

# PARENTING AS A PROCESS

Every parent experiences both challenges and joy with their young children. Parenting young children is hard work! Very young children can't communicate like adults, and it can be difficult to understand what they need. Many parents struggle through the challenges and feel like they aren't doing a good enough job, especially if they themselves had a tough time as children.

The good news is that you don't need to know all the answers in order to be a good parent. In fact, it may help to think of parenting as a process through which you're learning new things all the time. And just like learning anything new, the more you practice, the better you get.



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There are simple things you can do to improve the connection with your child that will help you feel better, too. For example, doing things like talking, reading and singing with your child bring you closer together, and teaches them important social-emotional skills that will boost their ability to learn and improve their relationships with others.

Here are a few research-based ideas that can help you develop strong connections with your child and teach them important social-emotional skills.

## FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD

Some babies are quiet; some fuss a lot. Some toddlers are quick to tantrum when tired or hungry, while others will take a little longer to get upset. Young children develop at their own pace and have their own patterns of learning and reacting. It helps to learn your child's tendencies, and to ask yourself what they might be feeling in a challenging situation so that you can respond calmly and consistently to their needs.

## THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN CHILDHOOD

How do your feelings of guilt, anger, or neediness from your own childhood influence the way you feel about your child, or your child's behavior? The more you understand your feelings about your past, the better prepared you will be to respond positively to your child when they are upset. And, your calm response will teach them how to manage their emotions.

## PAUSE, REWIND, THEN PLAY

It's typical for parents and caregivers to be irritated or frustrated sometimes by their young children. Yet emotions like these can cause negative reactions in your child, which can increase your frustration even more. If you find yourself becoming angry or depressed, place your child in a safe place and take a few minutes to separate yourself from the situation. Then, think about what just happened: was your baby tired, hungry, or overstimulated? Are there other things like work or finances that have you feeling stressed? Once you take time to reflect and calm down, you can come back to your child recharged.

## “IT’S NOT WHAT I DID, IT’S WHAT I DO NEXT”

The first step when you think you've done something with your child that didn't work is to recognize and admit it to yourself. The second step is to forgive yourself – to think and believe you'll do a better job next time. This is important because if you can be kind to yourself, you'll be freer to understand what went wrong and how to improve. Finally, many people feel better by explaining what happened to a friend or relative they trust. This can help you feel less alone, and help you think of different approaches to use in the future.

# LEARNING ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Here are some basic age-appropriate ways that you can improve connections with your child:

## BIRTH TO 9 MONTHS OLD

- Watch your baby closely and spend quality time doing things together every day like talking, reading and singing with your baby. By observing your child, you will learn to recognize their patterns of sleep, hunger, and activity, and can be responsive to their needs. Your baby will learn that you are paying attention and want to be there for them.
- Some parents feel sad or depressed after the birth of their baby. If you are feeling sad or anxious often, don't suffer in silence—talk to your doctor about how to get help.

## 9 MONTHS TO 18 MONTHS OLD

- Increasing independence is typical. Older babies want to explore the world, so encourage this independence by letting them do more things on their own, and firmly—but kindly—stopping them when they do something that isn't safe. And remember that this behavior is part of typical toddler development.
- Take time for yourself. As your baby enters toddlerhood, you may find that the demands on your time and patience can make you feel helpless or frustrated. Take time to care for yourself, too—the calmer and more stable you feel, the better able you are to care for your baby with love.





Want to learn more about how to improve your connection with your child? Check out our video “Neroliza: A Supermom Practices Self-Forgiveness” and find more tips at [talkingisteaching.org/big-feelings](https://talkingisteaching.org/big-feelings)

## 18 MONTHS TO 24 MONTHS

- Keep calm. You can help your young toddler learn how to manage their emotions by remaining calm when they get upset, and then talking with them about what you think they might be feeling. When you can calm yourself during difficult situations, your child learns the appropriate way to respond.
- Let them make safe choices. As toddlers learn how to communicate, they may be more interested in picking out their own clothes or food. Offer them “either/or” choices, so they feel more in control.

## 24 MONTHS TO 36 MONTHS

- Think about your reactions. Observe your child’s behavior and then think about how you feel: do you get angry when they’re yelling, or feel embarrassed when they’re afraid? The more you understand about your reactions to your child’s behavior, the better your connection to them.
- Look for special moments to talk with your child. Use stories, songs and books to explore feelings together. These special moments will encourage their social-emotional development and prepare them for future relationships.

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