

Top eight responsive parenting tips

1 Create a nurturing, loving and affectionate environment for your child

- Your child will feel loved when you cuddle, rock, touch, and sing with them.
- A loving environment will help your child to develop trust and connect with you. It helps your child's brain develop.
- These early experiences set the foundation for lifelong relationships and learning.

Love grows brains - Mary Gordon

2 Respond to your child's cries

- Crying is the most important way your baby communicates their needs.
- Crying is normal, it is important to respond to your child's cries.
- Pay attention; respond consistently, quickly, and affectionately particularly when they are sick, hurt, upset, hungry, sad, frightened or lonely.
- Use words and facial expressions that match your child's feelings, for example, *you are sad*.
- Some children cry more than others do. If you have a child that cries a lot, you may need help from family, friends or others if you are feeling overwhelmed.
- If you are angry and upset, calm yourself before you pick up your child. If you cannot calm yourself, do not pick up your child, get help.
- Comforting your child when they cry will not spoil them. It helps them learn to trust you and soothe themselves. This may be different from what your parent's did.
- Try to imagine what your child might be feeling or thinking.
- **Never shake or hurt your baby/child.**

*Have fun
with your child.
Laugh and enjoy
your child.*

*Parents cannot know what
their child's needs are all the time.
What matters is how you respond to
your child most of the time.*

3 Respond to your child's other cues

- Other cues include eye contact, looking, smiling, cooing and body movements.
- When your child looks at you; attend to them, play, smile, and talk to them.
- Notice and talk about what your child is looking at. This is what they are interested in at that moment.
- When your child smiles, coos or babbles; copy the sounds and expressions. This will encourage them to do it again and will strengthen your connection with them. It will also help develop language and social development.
- When your baby looks away, they might be tired and may need a break.

4 Respond to your child's feelings

- Feelings include happiness, excitement, anger, jealousy, fear and sadness.
- It is typical for children to have strong feelings. Do not deny them.
- As parents we need to help our children learn to express, understand and deal with their strong feelings.
- Name or label what you think your child is feeling to give them a word for the emotion. For example, if you see your child stomping her feet and/or frowning: you could say, *I think you are mad*.
- Accept your child's feelings. For example, *I understand you are angry*.

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- Helping your child identify their emotions will lead to better relationships with you as well as others. It will also help increase problem solving skills.
- The following statements can make your child feel ashamed of their feelings, unable to express or deny their feelings, and may lead to behaviour problems. Avoid saying:
 - ♦ You have nothing to cry about.
 - ♦ You are not hurt.
 - ♦ Don't cry.
 - ♦ You're okay.
- **Never ignore, laugh, tease, mock or respond with anger at your child.**

5 Connect with your child through play

- Get down at their level.
- Play face to face.
- Show interest in their play
- Allow your child to lead the play.
- Join your child's play.
- Copy their actions, sounds, words
- Give them time to respond, wait until they are ready to change.
- Let your child choose or set the pace of how fast or slow the play moves.
- Make comments and avoid asking questions. For example, say *That is an interesting way to build tower*, not *Why are you doing it that way?*

6 Take advantage of everyday moments

- Brief moments of play with your child throughout the day can be more valuable than one long scheduled playtime.
- Respond to your child's initiation of an activity or an interaction.
- Use tiny moments to share your child's interest.
- Respond to your child's interest throughout the day. For example, when your child wants to show you something, take the time to get down at their level and share in the experience. If you are busy, attend to them briefly, and tell them you will come back to them when you have more time. Remember to come back later.

7 Temperament

- Know your child's temperament and your own.
- Temperament is another word for personality.
- All people are born with their own temperament.
- Your child's temperament might be different from your own.
- Although all children go through the same phases of development, they each have a unique way of approaching the world. Is your child easy going? Cautious? Spirited?
- Understanding your child's personality can help you adapt your parenting approach.
- Understand, appreciate and learn more about your child's temperament.
- Different children may have different temperaments so you may have to respond differently.
- Be aware that your own temperament will affect your parenting style.

8 Learn and understand different stages of development

- This can assist your parenting and help you plan ahead.
- It helps you learn what to expect from your child, for example, most toddlers go through an aggressive stage.
- It helps you guide your strategies, for example, most preschoolers do not understand long explanations.
- It helps you plan experiences and activities, for example, many toddlers and preschoolers have short attention spans. Therefore, if you are reading with them, you may not be able to read every word of a book.

Further Reading

<http://www.capitalhealth.ca/nr/default.asp>

<http://www.investinkids.ca>

