

Positive Parenting For Young Siblings And Their Brothers And Sisters With Developmental Needs

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When a child is in need of developmental assistance everyone in the family feels it. Fortunately efforts have been made to learn more about the various effects (including positive ones) that this experience can have on siblings. Though parents already have a lot on their plates, they often worry that as they focus on meeting the needs of their child in services, they find themselves short on time for siblings and even shorter on time for themselves. Parents share that siblings sometimes press them for attention, and get it in less than desirable ways, leaving no one feeling satisfied. To try to turn this around, it may be worth exploring some ways to promote behaviors we desire in children as opposed to reacting to and managing misbehavior. This positive approach to children can create harmony, encourage independence and have lasting positive effects on social emotional development.

The following is taken from some of the strategies of the Triple P Positive Parenting Program developed by Matthew Sanders, Carol Markie-Dadds and Karen M. T. Turner to promote positive relationships with children and encourage desirable behavior. They are coupled here with suggestions based on sibling information taken from articles about Dr. Debra Lobato's work, and articles written by Marci Wheeler and by Don Meyer of the Sibling Support Project.

A First Step Toward Positive Parenting; Giving Children Quality Time

Right out the gate you may say...., but THIS is the problem. I have NO time. Consider this; when children are getting into mischief, we almost always find the time to correct them. They have gained our attention AND our time by doing something we did not want them to do. Receiving quality time can diminish the frequency of attention seeking behavior while promoting positive relationships between parents and children.

Quality time can be as little as a few minutes given frequently throughout the day, to read a book to your child, listen to them sing a song, admire their artwork, writing, or the like. Also, if you can try to be at least briefly available when children come to you, you can help them see that they can receive AND let go of your attention appropriately.

Your private time and attention is high on the list of what siblings say they need when parents are spending lots of time tending to a brother or sister with developmental or medical challenges. To continue meeting this need, if at all possible try to put in place a regular schedule of private time with siblings, so they can count on at least briefly being alone with a parent.

Talk With Children

Parents can sometimes find this challenging in daily childrearing. After all, how deep can these conversations be, *unless* you see the magic of what it means to be a child in discovery. More than directing children or giving them information, talking and listening can teach conversational and social skills. It also boosts children's self esteem. When you think back as a child about the special adults in your life, can you remember the ones that showed genuine interest in what you had to say? Those people made us feel valued, and that feeling is why we remember them in a special way. Think about what your children find interesting, and what you might share as opportunities arise. Do your best to talk with them while doing things together, until it becomes second nature. Also, you need not be limited to what is right in front of you. After all, if you were sharing a meal with a friend or your partner

and all you talked about was the food, it would not be very stimulating, and you wouldn't get to know each other any better. Talking with children helps build positive relationships. Get to know your children better and better through conversation.

Take Time To Show Affection

Receiving affection helps children develop secure attachments and trusting relationships. Giving affection to your children is one way of showing them that you care for them. Just as you would with quality time, take moments throughout the day to display brief expressions of physical caring. Choose ways that you and they find comfortable, and help them develop their abilities to give and receive appropriate affection that matches. Isn't it a pleasant surprise to receive an unsolicited expression of affection from your child? You can do the same for them. Brief displays of affection throughout the day, especially when children are behaving well helps develop positive relationships.

Use Descriptive Praise To Encourage Desirable Behavior

Encouraging behavior that you like increases the chances that children will repeat that behavior. Ignoring undesirable behavior (done correctly and in appropriate situations) can decrease the behavior.

Most of us like to be praised, children and adults alike. For example, if you make the special effort to cook a favorite meal for someone, and that person consumes it without a word of appreciation, then leaves you to take care of the dishes, the chances of their seeing that meal in front of them any time soon has likely diminished. On the other hand, expressions of appreciation, especially specific descriptive praise about your special efforts will likely encourage you to make that meal again.

Encouraging desirable behavior in children by using praise that describes exactly what you like can sometimes feel a bit unnatural, but being clear and specific makes a big difference. With a little practice it will become something you and your child get used to. This will mean adding to your repertoire of less specific praises like "Good girl", more specific descriptions such as, "Jenna, thank you for picking up your toys right away when I asked. Your room looks great", or "Thank you for remembering to wait until I am off the phone. That was very polite. Now, what did you need?"

By necessity siblings of children with developmental needs are often asked to pitch in, sometimes earlier and sometimes more often than in other families. Appreciating when sibs are helping out and making things easier is worthy of descriptive praise. When asked about their experiences of having a brother or sister with special needs, siblings have shared their belief that these experiences resulted later in life in some positive attributes. These included their having tendencies toward being charitable, being more sensitive to humanitarian efforts, and having a sense of closeness to family. It is worth recognizing these wonderful possibilities early, and encouraging this kind of desirable behavior by giving children clear, specific and descriptive praise for their help.

Provide Engaging Activities

Hearing your child say "I'm bored..." ranks right up there with "Are we there yet?" While there is nothing to do but keep driving until you ARE there, there is much you can do to provide engaging activities for children, thereby reducing the chances they will show you in some inappropriate way that they need something stimulating to do. Engaging activities promote children's development and can help them learn to play without the need for your constant attention. Materials for activities need not be store bought. Your home is a classroom full of learning resources disguised as Tupperware, spoons, junk mail, empty paper towel rolls, masking tape and the like. When thinking about the kinds of things

your children might enjoy, consider some for indoor activities and others for outings. Engaging activities can be particularly effective on those outings that tend to challenge or try a child's patience when left with little to do but watch or wait for you. Look in the library or at online websites for activities that match your children's ages. You may be surprised to see how many sites you find just by typing keywords like *Activities For*, or *Teacher Resources* into your search engine. Of course, providing engaging activities will fit right in with praising your children specifically for their good behavior, their ability to play independently, and for their creativity.

Take Care of Yourself, So You Can Set A Good Example Children Learn What They See, Hear And Experience

Parents try to cover all the bases but there are some things over which they have little control. Even one's best efforts can seem to fall short with some children. For example the temperament of a sibling may simply be such that they just take more work. When this is added to the often extraordinary efforts involved in caring for a child with developmental needs, it is a recipe for an exhausted parent.

With so many demands on parents' time the idea of taking care of oneself can easily move to the back burner. It is however one of the things over which you can exert some degree of control. By taking care of yourself, you will be tending to your own social emotional health, which in turn can help you be mindful of the social emotional health of your children. If this kind of reasoning resonates for you, use it as your motivation for taking some time for yourself.

The obstacles to taking care of oneself come easily to mind. They include lack of Time, Child Coverage, Resources and Motivation. They are the big 4 that must be created or found. Talking with others helps. With support and ideas from other parents or friends, you may build motivation, find just a little time for yourself, ask for a little more help covering the children, employ a little more creativity with your resources, or learn something new from someone who knows about resources in your community.

Taking care of oneself can take many forms. Talk to a friend, your partner or a professional about how you are feeling. Have adult conversations and a good laugh. Express yourself physically, spiritually, through art, music, writing or in whichever ways you have enjoyed but have put on hold. Set aside a little time to read a good book or a magazine that you like, so you can flex your brain. Like children, parents need a good mix of stimulation and rest.

A parent's physical and mental health are important factors in childrearing. They influence how we approach and meet the needs of our children. When parents are on edge, tired, or short of time it is hard to display tolerance and compassion. Conversely, when parents feel taken care of they are more likely to be patient and more calm in their guidance. Children learn how to treat others by what they see, hear and experience. Increase the chances of setting good examples by taking care of yourself.

Parenting is not an easy job but it is the most important job in the world. With some tools at the ready, parents may breathe easier knowing they are making efforts to encourage desirable behavior while promoting positive relationships with their children.

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