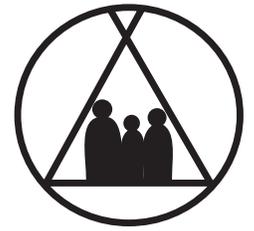


Principles of Child Rearing



Building a Positive Relationship with Your Child

Adapted from
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
(Alabama A & M and Auburn University)
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Most of us spend a lot of time talking only about a few things with our children. "Wash your hands." "Stop teasing your sister." "Do your homework." "Stop that." "Go to bed."

Think about each of your children. During the last week, what are the things you have talked (or yelled) about with each child? Make a note about whether the talk was friendly (helpful, happy) or unfriendly (angry, bossy, mean).

Discover
better ways
to have a healthy,
joyous, positive
relationship
with your
children

Name of Child	What we have talked about	Friendly?

The things we say and do with our children determine the kind of relationship we have with them. For instance, when you think about your relationship with your parents/caregivers as you were growing up, there are probably certain words that come to mind. Maybe *fear* or *happiness* or *closeness* or *anger* or *confusion*. How you feel about your childhood probably tells you a lot about your relationship with your parents. Some kinds of relationships help children develop. We call these positive relationships.

Relationships with our children may need to change

Often relationships with our children focus on control and correction. When parents control their children, they are trying to get the children to do things the children don't want to do. Or they are trying to keep the children from doing things they want to do. For example, have you ever tried to force a struggling child into a car seat? Have you ever tried to keep children from eating candy before dinner? Have you ever tried to get your children to do their homework, eat their vegetables, or stop fighting with each other?

Can you think of other examples?

Adults generally have more power than children. We are bigger and stronger. But it's hard to force people to do something they don't want to do. We can spend all of our time yelling at children and trying to bribe, convince, or force them to do what we want them to do. That's the trouble with control. It takes over the relationship. It can be the only thing that parents/caregivers and their children seem to talk about. And it's not a very good basis for a relationship.

Sometimes relationships with our children are based on correction. As parents/caregivers, we spend a lot of time telling our children what they do wrong. Sometimes our correction even becomes insulting. "How can you be

so dumb?" "Why can't you do anything right?" "Can't you think?"

Insults are damaging.

They do not give children useful information. They only make them feel bad. Even when we avoid insults, too much correction can be bad. Correction should not be the main part of our relationship with our children. There are better things to talk about.

Have you ever tried to get your children to do their homework, eat their vegetables, or stop fighting with each other?

Are control and correction always bad?

No. It is necessary for parents to control and correct their children at times.

But when control and correction are all that a child gets from parents, the child may become discouraged or rebellious.

Caregivers may have difficulties building a positive relationship with their children.

However, control and correction should not take over the relationship.

What can work better than control and correction?

Recently I asked a friend what she wanted her relationship with her strong-willed daughter to be like. She said that she was trying to make the relationship center on “opportunity.” She gave some examples.

Normally when Melissa has wanted to follow me up to the attic I have told her, “No. You’re too little. Go do something else.” Melissa would get mad and complain. I would yell at her. One particular day when I went up in the attic I decided to change how I acted. I invited Melissa to go up with me. I helped her climb the stairs, and I showed her the things we had stored. We looked in some of the boxes. We had fun together, and it only took a few extra minutes.

Opportunity is an excellent theme for a relationship. When children want to try something, we may be tempted to tell them no. But maybe we should find an acceptable way for them to try it.

I went to the mall with my baby and my 4-year-old. The 4-year-old wanted to explore the sitting area in the center of the mall. My natural answer was to tell her “later” and hurry on. Instead, I decided to sit with the baby for a few minutes and let the older girl explore. It only took a few minutes, and she loved it.

This wise mother took a few minutes to build a positive relationship with her child.

Affection is another excellent theme for a relationship. One good way you can build affection into relationships with your children is by taking time to do things that the children like to do. For example, little Andy loves to hike. Periodically his mother takes him for a hike.

Once in a while his dad takes him for a camp out. Andy gets the feeling that his parents really care about him. He feels their affection.

Another good way to show affection is to take time to read to and talk with children when you tuck them in at night (physical affection such as hugging, pat on the back, etc.).

How can I have positive relationships with my children?

In order to make your relationships with your children more positive, think about what you want your relationships to be like. Would you like to have more fun time with each child? Would you like to nag less often?

Think about the way you would like your relationship to be. Then notice when you say "no" without thinking. Is there some other way you can think to react? Can you distract or redirect the child? Can you get her busy doing something she likes to do? Can you take time to do something with him?

How can you build more opportunity and affection into your relationships and remove some of the control and correction?

Even as children get older it's good to redirect them toward acceptable choices. For instance, I might not feel good about my early-teen daughter going to a high school dance, but we can consider having a non-alcoholic party for her and her friends at our house. We can look for an opportunity that leaves us feeling good.

Go back to the list you made at the beginning of this publication. Notice whether the things you talked about with your children showed control and correction or opportunity and affection. Think about how you can make your relationship with each child more positive.

As you change your relationships with your children, be patient with yourself. It takes

time to make changes. Keep working at it. When you make a mistake, learn from it. Discover better ways to have a healthy, joyous, positive relationship with your children.

For more information, contact your county office of the NDSU Extension Service. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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Name of Child	What we have talked about	Friendly?



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