

# POSITIVE PARENTING **STRATEGIES**

Simple Strategies To Help Your Kids Thrive!



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*"If you want your children to improve, let them hear the  
nice things you say about them to others."*

**-Haim Ginott**

**W**hether you're the parent of a toddler, young child, tween, or teenager, you'll eventually encounter some challenges with your child. Don't panic, it's all a part of parenting! It's natural for kids to test parents or other adults close by.

**Toddlers aged 3 to 4 present their own special parenting situations.** Just learning to talk and state in simple terms what they need, toddlers require parents to use simple and immediate behavioral strategies to rein in their unruly behaviors.

**Young children aged 5 and 6 years have developed a little more self-control and soaked up more skills about what to do and not do.** They'll test parents on issues that are important to them. Young children observe and mimic others and will learn to handle anger and other feelings however their parents do.

**Older kids from age 7 to 11 span the gamut of well-behaved to manipulative.** Around the age of 9 or 10, kids' brains develop skills to reason and weigh out simple decisions. Parental tasks include being there to ensure fitting consequences follow behaviors of all kinds.

**By the tween and teen years, 12 and up, children are maturing into "mini-adults."** They can think for themselves and state what they want. Kids falling in the latter end of this age group have figured out

how to manipulate adults to get their needs met. Hopefully, by this time, parents know what consequences best ensure their child will appropriately correct his behavior.

If you're familiar with plenty of positive parenting strategies, you'll weather any parenting storm that arises.

Applying positive parenting techniques to all of these age groups will help you raise a child who's mostly respectful, well-behaved and attentive to adults around them.

## **TODDLERS 3-4 YEARS OLD: SHAPE YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR USING POSITIVE PARENTING STRATEGIES**

If you're parenting a child in this age group, you're likely aware of the parenting challenges presented. A toddler is all about "me" — what he wants is *the* most important thing. ***Toddlers do not yet understand that they cannot have everything they want when they want it.***

That being said, "easy" toddlers are those who really just kind of flow along with the program of the day, looking around, marveling at the

world around them. They'll take a cookie if you offer one but won't necessarily demand one.

Tough toddlers want what they want when they want it. If they don't get it, they might kick, scream, shout "no," or even slap at Mom or Dad. They might display tantrums.

With children this young, the parent's role is to begin to "shape" the child's behavior into socially acceptable actions. In shaping, you ***reinforce successive approximations of behavior.***

## What are Successive Approximations?

Successive approximations are behaviors a child displays that are close or near to the behavior you seek. ***If the child is close to showing you the behavior you want, it's time to provide reinforcement.***

## What are Reinforcements?

Reinforcements are rewards that follow the desired behavior and will increase the likelihood the behavior will happen again in the future.

Some reinforcers naturally occur while others must be provided by parents.

**Here's an example of a behavioral incident illustrating reinforcers:**

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Four-year-old Johnny sometimes throws himself on the floor and screams for a candy bar when he's in the check-out line at the grocery with Mom. However, today, he doesn't do it. He stands quietly beside Mommy and chats about his Superman t-shirt. This is a perfect opportunity for Mom to reinforce Johnny's behavior.

On the way out of the store, Mom looks at Johnny and says, "Wow, Johnny! You did such a good job in the grocery store. Thanks for being such a good boy. Here's a sticker to wear on your shirt (as she pulls a sticker out of her purse)!"

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Notice that Mom didn't mention how Johnny usually tantrums and demands a candy bar.

After all, who wants to be reminded of their mistakes?

***In this scenario, Mom used several different reinforcers.*** Any one of them would work to increase the likelihood that Johnny behaves well

at the store in the future. Using several of them together is even smarter.

**The reinforcers used were:**

- ➡ Talking in a positive tone of voice
- ➡ Smiling at Johnny and saying his name
- ➡ Giving Johnny a compliment by telling him what he did well
- ➡ Providing the tangible reinforcement of the sticker

The really good news is there are hundreds of ways to reinforce the behavior you want in young children. Also, ***you can tailor reinforcers to each child's individual needs, wants, likes, and dislikes.***

Here are more reinforcers for adults to use for 3 and 4 year olds:

- ➡ Playing a game
- ➡ Reading a book
- ➡ Giving a small treat
- ➡ Going out for an ice cream cone
- ➡ Going to play at the park
- ➡ Taking a walk
- ➡ Playing outdoors
- ➡ Watching a cartoon

- ➡ Viewing a video or favored animated film
- ➡ Patting a child on the head
- ➡ Giving a “high 5”
- ➡ Doing the “happy dance”

## More Positive Parenting Techniques to Use with Toddlers

Consider the following behavioral strategies to begin to shape the behavior of your 3 and 4 year olds:

1. **Reinforce desired behaviors or successive approximations.** As reinforcers have already been discussed, suffice it to say that if you want to use positive parenting with 3 and 4 year olds, understand this concept. It works when applied periodically.
  - ✓ Mix it up—smile, give a positive comment, provide a treat, or give a sticker. It’s especially effective when the child isn’t expecting it.
2. **Ignore undesirable behaviors.** This strategy seems to be one of the toughest for parents. If you’re at home and your child is yelling angrily, it’s often best to play it cool and calmly leave the room.



- ✓ If the child isn't going to throw or break things or do anything to hurt himself, ignoring the behavior sends the message, "When you behave this way, you'll get no attention from me."
- ✓ In most cases of harmless, annoying behaviors, ignoring is the best way to go.

3. **Use diversion.** *An incredibly effective way to help 3 and 4 year olds stop an annoying behavior is to use diversionary tactics.* In simple terms, when he's making that noise over and over again that drives you crazy, say, "Hey, Johnny. Let's go play outside" or "Let's go have some milk and cookies in the kitchen."

- ✓ The wonderful thing about toddlers is adults can pretty easily divert their attentions to perform more acceptable behaviors. In fact, diversion works with some kids a few years older as well.

4. **Give a time-out.** If you watch television, you've most likely come across a show that uses the "naughty chair" as a way to discipline small children. However, you can also refer to the chair in a more neutral, less negative way. Call it the "time out" chair, for example, or any other creative and neutral name you prefer.

- ✓ Obtain a small chair to fit the size of the toddler. Store it out of the way as it's to be used only when the toddler is given a time out. ***When the toddler "acts out," or misbehaves, tell him in a neutral voice tone to sit in the time out chair.*** Basically, you're introducing your toddler to the concept of "taking a time-out."
  - ✓ ***Time spent in the chair should be very quick, a maximum of one minute for each year of his age.*** Avoid talking to or maintaining eye contact with the toddler while he's in the chair. Set a timer (microwave, cell phone or kitchen timer). When it dings, say, "Okay, you can get up now" and go about your business.
  - ✓ It's common for 3- and 4-year-olds to not sit in the chair on command. If you need to, take the child by the hand and walk her over to the chair. Gently sit her in the chair. Caution: If you're feeling frustrated or angry, refrain from touching the child until you've got your cool back.
5. **Avoid harboring negative feelings about the toddler or the behavior.** Speaking of your cool, as much as you love your kids, it's still challenging to refrain from forming trying feelings on occasion. However, ***it's your responsibility to let go of these feelings as they'll have no positive effect on your child.*** Remind yourself, "Kids will be kids," let go, and move on.

As much as you can, use reinforcement, ignoring and diversion when parenting 3- and 4- year- olds. Also, introduce your toddler to the time-out chair so he'll develop self-control and get prepared for success at school and in social arenas.

*"We are apt to forget that children watch examples better than they listen to preaching."*

**-Roy Smith**

## **YOUNG CHILDREN 5-6 YEARS OLD: INFUSE MORE COMPLEX TECHNIQUES INTO YOUR POSITIVE PARENTING**

You've made it through the toddler years and now have a young child that's attending school. She's going to be learning a lot at school and at home.

Think of your parenting as an opportunity to teach your child how to control her own behavior. ***Rather than you controlling her, think of it***

***as helping her be in control.*** In any given situation, ask yourself, “What should she learn now?”

An important aspect of parenting is ensuring kids experience consequences for their behaviors. Consider this: If little Annie refuses to wear her raincoat outdoors on a school day when it’s raining and she goes outside, what will happen? She’ll get wet and most likely cold. The natural consequences of her behavior will most likely “teach” her to put on her raincoat the next time.

Interestingly, ***parents sometimes intervene to try to override the natural consequences when allowing the child to experience them will teach the child a lesson more quickly and with much less fanfare.*** Consider the above raincoat example with Annie’s mother insisting, cajoling and pleading with Annie to put on her raincoat.

Their conversation ends with Mom forcing Annie to put her arms in her raincoat and Annie fighting against it.

By the time Annie leaves, she’s crying, stomping her feet and angry. What kind of day do you think she’ll have at school? Think of how different the day might go for Annie and Mom if Mom steps back and allows natural consequences to occur.

## More Positive Parenting Tips for Use with Children Aged 5-6 Years

Review these tips to parent your 5-6 year old children more effectively.

1. **Choose your battles.** Ask yourself, what needs to happen now?  
Maybe I can do nothing and the situation will resolve itself.
2. **Allow natural consequences to occur.** If Stanley goes to school without combing his hair, other kids will most likely notice and say something to him about it. The peer pressure will most likely “encourage” Stanley to comb his hair before school in the future.
3. **If necessary, provide consequences swiftly.** If the situation requires you to give your child a consequence, do so right away and without emotion.
4. **Make the consequence fit the “crime.”** With young children, keep consequences in perspective. It’s important not to go overboard with the idea of punishment. Rather think of how you can provide fitting consequences for the behavior. Let’s say you caught Stanley eating two cookies after you told him he’d had enough cookies.

- ✓ What type of consequences should you give? Sending him to time-out for 30 minutes is excessive. Depriving Stanley of today's after-dinner dessert is just right.

5. **Issue a warning.** When a 5- or 6-year-old misbehaves, state briefly to him to stop the behavior. Add that if he repeats the behavior, he'll get a consequence and tell him what it will be. This way, you've provided the child with an opportunity to make a better decision in the near future (not to do the behavior again).

**Here's an example:**

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If your 5 year old daughter slaps your 3 year old son, one way to handle it is to give your daughter a warning. Say something like, "Sally, it's unacceptable to hit Tommy" or "You're not allowed to hit your brother." Then, say, "If you hit Tommy again, you'll have to sit in the time-out chair." Then, move on with whatever you were doing.

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6. **Expect testing behaviors.** It's normal for a child to test out what you're saying from time to time. ***This is very important: be sure you follow through with the consequence you set whenever your child pushes the limits.*** Following through with this process helps

children learn to accept authority.

7. **Avoid setting consequences when you're irritated or angry.**

You're more likely to set too strict or too harsh of a consequence when you're emotional. Give yourself some time to think clearly and rationally. Plus, if you set too harsh of a consequence, you won't follow through with it because you know it isn't fair.

8. **Keep it short and sweet.** Avoid giving lectures or providing in-depth info about why a child this young shouldn't do a behavior. Most likely, they can't intellectually follow everything you're saying anyway. ***Parental lecturing is not part of a positive parenting strategy.***

9. **Remind the child what's expected.** If you consistently state in simple terms how the child is to behave when you're in a particular situation, it can be helpful to little ones.

10. **Use stickers and behavior charts.** Children in this age group respond beautifully to simple charts listing 3 or 4 behaviors you want them to work on. Parents put stickers on the chart when the child performs well on a particular behavior daily. At the end of the week, allow the child to choose his reward: go for ice cream, play at the park or select a movie to watch.

- ✓ In order for the chart method to work, parents have to do the work by noticing the child's behavior, putting up the stickers in a timely fashion, commenting on the behaviors, and following through with the big reward at the end of the week. Otherwise, kids will lose interest and their behavior will slip.

Use natural and applied consequences to rein in the behavior of 5- and 6-year-olds. Giving a warning, reminding of expectations and using stickers as reinforcers are also effective positive parenting strategies for use with kids who're just starting school.

*"Kids spell love T-I-M-E."*

**-John Crudele**

## **CHILDREN 7-11 YEARS OLD: OFFER MORE CHOICES AND ALLOW THE CHILD TO MAKE DECISIONS**

Children in this age group are more autonomous and often enjoy doing their own thing for short periods of time. Parents' roles with this



age group involve setting consistent behavior limits and allowing the child the space to make some choices on his own.

**Consider the following strategies when parenting children aged 7 to 11 years old:**

1. **Give rewards.** Remember to give rewards when kids behave as you desire. Those rewards/reinforcements tell the child he is displaying socially desirable behaviors.
2. **Continue to use behavior charts and stickers.** These charts and stickers can work on some kids as old as 9 or 10. However, in the event you believe your child has outgrown this method of positive parenting, go ahead and discontinue it.
3. **More and more, set up choices.** As children mature, they want to feel more in control of their existence and their situation. ***You can increase your kids' feelings of self-esteem and independence by presenting choices to them.***
  - ✓ If you set up choices that pair something that's attractive to the child with a desired behavior, your child will show signs of happiness and maturity at the same time. Tell the child, "You can do A (behavior) and get Y (reinforce) or you can do B and get Z."

Here's an example:

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"Miranda, you can either clean up your room this morning and have your friend, Sue, over this afternoon," or you can clean your room this afternoon before dinner and then watch a video."

Miranda says, "Can I have Sue over for dinner?" You say, "No, not this time as we're planning to have a family dinner out this evening."

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- ✓ In this example, Miranda can decide for herself when she wants to clean her room. Either way, the room gets cleaned, which is what you want done. However, if Miranda wants to have Sue over, she'll need to get her room in order this morning.
- ✓ You can set up more sophisticated choices for kids as they mature. Also, you can use choices as ways to increase a child's ability to weigh out decisions, which will come in handy as she approaches the teen years.

4. **Give time-outs.** Using time-outs are still quite helpful for kids of these ages. When planning a time-out setting, think of something that is “boring” for your child and where they are removed from others. It also must be easy to set up. One example of an effective time-out setting is the hallway outside of the laundry room. Place a chair in the hallway facing the wall.
- ✓ The child should not be able to see a television, listen to music or watch people doing something during time out. Stick with the rule of one minute in time out for each year of age. If time out is boring enough, kids will not enjoy it and therefore, the child will discontinue the undesirable behavior.
  - ✓ ***Time out in a child's room is likely not very effective since most kids' rooms are packed with toys, techno-gadgets, a television, and books to read.***
5. **Be specific.** With kids aged 7-11, be specific about what behavior you want. If you want the child to put his dishes in the sink after dinner, that needs to be spelled out. Let the child know it's *not* okay to go play games on the computer after dinner and state he'll put his dishes in the sink “later.” Be clear with your child about the behavior you want.

6. **Short explanations are okay.** Although brief explanations can be helpful, use caution in getting too elaborate with reasons children must do certain things. This is because children in this age group are beginning to develop reasoning skills and might possibly believe their own argument is a better argument than yours, which can lead to talking back or arguing.
7. **Know what motivates your child.** If your child loves to play computer games or go swimming, build those activities in as rewards/reinforcers for jobs and behaviors well done.

Children 7 to 11 years of age are maturing at a fast rate. They can play independently and even help out with tasks at home. These children are usually able to grasp rules and simple instructions and follow through with clearly given requests. They can weigh out simple choices.

*"Don't handicap your children by making their lives easy."*

**-Robert A. Heinlein**

## **TWEENS & TEENS 12+ YEARS OLD:**

### **PROVIDE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND FOLLOW THROUGH**

The tween and teen years can be quite turbulent for kids. You may be tested and challenged in your efforts to be effective with your children. When you know well just what goals you're striving for, parenting will be easier.

***Posting the rules, having clear expectations, negotiating if necessary, and allowing kids the opportunity to set their own consequences are the most effective ways to raise responsible, respectful kids.***

1. **Post the rules.** By this age, your kids should, for the most part, know what you expect of them. But just in case, it's wise to have the most important rules written down and posted on the refrigerator or in the family room.
2. **Make it clear.** When you're specific about what you expect, it's clearer cut for your tweens and teens. If the rule is, "Be in the house by 9:00 p.m.," there's very little the teen can question. A rule like, "Be home by dark" can be manipulated or stretched. Have the

tween or teen read the rule aloud and explain what it means so it's clear to both of you.

3. **Negotiate in advance. *If your teen wants to negotiate a rule, the time to do it is before she violates the rule.*** Here's an example:

Your teen, Renee, thinks that being home by 9:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights is too strict. She wants the time extended to 10:00 p.m. on those nights.

- ✓ If Renee brings up this issue before she goes out on a Friday night, listen to what she has to say. Tell her you'll think about it and talk with the other parent about it but that for tonight, the curfew will remain 9:00 p.m. Then, talk with the other parent and decide whether or not you believe her request is reasonable.
- ✓ What do the two of you think about Renee's request? If she's usually responsible, follows instructions cheerfully and does well at school, you might be willing to consider extending her curfew on Friday and/or Saturday to 10:00 p.m. or maybe just 9:30 p.m.
- ✓ But what if she's been getting lower grades recently and refusing to clean her room when asked? You might not be so sure about extending her curfew in this case.

- ✓ The point is that when you have a teen, it's normal for her to sometimes want to increase time to be independent. As parents, ***you'll need to decide if you believe she can handle additional freedom and be safe or not.***
- ✓ If you believe she's not yet ready for a later curfew, by all means, tell her so. Then, tell her diplomatically how she can earn the later curfew in the future.

4. **Allow teens and tweens to set their own consequences.** This strategy can be interesting. Some teens will occasionally make a poor choice like skipping school or lying to an adult and getting caught. Since these might be situations that aren't listed in your posted rules, as a parent you'll have to come up with an appropriate consequence.

- ✓ For tweens and teens who're typically responsible and well-behaved, parents can ask the kids themselves what they believe is an adequate consequence. Don't be surprised if the consequence your teen comes up with is actually harsher than the one you had in mind. ***Work with your teen to come up with a consequence that fits the misbehavior.***

- ✓ On the other hand, if your tween or teen has been acting out quite a bit and violating limits and boundaries, it usually works better for you to set the consequence rather than allowing the child to do so.
5. **Deprive them of privileges.** Speaking of consequences, depriving tweens and teens of privileges is one of the most effective ways to help them display more acceptable behavior.
- ✓ If your 16-year-old son comes in 30 minutes late, deprive him of the privilege of driving for a few days. If your 12-year-old daughter uses foul language, deprive her of her beloved computer time for the rest of the day.
6. **Listen well.** Kids in this age group often want to talk to someone. Be there for them just to listen. Try to turn off that evaluative, judging side. Otherwise, your child will gradually stop talking to you during these years he needs you the most.
7. **Give plenty of verbal boosts.** Tweens and teens are under unbelievable peer pressure at school. ***They need all the encouragement, love and respect you can give them on a daily basis to bolster their confidence and self-esteem.*** Keep this idea in your mind every day. You'll never know what you might have helped



your kid through simply by being positive.

8. **Refuse to debate or argue.** Because teens are maturing rapidly, they often develop strong and emotional feelings about things. Parents have the most positive effect by not engaging in a debate or argument with their teens. Doing so rarely results in anything helpful and can even be destructive to your relationship with your teen. ***Avoid pointless debates and arguments.***

Parenting tweens and teens is quite challenging but brings great rewards. Posting rules, being specific about what you want, negotiating in advance, depriving them of privileges, listening well, and providing plenty of positive talk will contribute successfully to your tweens' and teens' emotional growth and maturity.

*"Parents need to fill a child's bucket of self-esteem  
so high that the rest of the world can't poke  
enough holes to drain it dry."*

***-Alvin Price***

## SUMMARY

Regardless of the age of your children, ***using positive parenting methods will help you shape your kids into contributing members of society.*** Keeping your cool, being positive by avoiding debates/arguments and providing choices for your children as they grow will result in raising emotionally healthy and confident young people.

Apply these positive parenting techniques when parenting. If you do, your children will grow up in a stable home filled with consistency, respect and love.

*"The voice of parents is the voice of gods,  
for to their children they are heaven's lieutenants."*

***-Shakespeare***