

Back to the Basics...10 Parenting Tips

By Nicole Schwarz, MA, LMFT

1. **Praise, praise, praise** - Research shows, the behavior that gets the most attention will increase - so, go out of your way to notice anything your child does well, anytime they respond the first time, make a good choice, says something respectful or thoughtful. Be genuine and sincere. Sometimes it deserves an animated cheerleader-like response, other times, a simple, "thanks for responding so quickly" will do the job.
2. **Allow Do-Overs** - Mistakes happen, people yell, things don't always go right the first time. Model "do-overs" for your kids, by asking to start a discussion over, apologizing if you became angry, or admitting you made a mistake.
3. **Remain Neutral and Calm** - Kids are masters at getting a 'rise out of us.' Don't give them that privilege. State your request, as calmly as possible. If needed, turn your attention to something else to keep yourself from yelling.
4. **Pick Your Battles Wisely** -Not every battle is worth fighting. You may hate that your daughter wears purple pants with a red shirt, but if you already have a number of other battles to fight, this one may have to wait.
5. **Give Choices When Possible** - For younger kids, you can give them the choice between the red cup or blue cup; a pear or an apple. It helps to build a sense of independence and decreases tantrums. For older kids, choices have greater consequences, which means that they need to be discussed in more detail - help them brainstorm solutions to a problem or think about possible outcomes of their choice.
6. **Know that "No" is an Unspoken Option** - Kids have their own opinions, which is a good thing in the long run...but makes it difficult in the moment. Which leads to the need for consequences...
7. **Consequences Should be Logical and Time Specific** -If your child chooses to play his Xbox instead of getting ready for school, he should lose the Xbox for a specific period of time. If you find yourself taking away snacks, time with friends, *and* visits to grandma's house or grounding him for weeks or months at a time - stop - and think "is this consequence going to improve his chances of getting ready for school or am I just angry and feeling out-of control right now?"
8. **Keep Verbal Reminders Short** - Kids tune parents out quickly, keep your reminders short, "Aaron - Shoes - Now" or "Katie, the dog is waiting to be fed." No need to go on and on about the importance of doing this task.
9. **Use "If...Then" Phrasing** - "If you finish your homework, then you can watch TV." Again, short and to the point. Repeat this phrase as often as necessary. Once you've stated the expectation and the reward (or consequence, which is not being able to watch TV) there is no need to discuss anything else. They can choose to follow through or receive the consequence.

10. **Ignore the Noise** - What is your goal? Stay focused. Don't feed in to statements such as "you're the meanest mom ever," or "none of my friends have to do the dishes" or worse. Restate your expectation; you do not need to defend yourself or your expectation as long as it is developmentally and age-appropriate for your child.

Nicole Schwarz, MA, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, provides therapy to children, adolescents and their families at River City Clinic. Schwarz' practice focuses on teaching positive parenting techniques and strategies to decrease conflict and improve communication within the family. For more information go to www.NicoleSchwarzCounseling.com or call 651.646.8985 to schedule an appointment.