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10 Guidelines for Living with Children

by North Carolina ABCD Project
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1. **"Catch 'em being good."**
   The single most important rule in living with a child is to work very hard to praise or attend to the child when he is being appropriate (not when **you** feel like it). Being appropriate includes everything (depending on the parents personal preference) from playing quietly with siblings to doing homework, to being a good sport.
2. **"Let them help you."**
   The second most important rule is to let your children help you with the variety of activities involved in everyday living. This is much better than doing the job or task by yourself because it is too difficult for the child to do. Most children enjoy helping their parents and cna learn a great deal while doing so. The "helping" might just consist of simulated "work" in your vicinity, but it is still good to have them with you.
3. **Monitor your children.**
   When your child is playing quietly - catch him being good! Don't fall into the old trap that you don't want to disturb him. Check on your child frequently (at first, every 10 minutes or so; then gradually decrease your monitoring to every 30 minutes or so) you can then give him lots of feedback on what he is doing. But don't disrupt activities that you wish to encourage, a five or ten second interaction is all that is necessary.
4. **Home routines and responsibilities should (within reason) be orderly and predictable.**
   Don't let toddlers decide their own timetables. You should decide on a reasonable bedtime and stick to it. Don't do all of the housework yourself. " Your most important job is that of teacher." Don't use all of your time being a maid, a cook, etc.
5. **Discipline and enforcement of discipline should be as matter of fact as possible.**
   When a child breaks a rule, he should pay for it in whatever way you enforce broken rules. Once a child has paid for a broken rule, no part of the incident should ever be mentioned again. It is much better to have a child sit in a kitchen chair or sit on the sofa for three or four minutes than it is to spank him. The first spank is for the child; all of the rest are for you. For a younger child, try placing him in his crib until he is quiet for five or ten seconds: then go in and pick him up. Don't be reluctant to have a child sit on the chair 10 or 15 times in one day if he deserves it.
6. **Lectures belong in lecture halls; not in homes.**
   Do **not** lecture your children - not even under the guise of reasoning with them. Threats and nagging are useless in dealing with children. In fact, threats probably make children worse, not better. Talking with your children is important; however, be careful to avoid talking with them only at times of crisis or problems. Rather, spend your time talking with them when things are pleasant and running smoothly. For example, if you and your child are working together or going somewhere together,

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that is the perfect time to talk with your child. With smaller children, talking to them a lot is a good way to get language development started. Just try carrying on a running description of what you are doing.

7. **Show sympathy when you discipline.**
   When a child has to miss a movie, a trip to McDonald's or an opportunity to play a game with a friend because he hasn't been behaving, you should be sympathetic with him, but don't give in. Make sure that this sympathy doesn't last over a minute.
8. **Prompting and modeling, or imitating.**
   Children learn by what they see, and hear you and others do. If your child breaks one of the house rules and you handle the whole issue "matter-of-factly," then your child will learn that problems can be handled "matter-of-factly." If you yell when you are mad, you can probably expect your children to follow that example. Show your children that you can handle problem situations without losing your cool.
9. **Be a mother, not a martyr.**
   Find a **good** babysitter or preschool, and take a breather. (Fathers, by the way, make excellent babysitters.) It's very desirable for a mother to spend time alone with other adults. If your child spends most of his waking hours with a babysitter, you can expect him to behave a lot like that babysitter, so choose babysitters carefully.
10. **Parents are teachers.**
    Whether you program it or not, whether you intend it or not, you teach your children through your interaction with them. If you only pick them up when they are crying, you teach them to cry more often. With younger children, in particular, what you do is much more important than what you say.

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