

Tips for Parents of Young Children

Supporting and guiding children's behaviour



Parenting.
Give it time.

www.gov.wales/giveittime





Introduction

The information in this booklet has been developed by the Welsh Government with the help of a range of organisations and professionals.

This booklet provides ideas for parents of young children on supporting children's development and guiding their behaviour in a positive way. "Parent" means anyone who is responsible for the care and upbringing of children.

There is no 'one size fits all' way to parent. Every child and every parent is unique and this booklet is not meant as a set of parenting rules that must be followed. It gives ideas so parents can make decisions about what can work for their child and family. It aims to help parents to build a positive, healthy relationship with their children.

The information provided gives general parenting information only. Parents of disabled children may face additional challenges which are not addressed in this booklet. There are details of organisations that may be able to help in the 'Further Sources of Support' section.

If you have any concerns about your child's development or behaviour please ask your GP or health visitor for advice.

There is more information, ideas and tips on the 'Parenting. Give it Time' website:

www.gov.wales/giveittime
and on our Facebook page
**[www.facebook.com/
MaguPlantRhowchamseriddo](https://www.facebook.com/MaguPlantRhowchamseriddo)**.
ParentingGiveittime.

Tips to encourage positive behaviour

Children are not born knowing what is acceptable and what is not acceptable behaviour. Young children don't have the ability to link their feelings, thoughts and behaviour in the same way adults do. Children learn to manage their emotions and their behaviour as they develop. As they grow they learn acceptable ways to respond to different situations.

Parents can best support this development by fostering a good relationship with their child and build on their child's wish to please. Children do not need to be afraid or feel pain in order to achieve this. Smacking does not teach children acceptable ways to behave. It may teach them that hitting others is an acceptable way to solve problems or respond when cross.

Here are seven ideas that have been shown to work to help you develop a good relationship with your child. These ideas will also encourage positive behaviour, boost your child's confidence and support them during each stage of their development.

All children are unique and will respond differently. If you try these ideas together and give them enough time to work they should help you in guiding your child's behaviour.



1. Make time for love and affection

If you have a warm, loving and affectionate relationship with your child it will help them feel safe and secure. When children feel secure they are more likely to be happy and confident, and be able to handle conflicts and anger. If your child feels secure they are more likely to be curious and start exploring, which will help them develop well.

Make time for cuddles and cwtches

Giving your baby or child lots of love and attention will help you become close. Making time to give them lots of cuddles every day will:

- make them feel calm and safe
- help them relax

- make them feel more secure and confident
- help them manage upsets and problems as they grow up
- strengthen their relationship with you.

Make the most of everyday activities

Daily activities like bath time, nappy changing, mealtimes and dressing are opportunities to connect with your child in a meaningful way. You could give your child cuddles, cwtches and tickles during nappy changes or bath time. On your way to the shops or school you could take a few minutes to point out something that might interest them. These interactions with your child don't have to take up much time but they can make a real difference.





2. Make time to listen, talk and play

Every child is unique. When you talk, listen and play with your child you will learn more about their needs and interests. This will not only help your child develop well, but it will also help you build a strong relationship.

Make time to talk and listen to your child

Learning to talk is one of the most important skills that children need to develop before they go to school. Being able to talk and communicate well is proven to help children make friends, learn to

read and have better opportunities in life.

Even in the womb, your baby can hear your voice. From birth your baby will respond to familiar voices.

The first two years of your child's life are very important. During this time they will learn all the skills needed for talking. These include looking, listening, copying and making early sounds.

Talking and responding to your baby and young child, as well as singing, playing and reading together will help your babbling baby grow into a happy and healthy talking child.

Words for Life (www.wordsforlife.org.uk) and Mudiad Meithrin (www.meithrin.cymru) have lots of ideas for activities to do with your baby or child to encourage them to talk.

Twf (twfcymru.com) has lots of resources to help you to use Welsh with your baby, even if you don't speak the language very well yourself.

Make time to play everyday

Play is fun for babies and children. It's also how they learn, and how

they work out who they are, how the world works and where they fit into it.

One of the most important things you can do with your child is play. The time you spend playing together gives your child lots of different ways and times to learn.

Your child will be happy if they have plenty of time and space to play. You don't need lots of expensive toys.



3. Make time for praise

Praise works better at encouraging the behaviour you want than criticising and punishing your child for problem behaviour. It helps your child feel good about themselves and feel good about you.

When you praise your child or baby for positive behaviour or learning a new skill, then they're more likely to repeat it.

Giving praise also helps you build a good relationship with your child, which will make you and your child happier.

Tips for giving praise:

- **Don't worry about praising your child too much.** They won't get big-headed or over-confident.
- **Give your child lots of praise when you see a desirable behaviour.** This helps your child learn what behaviour you like. Reward the behaviour with lots of attention, praise, cuddles and favourite activities. Try to avoid giving sweet treats as a reward.
- **Show your enthusiasm.** When you give praise smile and make eye contact. Praise given across a room, or running out of the door won't have the same impact.

- **Make it clear to your child what you are praising.** It will show you were paying attention and that you really mean it. Instead of just saying "Well done" say "I loved the way you shared your doll with your sister." Praise is not as powerful if you don't make it clear what you are praising your child for.



4. Make time to create order and structure to your day

Don't worry when young children test the limits. That's how they learn what is right and wrong. It is perfectly normal, but it can test our patience! It can help if you have regular routines and some family rules.

- **Routines will help your child feel safe and know what to expect.** You can make routines for young children around meals, snacks and sleep times. Find the routine that works for your family.
- **Let your child know if a change is coming.** Your child will come to expect and accept change better when they know it's coming.
- **Family rules teach your child what behaviours are acceptable.** Having a routine supports this learning.
- **Keep rules clear and simple, in keeping with your child's age and ability.** The number of rules you have will depend on your child's ability to understand and remember. With young children try to focus on two or three rules at any one time.

You can adapt your rules when your child is older and has the understanding and ability to follow them.

- **Talk to your child about exactly what you expect of them.** Tell and show your child what you want them to do instead of what you don't want them to do. For example say "Please put your toys in the box" and show them what to do, rather than "Don't leave your toys out".
- **Reward and praise your child for following routines and rules.** This makes it more likely that your child will follow the routines and rules in the future.



5. Take time to model the behaviour you want to see

From the moment they are born, children listen to what you say and watch what you do. Babies and children learn by imitating. By watching how you behave, your child will learn about how to react in similar situations.

You are your child's role model. Your child will repeat what they've heard you say and they'll imitate what they've seen you do.

Children are not born knowing what is acceptable and what is not acceptable behaviour. They learn this by watching how you behave and how you treat them and other people.

Children learn to express and manage their emotions by watching how you and other family members express and manage their emotions. You play an important role in showing your child how to express strong feelings. Try to keep calm when things get stressful. This will encourage your child to do the same. A child won't understand that hitting or shouting is not allowed if that is what they see you do.



6. Make time to look after yourself and manage stress

Being a parent is the most wonderful and possibly the most difficult role you will have. It isn't always easy and sometimes it can prove challenging.

Remember nobody is perfect and nobody gets it right all the time. Looking after a child can be hard work. Most parents feel negative emotions from time to time. These feelings are normal. It is important to manage feelings like anger and frustration so you can enjoy being a parent and have a safe, happy home for your child.

Try to set aside time for yourself

If you get a break to relax then you are more likely to be able to cope with everything. Take 10 minutes to have a bath, read a magazine or talk to a friend.

Get together with other parents and their children

Your child will enjoy the company of another child and you will enjoy some adult conversation. Your Family Information Service will be able to tell you what's on in your area. You can contact them by telephone on 0300 123 7777. The Family Point website (www.familypoint.cymru) also has information on services and activities in your area.



Anger

Most parents have times when they feel tested to their limits. Sometimes parents have trouble controlling their emotions and reactions. Learning to manage your anger will be beneficial to your health and your relationship with your child.

If you feel anger getting the better of you try to take some time out - leave the room briefly, count to ten, make a cuppa, phone a friend, breathe slowly.

If you feel angry in spite of everything you have tried, it may be worth getting some advice. It may help talking it through with a counsellor or getting some advice on managing your anger. You could speak with your GP about this or talk to the Family Information Service for services in your area.



7. Take time to think about how you respond to unwanted or problem behaviour

Even though it may not feel like it, a lot of the behaviour you think of as naughty is actually normal behaviour for your child's age and stage of development. Your child does not do this deliberately or intentionally.

When you see your child doing something you don't like, take a little time to think about how to respond.

What works:

- **Try to encourage everyone close to your child to deal with unwanted behaviour in the same way.** This consistent approach helps your child feel secure.
- **Plan ahead!** Put things that could harm your child locked away. When out and about, have some small toys to distract your child with or think of some games to play like 'I spy'.
- **Try to work out the reason for your child's behaviour.** Think about whether there are times when you see more unwanted behaviours. What triggers this behaviour? What



changes could you make to avoid this and break the cycle?

- **Ignore the little things.**

Children use noises, whining, whinging and stamping to gain attention. Rather than react and give attention to these behaviours, try to give lots of praise and attention to the behaviours you want to see more of.

- **Try distracting your child.**

Rather than focus on minor irritating behaviour try distracting young children. You can introduce a new activity, toy or game. If you can see that they are getting frustrated with an activity, you could suggest they do something else.

- **Don't ignore behaviours that are dangerous or destructive.**

Ignoring can work well for minor irritating behaviour. However, when your child behaves in an unacceptable way (e.g. hitting someone, or putting themselves in danger), gently and firmly move your child away from the situation.

- **For children over 3 - follow through with a consequence.**

If your child behaves in a way that is not safe or hurts someone or something you can follow through with a consequence. For example if your child throws sand - you remove them from the sandpit for a short time; if they throw a toy, the toy is put away for 10 minutes, if they draw on the wall you take the crayon away. A consequence must be followed through consistently.

- **No means no!** If you give in to pester power your child will learn they can get what they want by acting in that way.

What doesn't work:

- **Avoid too much criticism and nagging.** This may make your child feel like they can never get it right and affect their self esteem. Help your child by being

clear what you expect from them and model the behaviour you want to see.

- **Getting angry, yelling and smacking can turn things into a major battle.** This won't help your child learn to behave. Instead try to keep calm when things get stressful. This will encourage your child to do the same.



Further sources of information and support

Most parents need support and information from time to time. You may find the following sources of information and support useful.

Parenting Support

Family Lives provides information, advice, guidance and support on any aspect of parenting and family life.

Free Helpline on 0808 800 2222
www.familylives.org.uk

Cry-sis helps families who find it difficult to cope when their baby cries a lot.

Tel 08451 228 669
www.cry-sis.org.uk

NSPCC Cymru/Wales have a Helpline – 0808 800 5000 which offers help and advice. Bilingual Welsh/English service. Open 10am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Textphone 0808 100 1033
www.nspcc.org.uk

Family Support

Contact a Family Cymru is dedicated to helping families who care for children with any disability or additional need.

Free Helpline 0808 808 3555,
Textphone 0808 808 3556,
Tel 029 2039 6624

www.cafamily.org.uk/wales

Family Information Service

provides FREE information, support and guidance on all aspects of childcare and children and young people's services.

Tel 0300 123 7777

Family Point provides access to useful information for families and carers in Wales and links to local information.

www.familypoint.cymru

National Childbirth Trust

(NCT) supports families through pregnancy, birth and early parenthood.

Tel 0300 330 0770

www.nct.org.uk

Education begins at home

Hints and tips on how you can support your child at home and help prepare them for school.

www.facebook.com/beginsathome

Barnardo's Cymru runs a number of projects aimed at supporting children, young people and their families.

Tel 029 2049 3387

www.barnardos.org.uk/wales

Home-Start UK in Wales supports families with young children.

Tel 029 2049 1181

www.home-start.org.uk

Action for Children offer services to children and young people and their families.

Tel 029 2022 2127

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

Gingerbread Wales supports lone parent families in Wales.

Tel 029 2047 1900

Helpline 0808 802 0925

www.gingerbread.org.uk/content/462/Gingerbread-Wales

National Offenders' Families Helpline provides information on what to expect if a member of your family is arrested and what it means if they are charged.

Helpline - 0808 808 2003
(freephone: including most mobiles). Open 9am – 8pm

Monday to Friday and 10am – 3pm
Saturday and Sunday.

www.offendersfamilieshelpline.org

Families Need Fathers

because both parents matter is a charity which supports dads, mums and grandparents to have personal contact and meaningful relationships with children following parental separation.

Helpline 0300 0300 363

(9am - 10pm weekdays,
10am - 3pm weekends).

www.fnf.org.uk

Relationship Support

Relate Cymru offers advice, relationship counselling, mediation and support.

Tel 0300 003 2340

www.relate.org.uk/cymru

Domestic Abuse - Please call the helpline on 0808 8010 800 or visit the Live Fear Free website for more information and sources of support

www.livefearfree.gov.wales