

Top 10 Parenting Tips

These key tactics come in handy when you're raising kids.

By **Gina Shaw**

FROM THE WEBMD ARCHIVES 

Parenting advice changes so often that it's easy to feel like you're doing it wrong no matter what.

But Laura Markham, PhD, author of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*, has her own tips that have nothing to do with choosing between grounding and the time-out chair. Instead, they're all about your relationship with your child.

1. Connect.

Set aside "10 minutes of special time with you every day for each child. Call it 'Hannah time' or 'Ethan time,' so they know it's all about them. One day, they pick what to do. The next day, you pick. But focus all your attention on your child, with all your heart.

"Make sure any siblings are occupied elsewhere -- and put your phone away! Ninety percent of your interactions with your child should be about connecting so she can accept the 10% about correcting."

2. Control your own emotions first.

"No matter what the issue -- bad grades at school, **temper tantrums**, refusal to eat dinner -- before you intervene with your child, always start by calming yourself. Most of the time, an issue with your child may feel like an emergency, but it isn't. You can take a deep breath and step away in order to calm yourself and be the parent you want to be."

3. Reconnect when you set limits.

"Don't yell, 'Clean up your Legos, it's time for bed,' from the kitchen. Go to where he is, get down on his level, and take a look at what he's doing. We're always rushing kids through the schedule. Take a minute to sit down and admire what he's made -- then talk about **bedtime**. If you set your limit with empathy, he's more likely to cooperate."

4. Don't shut down the conversation.

"If your child says, 'I hate math! I'm never going to school again!' he's probably not just being difficult. Heightened emotions mean something's going on. If you just say, 'Of course you're

going to school, now do your homework,' you've closed the door on finding out what he's really feeling.

"Instead, open the door by saying something like, 'It sounds like you really don't like math. Can you tell me about it?' That helps the child feel safe opening up to you."

5. Welcome tears.

"Part of your job as a parent is helping your child manage his or her emotions, and sometimes we all need to cry. Parents think that when kids cry you have to quickly calm them down, but it's the opposite. Teach them that those big emotions, like hurt and anger, aren't dangerous. If you see your child getting cranky or aggressive, take a minute to acknowledge your own irritation (see tip No. 2) and then shift to compassion and empathy.

"Your job is to help your child feel safe enough to express the big, scary feelings – and yes, even let him have a meltdown in the safety of your arms. If he can't articulate them, you can help him show you by setting kind limits, saying something like 'Oh sweetie, I see you're upset. I'm sorry this is so hard.'"

6. Take lots of time for laughter.

"Kids need belly laughs. Set aside time for roughhousing and goofiness. Laughter helps kids feel safe, and helps them transition when they have to leave you for school or a babysitter, because they feel connected.

"But I don't recommend tickling to get kids laughing. ... It doesn't accomplish the goal of release, and it can make kids feel out of control."

7. Avoid power struggles.

"We are told as parents that we're supposed to be in charge, and children are supposed to do what we say. But no one wins a power struggle, so don't get stuck on showing who's boss.

"For example, if your child always resists dinner, think about the real needs involved. If she says she's not hungry now but then she's hungry later, maybe she means it. Is it the end of the world if she eats her dinner while you read her **bedtime** story?"

8. Don't take it personally.

"If your child is upset and lashes out, it's usually not about you. Don't attack back. If your child is rude to you, I would try responding, 'Ouch! We don't speak to each other that way. You must be very upset to talk to me like that.' That opens the door for talking instead of escalating."

9. Help your child learn self-discipline.

"Self-discipline is giving up something you want for something you want more. That's essential as a child grows up. If they want to get good at something, they have to learn to manage themselves through the hard spots. If his train tracks won't fit together or her puzzle is too hard, empathize with the frustration and encourage your child to work through the problem."

10. Never interrupt a playing child.

"OK, you can't always follow that rule. But play is a child's work. If they love doing something so much that they lose themselves in it, that's the kind of passion and flow they'll need to be successful in whatever they do as an adult."

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SOURCES ▼

SOURCE:

Laura Markham, PhD, clinical psychologist; author, *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids: How to Stop Yelling and Start Connecting*, Perigee Books, 2012.