

How to Help Your Child Succeed

Building Successful Partnerships' Parenting How-To's

At Home Activities

Let's talk – Talk with your child

Role-play with your children to practice how they would respond to peer pressure. For example, say to your children, "You are in the store with friends and one of them suggests stealing candy. What would you say and/or do?" Let them tell you what they would do. If they have difficulty you can talk about responses to negative peer pressure (to steal, take drugs, etc.) that parallel your values and beliefs. Asking questions instead of "telling" works best; e.g., if you think the children should have left the store, you can guide them in that direction by questions. "If caught, do you think the store owner might have thought you were guilty just because you were part of the group? What do you think would have been the best way not to be associated with the person who took the candy bar?"

Help your children find reasons for situations in which they don't want to take part; e.g., "My parents don't allow me to do that. If they find out I'll be grounded for life!"

Help your children suggest other things to do; e.g., "Let's go to the (fill in local teen activity) instead."

Help your children say 'no' and mean it; e.g., "I said 'no' and I really meant it." Talk about what it feels like to stand up for one's beliefs.

Reach for the sky – Set high but realistic expectations

Ask your children what jobs they would like to have when older. If your children seem unsure, read the newspaper help-wanted ads with them, check out a library book on careers, and help them select three possible careers. Ask your children to explain their choices and the kinds of training or skills needed for each one. Respect and accept your children's choices. Next, encourage your children to talk with adults who hold jobs in their areas of interest. Talk with your children about what they learned from the interviews.

I'm OK, you're OK – Build your child's self-esteem and confidence

As a family, make a point of looking for one another's achievements and commenting on them. For example, when a family member sees another member doing a good job, trying hard, or learning something new, recognize the latter person with a special family dinner or by doing an activity that the person enjoys.

An apple a day – Keep your child healthy

Plan time for family activities like playing outdoor games, going for bike rides or walks, or taking in a funny movie. Take out a family membership at the local YMCA, go bowling or swimming. Laugh and have fun.

Parents, the first teachers – Support learning at home

The next time your children have a project at school, help them with the following: Determine the nature of the assignment. Is it a report, a model, etc.; decide what tools are necessary to complete the assignment—a textbook, library research, etc.; break down large projects into manageable steps and decide the order in which things need to be done; determine how much time is needed to complete an assignment by creating a timeline.

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Workshop Activity – Parent and Child Scenarios

Here is a role-play activity for you and a partner to do during this workshop. Select one of the following scenarios with each of you alternating roles of the parent and child. As you go, listen to the “parent” speaking. Is the message clear in communicating the parent’s desires without focusing on the child’s shortcomings? Or are the child’s shortcomings the focus? If the latter, how will it make the child feel? Is there another way to get the message across?

After you’re home, try role-playing some of these scenarios with your own child or make up your own. Talk with your child about how he or she feels when you say things in a certain way. You should share your feelings, too; for example, “When you don’t do as I ask, it makes me feel...” Working through this exercise with your child helps you both look at how the other feels from a safe distance. When a situation is not “up-close and personal” it is easier to think things through and understand the other’s point of view so that you can respond in a way where everyone wins.

Sample Scenarios

1. Let’s talk – Talk to your child

The 10-year-old has agreed to sweep the kitchen, but hasn’t done a very good job – the floor is not very clean. How would the parent talk to the child about getting the floor clean? How would the child respond?

2. Reach for the sky – Set high but realistic expectations

The parent notices that the 8-year-old child likes to scale the “monkey bars” at the playground and does it with confidence and skill. How would a parent encourage the child while still cautioning her? How would the child respond?

3. I’m OK, you’re OK – Build your child’s self-esteem and confidence

The child completes his homework and cleans his room without being told; however, he forgets to change the cat’s litter box, which is his job (and one that he hates). How would a parent convince the child to clean the litter box? How would the child respond?

4. An apple a day – Keep your child healthy

This 15-year-old loves potato chips! They’re her favorite food and she eats them at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and in between meals. Her parents know that chips have little nutritional value and loads of calories. How could a parent convince her to go easy on the chips? How would the child respond?

5. Parents, the first teachers – Support learning at home

The child loves school, but mainly for its social value. He has learned how to read, but not very well. It has been difficult to motivate him to study and evenings are sometimes not very pleasant when trying to get him to complete his homework. What would a parent say to help turn this situation around? How would the child respond?

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School/Community Activities

Getting connected!—Communicate with your child's school

Use the following guidelines to have productive communication anytime with teachers or principals: Identify the purpose of your call or meeting; call, e-mail or write a note to the teacher letting him or her know you wish to meet and why; share your schedule and suggest that the conference be arranged at the teacher's convenience; plan for the conference by writing out clear and specific questions you want to ask (e.g., How does my child interact with others in group activities?); summarize each important point made to make sure there is mutual understanding of things discussed; get specific suggestions on how you can help improve the situation. Thank the teacher for talking with you. Do the activities suggested until progress is noticed, and talk with the teacher about the changes you see.

Oh, the places we'll go!—Encourage exploration and discovery

Buy a chemistry set for your children and try simple experiments at home. Plant a garden together. Encourage your children to build with blocks and tinker toys. Go for walks in your neighborhood, a park or forest preserve, or go exploring in your backyard for bugs, worms, different kinds of rocks, leaves, flowers, etc. Visit your local public library or art, history, science or children's museum, and inquire about the children's programs they offer. Take out a library card in your child's name. Consider a family membership or take advantage of discount and free days at museums.

Circle of friends—Help your child develop good relationships

Help your children think about the qualities people look for in a friend. Ask your children, "What do you think people look for in a friend?" Write down the qualities you and your children identify. Select the three qualities each of you feels are most important in a friend; compare and discuss them. (*You do not need to agree on them.*) Brainstorm ways to help your children develop the three qualities they felt were most important in a friend.

Stayin' alive—Keep your child safe

Share a story about a situation in which you felt threatened or unsafe. Describe how the incident made you feel; share what you said or did; tell your children whether you got help, how, and from whom. Discuss what else you could have done or what you could have done differently. Ask your children how they might respond to this type of situation or ask them to share a similar experience they have had at school, on the playground, or in the neighborhood.

Can I help?—Participate in community service

Participate in a community service project as a family. Some ideas include donating clothes and food to a community clothing or food drive; participating in a neighborhood project to clean up a park, a river, or heavily littered sites in the community. Assist in planting a community garden on community parkways.

Talk to your child's teacher for more ideas on what you can do at school or in the community to help your child succeed.

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Promote the school in the community

Take a moment and think... What can I do to promote the school in the community?

Here's an idea that takes little time. Write a letter to the editor of your community newspaper. Write the facts about an after-school activity, school/community program, or any positive school event that informs the community and perhaps will get you and others involved. Keep your writing clear and concise limiting it to no more than 250 words. Include in your letter facts about

- 1) who (sponsoring PTA or school);
- 2) what (event or activity title);
- 3) why (one or two reasons to attend);
- 4) where (location); and
- 5) when (time and date).

Can you see how simply writing to the community paper about positive student/community or PTA events is a way to get involved?

Workshop Activity—Role Play

This is a role play activity for two volunteers and the audience. One volunteer's role is as "your" child and the other as your child's friend. Imagine they are on the school grounds, while you watch the role play. Think about your response to the following:

School policy and family guidelines say "no leaving school grounds during school hours." When you find out your 5TH grader goes off the playground to the store at lunchtime, he or she says to you, "Everybody does it, what is the big deal?"

After the role play, discuss and determine what your group wants to communicate to help "your" child make a good decision next time? What can you say that helps your child stand up for him or herself while maintaining good relationships with peers?

At home talk with your child about what he or she would do in a similar situation to make a good decision. Listen to how your child stands up for him or herself. Discuss safety and prevention skills.