel or attempt to solve a problem when he or she is emotional, because it could create feelings of anxiety and lead to increased frustration
- Instead, use reflective listening strategies to make sure your child feels heard and understood

## Reflective listening guidelines

1. Listen quietly and attentively
2. Acknowledge your child's feelings with a word
3. Give the feeling a name
4. You can give your child his or her wishes in a fantasy
5. Be gentle but firm when responding



Here is an example of reflective listening:

Child

"Nobody wants to play with me."

"I am never going back to that school."

"That would be awesome!"

Parent

"It hurts your feelings to think no one will play with you?"

"I bet you wish that school was more fun and easy."

"I wish I could make school more fun for you, but let's think about what other fun things we can do together. Maybe we can bring those ideas to school to have fun."

# communication

## Managing Conflicts With Effective Communication

Using behavioral intervention techniques such as the token economy can help minimize behavior problems and prevent conflict. Some conflicts, however, are inevitable. Effective communication strategies can help to control the intensity of these conflicts.

Try to provide your child with frequent feedback to help him or her stay on the right behavioral path. If given correctly, praise and constructive criticism can be used positively. For example, praise and thank him or her for putting a glass on the counter. Set a goal of **“filling up their praise bucket,”** making emotional deposits so that your child may avoid reaching emotional bankruptcy.

Praise the behavior you want to see, and be specific. For example, you could say, **“You worked very hard on your science project last night before bed. I’m proud of you,”** or **“Thank you for coming home by your curfew. I didn’t have to wait up and worry.”**

While it is also important to provide feedback and instruction for specific behaviors you do not want to see, be sure to avoid criticizing the child. For example, do not say, “Stop using bad words when talking to me, you are a very difficult child to deal with.” Instead, try, **“That word hurts me. Stop talking to me using bad words.”**

It is also helpful if you mention what behavior you would like to occur next time.



## Remember to

**Be concise**

Be short and to the point.

**Be sincere and calm**

Avoid displaying too much emotion.

**Stay in the present**

Don't dredge up past mistakes.



# communication

## Forming Effective Commands

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Forming a command the correct way is critical to teaching children to behave. There are three basic steps to forming effective commands.

**First, make sure the command is specific.** Telling a child to clean a room may lead to him or her to feel overwhelmed and not sure where to begin. Instead, give the child a specific instruction, such as “Put your dirty clothes in the laundry basket.” Try to keep the command short, and avoid multiple instructions within a single command. It is also important to state the command as a statement and not a question. Do not ask the child to do something, tell him or her what to do.

**Second, clearly explain the consequence of noncompliance with the command, and provide that consequence immediately should the command not be followed.**

**Third, reward compliance with the command.** This can be as simple as saying, “Great job!” or “I appreciate it.” Children need, appreciate, and respond to positive reinforcement.

### Be sure to

- give commands only when you have the time and patience to obtain compliance
- be in proximity to your child when giving the command
- have your child’s attention when giving a command
- not waste time justifying the command to your child

Sometimes parents can make mistakes that teach their child to be noncompliant. Some of these mistakes include giving too many daily commands or failing to follow through with a consequence or reward. It can also be difficult for a child to follow a single command that is stated in many different ways or that isn’t consistent.

## self-control

### Positive Timeout

Positive timeout is a great technique to help a child learn self-control. The purpose of timeout is not punishment but to give the child an opportunity to regain control of his or her emotions and then rejoin the regular activity.

To begin establishing a timeout, **select a good spot.** A chair, cushion, or beanbag that is separated but not isolated is a good choice. You want to give the child the separation that he or she needs to calm down and refocus, but you also need to remain aware of what is going on around him or her.

**Talk with your child in advance** about how you will use the “take-a-break” place. Introduce and explain the concept of being calm and regaining control. Explain that it is not a punishment but an opportunity to calm down.

Emotions cannot be controlled,  
but reactions can be controlled.



## self-control

Intervene as soon you notice the child is losing control; do not wait too long. When a timeout is warranted, it's important that you

- make sure the length of the timeout is appropriate to your child's age. A good rule-of-thumb is to assign 1 minute per year of your child's age (for example, a 3-year-old would get a 3-minute timeout)
- tell your child to go to the take-a-break place to regain control
- say when he or she can come back
- be gentle, use a calm, quiet voice and few words
- do not allow negotiation
- give positive reinforcement such as hugs or kisses, or a "Good job!" once the timeout is over

Be sure to

- not overuse timeout, or else it will lose its effectiveness
- use timeout primarily with children of elementary school age
- stay calm, even if your child is not, during timeout





notes

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activity to share with your child

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Print this page for your child!

time for dessert

Moxie and Sparx did the dishes without being asked. As a reward, they were told that they could have dessert. Color in all the desserts and circle the one that you like best.

