

How Can I Teach Kids to Be Smart About Strangers?

When I'm out with my young children, friendly strangers often approach us to smile and say hello. Although I'd like my kids to be polite, I also want to teach them not to talk to strangers. How can I avoid sending mixed messages?

- Suzanne

"Don't talk to strangers" has been the mantra of many parents for generations. But contrary to this age-old wisdom, sometimes it's actually a good idea for kids to talk to strangers. Who else will they turn to if they're lost and need help? So, instead of making a blanket statement, it's better to teach kids when it's appropriate to talk to strangers and when it is not.

When your kids are out with you, it's fine to let them say hello and talk to new people. You are monitoring the situation and will protect them. But if your child is alone and approached by a stranger, that's a different story.

Tell your child that if a stranger ever approaches and offers a ride or treats (like candy or toys) or asks for help with a task (like helping find a lost dog), your child should step away, firmly yell "No!" and leave the area immediately. Your child should tell you or another trusted adult (like a teacher or childcare worker) what happened. The same goes if anyone — whether a stranger, family member, or friend — asks your child to keep a secret,



tries to touch your child's private area, or asks your child to touch theirs. Most kids are likely to be wary of strangers who are mean-looking or appear frightening in some way. But the truth is, most child molesters and abductors are regular-looking people, and many go out of their way to look friendly, safe, and appealing to children. So, instead of judging a person by appearance, teach kids to judge people by their actions.

Perhaps just as important, encourage kids to trust their own instincts. Teach them that if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or if they feel like something's just not right — even if they can't explain why — they need to walk away immediately.

So, what happens if your kids are alone and need to approach a stranger for help? First, they should try to find a person in uniform, like a police officer, security guard, or store employee. If there are no uniformed people, grandparents, women, and people with children may be

able to help. And again, remind them about instincts: If they don't have a good feeling about a certain person, they should approach someone else.

Although it's not possible to protect kids from strangers at all times, it is possible to teach them about appropriate behaviors and what to do if somebody crosses the line. Keeping these tips in mind can help kids stay safe while they're out and about.

Reviewed by: [Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD](#)

Date reviewed: July 2013



Caring for your baby's teeth

Good dental care can start as soon as your baby's teeth are visible, which typically begins at approximately four months of age. Initially, you may want to use a washcloth to clean your child's teeth and eventually move to a small toothbrush. Also, begin regular dental appointments for your child during his or her first year. This will give your child a chance to get used to the dentist and get comfortable with these new surroundings, all of which will make future dental appointments much easier. While toothpaste may not be necessary for a baby, children should begin using a small amount on a child-sized brush at the age of two or three.

Although you may think that it is not necessary to emphasize dental habits until adult teeth begin to come in around age six, baby teeth act as placeholders for the permanent teeth, and damage to them can cause substantial problems later. Baby teeth need to avoid cavities through a child's early years. In addition, smart dental habits established at a young age will set the stage for life-long healthy habits. Children who have brushed their teeth or had them brushed since they were babies are more likely to understand the importance of this as they grow and develop permanent teeth.

Electric toothbrushes for kids

Electric toothbrushes are a more efficient alternative to traditional brushes. They are more effective at reducing tooth decay because of their ability to clean hard-to-reach places that are difficult for children to access on their own. The spinning motion of an electric toothbrush helps to ensure that each part of the tooth is being effectively cleaned. Some electric toothbrushes also make a different sound every 30 seconds to help your children know when to switch to a different section of their mouth.

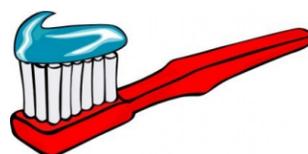
While electric toothbrushes are smart, they're also fun. They are available in a wide range of colors and designs and provide entertainment at tooth brushing time, much more so than a traditional brush.

10 children's dental health statistics

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost 20% of kids between the ages of two and 19 have cavities that have not been treated.
- New York Presbyterian Hospital states that tooth decay is found in 20% of children ages four and five, with 86% having some form of tooth decay by age 17.
- More than 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental related problems.
- Dental problems can affect the self-esteem of children, making them reluctant to smile or engage in conversation.
- Poor dental care can result in poor nutrition and sleep problems for children.
- Tooth decay is five times more common than asthma in young children.
- Tooth decay can be caused by formula, breast milk and juice sitting against the teeth. Children should not fall asleep with a bottle, and continuous use of a sippy cup with sweet drinks should be avoided.
- Drinking water is ideal for developing teeth.
- Children should begin regular dental visits at age one.
- Children should have their teeth brushed as soon as they appear.

Helping children establish good, life-long dental habits from the beginning by overseeing brushing and flossing, maintaining regular dentist office visits, and providing nutritionally balanced meals without excess sugar is the best way to ensure that children grow up with healthy teeth and gums, as well as good overall long-term health. Make your home an encouraging environment that not only supports your child's proper dental hygiene, but reinforces the many reasons why daily dental care is so critical. Children who are healthy and happy do not hesitate to smile. And those with healthy, white teeth can flash that smile with confidence.

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Ways to Bond with Baby

Bonding is generally recognized as the period shortly after birth when the baby and parents begin to get to know each other. In this relationship of love, several things caregivers can do to build this bond.

- Touch the baby.** Touch the baby's hands and the baby's face. Get to know the baby's body, the palace of the baby's soul.
- Talk to the baby.** As you are gently touching your baby, talk to her/him. If you like, sing to the baby. Tell her how proud and happy you are to have her join your family. Tell her the wonderful things that you have planned for her and the beauty and magic that life brings.
- Smile at baby.** Smiling is an important bonding practice that promotes love and happiness. Smiling communicates your pleasure and reassurance in happy and sad times.
- Look at the baby.** Make eye-contact. Observe the baby and notice his facial expressions and body postures. Learn the baby's cues. Although the baby can't com-

municate using words, he certainly is communicating. Notice his sounds, his movements and his facial expressions. These are called Cues.

- Respecting baby's cues.** Being attuned to your baby and her needs, learning how she communicates and feels, and what she might be trying to tell you is the deepest sense of bonding you and the baby can experience. Being attuned to the baby's cues without respecting those cues is not creating a healthy bond. Respect communicates honor and consideration. When you respond to the baby, do so out of deep respect and honor.
- Feeding the baby.** Feeding the baby is a very special time to enhance bonding. During feeding times, touch the baby using gentle touch. Tell him how much you love him. Use a soft voice, smile, make eye-contact, sing songs. Feeding is indeed a special time.



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Inside this issue:

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A Safe and Spooktacular Halloween

From the candy to the costumes, Halloween is a fun-filled time for kids and parents alike. But it can pose dangers to young revelers. To help make this year's festivity a trick-free treat, follow these simple safety tips:

Adorning Your Little Ghouls



- Choose a light-colored costume because these are easily seen at night. Add reflective tape or glow-in-the-dark tape to the front and back of the costume and to the trick-or-treat bag.

- Only buy a costume that is labeled "flame-retardant." This means the material won't burn. If you are making your own costume, use nylon or polyester materials, which are flame-retardant.
- Make sure wigs and beards don't cover your kids' eyes, noses, or mouths.
- Kids shouldn't wear masks — they can make it difficult for them to see and breathe. Instead, use nontoxic face paint or makeup. Have younger kids draw pictures of what they want to look like. Older kids will have fun putting the makeup on themselves. Test the face paint or makeup on your child's arm or hand before applying to make sure the paint doesn't irritate the skin.
- Avoid colored or decorative contact lenses, unless they have been prescribed by an eye doctor for your child.
- Put a nametag — with your phone number — on your children's costumes.
- Avoid oversized and high-heeled shoes that could cause kids to trip. Make sure the rest of the costume fits well, too, which can help prevent trips and falls.
- Make sure that any props your kids carry, such as wands or swords, are short and flexible.

Pumpkin-Carving Precautions

- Don't let kids use knives. Have them draw their designs on the pumpkin with a black marker —

then you or an older sibling can do the carving.

- Keep kids at a safe distance while you're carving the pumpkin so that they don't distract you or get in the way of sharp objects.
- Remove pumpkin guts safely. If your children beg to remove the guts of the pumpkin — as many kids do — don't hand over a knife to do it. Instead, let your little ones get messy by scooping out pumpkin flesh with their hands or an ice cream scoop.
- Clean up the mess. Pumpkin flesh is slippery and can cause falls and injuries when dropped on the floor. Layer newspaper or old cloths under your carving work-space and clean up spills right away so no one slips or trips.
- Skip the candles, which may cause fires. A burning candle in a pumpkin may become a blazing fire if left unattended. Instead, use a glow stick (available in many colors) or flameless candle to safely illuminate your jack-o'-lantern.

Trouble-Free Trick-or-Treating

- Accompany young children (under age 12). Make sure they know how to call 911 in case they get lost. Check to make sure they know their home phone number.
 - For older kids who are trick-or-treating on their own, find out the route they'll be taking and when they'll be coming home.
- carry a cell phone, if possible
- go in a group and stay together
- only go to houses with porch lights on and walk on sidewalks or lit streets (never walk through alleys or across lawns)
 - walk from house to house (never run) and always walk facing traffic when walking on roads
 - stay away from candles and other flames
- know to never go into strangers' homes or cars
- cross the street at crosswalks and never assume that vehicles will stop
- Give kids flashlights with new batteries. Kids may also enjoy wearing glow sticks as bracelets or necklaces.
- Limit trick-or-treating to your neighborhood and the homes of



people you and your children know.

- When your kids get home, check all treats to make sure they're sealed. Throw out candy with torn packages or holes in the packages, spoiled items, and any homemade treats that haven't been made by someone you know.
- Don't allow young children to have hard candy or gum that could cause choking.
- Make sure trick-or-treaters will be safe when visiting your home, too. Remove anything that could cause kids to trip or fall on your walkway or lawn. Make sure the lights are on outside your house and light the walkway to your door, if possible. Keep family pets away from trick-or-treaters, even if they seem harmless to you.



Gobbling Down Halloween Goodies

- Offer a filling meal before your kids head out to trick-or-treat so they won't scarf down too much of their haul.
- Consider purchasing Halloween treats other than candy. Stickers, erasers, crayons, pencils, coloring books, and sealed packages of raisins and dried fruits are good choices.
- Know how much candy your kids have collected and store it somewhere other than their bedrooms. Consider being somewhat lenient about candy eating on Halloween, within reason, and talk about how the rest of the candy will be handled. Let kids have one or two treats a day instead of leaving candy out in big bags or bowls for kids to sample at will. Consider giving some of the treats away.

Take these quick and easy precautions to help your little ghosts and goblins have a hauntingly happy and safe Halloween.



Reviewed by: [Susan Kelly, MD, and Kate M. Cronan, MD](#)
Date reviewed: October 2013



Stereotyping Children and Its Lasting Effects

As a parent and child care coach, I have always been cautious with regard to labeling and/or stereotyping children. Labeling and stereotyping children can have a lasting effect that cannot only damage their self esteem, but can also affect their adult lives.

Thinking back on my own childhood, I remember a teacher telling me I was the worst artist she'd ever seen. She announced this in front of the entire class and I was completely humiliated. Seeing her as an authority figure I believed her and I saw myself as a horrible artist for many years. Although I loved to draw, I found myself losing interest and didn't draw until I had children of my own. Looking back at those pictures I drew as a child, I realized there was nothing wrong with my drawings, but there was something wrong with that teacher!

How many of you can recall situations in your childhood in which you were labeled as "un-artistic", "ugly", "lazy", "something's wrong with him/her" or worse. How do those labels affect you now as an adult? Do you find yourself believing those labels that were so easily attached to you as a child?

As providers and parents, I encourage you to use caution when speaking of a concern about your child or those in your care. If you need to speak to a parent or a doctor, do so in private, so the children cannot hear what you are talking about.

Use positive reinforcement and kind words on a daily basis. As the caregiver, you have the ability to make or break the self-esteem of those in your care. Be careful what you say and what terms you use.

By: Kris K. Murrays
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- * **Strategies for Caring for Children with Sensory Integration Issues**
- * **Strategies for Partnering with Parents of Children with Special Needs**
- * **Supporting Positive Peer Interactions in Inclusive Child Care Settings**

<http://infanttoddler.tamu.edu>

DISCIPLINING YOUR TODDLER

Are there any parents who **haven't** felt complete and utter love for their toddler and, at the same time, frustration and anger?

Our beloved little ones test our nerves because they're testing boundaries all around them. Every day, little by little, they're mastering new abilities and accomplishing new feats, and are anxious and excited to use these skills.

Sometimes it's tough to reel in a toddler, but it can be done. And setting rules and limits now — when your child is learning what behaviors are acceptable — will help prevent bigger problems down the road. Here are some ways to help you keep your youngster on the right track.

BE CONSISTENT

When it comes to discipline, it's important to be consistent. Parents who don't stick to the rules and consequences they set up don't have kids who do either.

For example, if you tell your toddler that a timeout is the repercussion for bad behavior, be sure to enforce it. Only issue warnings for things that you can follow through on. Empty threats undermine your authority.

And don't forget that kids learn by watching adults, particularly their parents. So make sure your own behavior is role-model material. When asking your child to pick up toys, you'll make a much stronger impression if you've put away your own belongings rather than leaving your stuff strewn around the room.



ELIMINATE TEMPTATION

By now, you've figured out that your toddler wants to explore and investigate the world. Toddlers are naturally curious, so it's wise to eliminate temptations whenever possible. That means items like TVs, phones, and video equipment should be kept out of reach, as well as choking hazards like jewelry, buttons, and small items that kids can put in their mouths. And always keep cleaning supplies and medications stored safely away where kids can't get to them.

USE DISTRACTION

If your roving toddler does head toward an unacceptable or dangerous play object, calmly say "No" and

either remove your child from the area or distract him or her with another activity.

It's important to not spank, hit, or slap your child. At this age, kids are unlikely to be able to make a connection between the behavior and physical punishment. The message you send when you spank is that it's OK to hit someone when you're angry. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) discourages spanking, which is no more effective than other forms of discipline, such as timeouts.

PRACTICE TIMEOUT

If you need to take a harder line with your child, timeouts can be an effective form of discipline. A 2- or 3-year-old who has been hitting, biting, or throwing food, for example, should be told why the behavior is unacceptable and taken to a designated timeout area — a kitchen chair or bottom stair — for a minute or two to calm down.

As a general rule, about 1 minute per year of age is a good guide for timeouts. Shorter timeouts can be effective, but longer ones have no added benefit and can sometimes undermine your efforts if your child gets up (and refuses to return) before you signal that the timeout has ended.

HOW TO AVOID TEMPER TANTRUMS

Even the most well-behaved toddler can have a tantrum from time to time. Tantrums are common during toddlerhood because kids can understand more than they can express and this often leads to frustration when they can't communicate their needs.

Toddlers get frustrated in other ways, too, like when they can't dress a doll or keep up with an older sibling. Power struggles can ensue when your toddler wants more independence and autonomy too soon.

The best way to deal with tantrums is to avoid them in the first place, whenever possible. Here are some strategies that may help:

- Make sure your child isn't acting up simply to get attention. Try to establish a habit of catching your child being good ("time-in"), which means rewarding your little one with attention for positive behavior.
- Give your toddler control over little things. This may fulfill the need for independence and ward off tantrums. Offer minor choices that you can live with, such as "Would you like an apple or banana with lunch?"

- When kids are playing or trying to master a new task, offer age-appropriate toys and games. Also, start with something simple before moving on to more challenging tasks.
- Consider the request carefully when your child wants something. Is it outrageous? Maybe it isn't. Choose your battles; accommodate when you can.

Know your child's limits. If you know your toddler is tired, it's not the best time to go grocery shopping or try to squeeze in one more errand.

WHEN TEMPER FLARE

If your child does throw a tantrum, keep your cool. Don't complicate the problem with your own frustration.

Kids can sense when parents are becoming frazzled and this can just make their frustration worse. Try to understand where your child is coming from. For example, if your youngster has just had a great disappointment, you may need to provide comfort.

Ignoring the outburst is another way to handle it — if the tantrum poses no threat to your child or others.

Continue your activities, paying no attention to your child but remaining within sight. Kids who are in danger of hurting themselves or others during a tantrum should be taken to a quiet, safe place to calm down.

Some kids will have a hard time stopping a tantrum. In these cases, it might help to say to say, "I'll help you settle down now." But whatever you do, do **not** reward your toddler by giving into desires. This will only prove that tantrums are an effective tactic for getting what he or she wants. Instead, verbally praise your child for regaining self-control.

As their language skills improve and they mature, kids become better at handling frustration and tantrums are less likely. If you're having difficulty handling your child's temper tantrums or have any questions about discipline, ask your pediatrician for advice.

Reviewed by: [D'Arcy Lyness, PhD](#)
Date reviewed: January 2013



12 Fun Kids Websites for Play and Learning

Erica Loop, Contributor

Care.com

Your child is online already, so why not choose kids' websites that make entertainment educational? There are plenty of sites out there that are great for kids -- you just have to point them in the right direction. Matt Bergman, M.Ed., technology educator, dad and creator of the Learn Lead Grow blog, agrees, noting that technology provides children with customized learning experiences and valuable problem-solving experiences.

If you're wondering what websites pack the most educational punch, fan the flames of fun, help with homework or are the safest when surfing, check out these ideas!

For Fun

"Teachers and parents should opt for academic gaming that fosters higher order thinking skills, such as games centered around planning, reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking, rather than specific content," suggests Alison Amato, elementary computer teacher and creator of the blog Technology Kidz. And when it comes to virtual world sites, the Federal Trade Commission suggests choosing ones that are specifically intended for children.

Club Penguin

It's a virtual penguin-filled world that's just for kids. Not only can your kids have fun interacting with other penguin fans in their own crazy cool world, but the site feature online safety tips for kids! This particular site requires a subscription to play, but there are plenty of free options out there.

Poptropica

Your child creates a "Poptropan" who travels through the virtual world. The free levels of this online game require problem-solving and critical thinking to master.

Moshi Monsters.

Adopt a monster (the friendly kind), socialize with virtual friends and solve puzzles in the free community. Like Poptropica, it's free to play, but there's also a paid option.



section.

YouTube Kids

Yeah, the cats on YouTube are cute, but adult content abounds. Instead of standing over your grade schooler's shoulder as she flicks on videos, let her browse on YouTube Kids, which offers a safe, child-friendly online experience. With top kids' shows and tutorials geared towards children, YouTube Kids lets her view and you feel safe.

For Help With Homework

Kids.gov

If you're looking for kids' websites that help with just about any school assignment, check out this one by the U.S. General Services Administration. From history and government to science, this website provides "Learn Stuff" links to every content area imaginable.

Fact Monster

Your student can get help in geography, history, language arts, math, science and social studies, along with studying tips.

For Math Help

Keep an eye out for sites that incorporate video. "The power of websites to offer video instruction on particular topics can be very useful, especially if you're trying to help your child with some math homework, let's say, and don't know how they're doing it in the new math kind of way," suggests Sarah Vander Schaaff, author behind the blog The Educated Mom.

Scholastic Study Jams!

Amato suggests visiting Common Sense Media for good website picks. "They provide an excellent online database where parents can search websites by name and read reviews on their overall quality, learning content and age-appropriateness." Ranked by Common Sense Media as one of the top educational helper sites for kids, Study Jams! has a math section that features number lines, whole numbers, expanded notation, integers and place value content. Each "Jam" has a cartoon video, key vocabulary and a "Test Yourself" section.

Figure This!

From the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, this kids' website helps children enjoy math at home through "challenges." Look for notes on how each math concept is used in the real world, problems, solutions, related questions, resources and fun facts.



For Literacy Learning

Storyline Online

The Screen Actors Guild Foundation presents this video-based site. Famous actors make equally famous children's books come to life through read-out-louds. Some of the famous faces (and voices) include Jane Kaczmarek, Haylie Duff and James Earl Jones!

Starfall

From the ABCs to real reading, this site features interactive activities and games that foster literacy learning in a completely creative way.

For Artsy Kids

NGA Kids

This is the National Gallery of Art's kids' zone. Your child can use "Brushster" to make abstract art (with a full-color palette, special effects and 40 different virtual brushes), decorate a 17th-century Dutch dollhouse and design animated portraits.

Tate Kids

Skip across the pond to London's Tate Museum's Art Lab. Your child can create, play games and help restore virtual paintings.

Vander Schaaf suggests that parents check websites often. "Websites, unlike workbooks or even some apps, can change almost daily, so you can't assume that just because you've vetted it that it's the same content you looked at before." This helps to ensure safe surfing!

Extension Celebrates Family Mealtime 2015 :

MAKING IT FUN!

GET CHILDREN INVOLVED AND MAKE IT FUN!

Encourage children to participate in age appropriate tasks:

- ⇒ Let children help plan menu ideas and side dishes
- ⇒ Take them grocery shopping and let them pick out a new fruit or vegetable to try with dinner
- ⇒ Teach them about setting the table
- ⇒ Guide them in basic food preparation (as they are developmentally ready for and can safely do)

Have them help clean up and clear the table



Have you ever wondered what is for dinner after a long day of work, errands, or afterschool activities?

We know we could drive through another fast-food restaurant to save time, but is that meal meeting the nutritional needs of your family?

The Dinner Tonight program was developed to provide busy families with quick, healthy, cost effective recipes that taste great. Not only does the Dinner Tonight program provide recipes, it also gives you weekly video demonstrations on cooking tips and techniques, nutrition topics, menu planning basics and information on healthy living.

Our goal for the Dinner Tonight program is to improve the health and wellness of Texans through nutrition education. We are so excited to help you get you started on preparing your dinner tonight.

Visit dinnertonight.tamu.edu to sign up for weekly emails, info on recipes, cooking schools and more!

7 Ways to Boost Kids' Confidence

Alonna Friedman, Contributor

www.care.com

Happiness. Healthy habits. Success. These are qualities we want in our children. But you know the underlying trick to get there? Building their confidence.

While insult and injury are part of life and can be crippling, a child with healthy self confidence is more likely to be resilient, to be an individual, and not to follow the group, explains Dr. Robi Ludwig, Psy.D, a Care.com parenting expert.

Lori K. Evans, PhD, a clinical assistant professor in the department of child and adolescent psychiatry at the NYU Child Study Center, adds that a confident child will be less vulnerable to emotional problems, attempting suicide or harming himself. "When you are confident, you know your strengths and weaknesses, and that you can learn from other people rather than feel threatened by them," she says.

Our experts have developed 7 simple ways you can teach your child to be a confident and kind person. It might be a small start - teaching kids to be independent thinkers and respectful of others -- but one that can hopefully have a positive impact on all of us (think: less likely to bully, or be bullied and more likely to befriend those who are bullied).



1. Model Acceptance

"It's fine to have your own opinion, but when you demean a certain group of people - by how much money they have, what they look like, their sexual orientation -- you're simply preaching hate to your kid," says Dr. Ludwig. Even something about an outfit choice or intelligence level can stick with a child.

A confident child is more likely to feel compassion for others and not belittle those who are different from them. Still, your son might worry that if he stands up for a classmate when kids are talking nasty, he might be the next victim. Instead of intervening, tell your child to report the behavior to a teacher and then ask the student to play with him. "Confident children don't necessarily tell off bullies, but they choose to include the underdog," says Dr. Evans.

2. Teach Good Manners

It might seem old fashioned, but knowing how to properly address a person, shake hands or even set a table can give your child a kick start to building self confi-

dence. "Having good manners helps you feel good about yourself because you know how to treat others with respect and carry yourself in the world," says etiquette expert Lisa Richey. "It helps a child to develop the qualities of a leader."

Work on good posture. It not only makes a child feel confident, but provides a visual clue to all of the other kids that he is confident. Another trick? Eye contact. It's the basis of a self-confident child, says Richey. To start, put aside your iPhone and give your daughter your undivided attention. Being fully present is key to good manners.

And remember, kids are watching and listening to you. Say, "Thank you" to the checkout lady in the supermarket, shakes hands when you meet someone. Each time you practice good manners make sure you tell your child: This is how we treat and respect people.

3. Give Genuine Compliments

It's time to drop meaningless flattery. Kids don't buy it. "When parents give praise that is not accurate to who the child really is, the words seem fake," says Dr. Ludwig. Don't say your daughter is a wonderful tennis player if she's not. You need to get specific with your accolades. "Tell her you are proud that she works hard at always improving her game and how she takes direction from her coach," says Dr. Evans. You not only give her a genuine compliment that reinforces her confidence, but you're sharing your values: persistence and respect.

4. Set Kids up to Succeed

You can't push your kid to try activities you have selected because you think it will make a well-rounded child. When you play to a child's natural abilities, her hard work and success fosters confidence. "When a child excels in an activity outside school he will go back to school with the confidence to know it's okay if he doesn't fit into the school blueprint of success," says Richey.

5. Help them Trust Themselves

Parents generally want to make life easy for their kids. It's just natural to want to protect them, but it's not healthy to always forge the path. In fact, constantly running to the rescue could send the message to your child that he or she is not a capable person.

Part of building confidence is learning how to cope with all types of situations. "Don't jump to problem solving, just listen," says Dr. Evans. And when they make a choice that goes awry, help them review the outcome and figure out why it was a mistake.

Otherwise kids remain dependent on you and not confident in their decision making. "Kids need your unconditional love," she says. "Tell them: you will make mistakes but you are a good person and I love you!"

Dr. Ludwig suggests starting small. Allow your toddler to choose her own clothes in the morning. She might go off to the playground in a flower-print skirt and rainbow sweater, but she will feel confident in her choice.

6. Assign Household Jobs

The trick is to think about your child's strengths and interests and bestow a job that allows him to feel useful and successful. "When a child accomplishes something he or she feels confident," says Dr. Ludwig. An eye for organizing? Ask her to help unpack the groceries or sort the pantry. Fascinated by cars? Ask for help cleaning the interior. Make sure to point out why you asked your child to handle this responsibility -- because he's so tidy or a nature lover or is adventurous with food -- even if it's a strength you don't pose.

7. Open Your Home to Friends

Here's how to get a pulse on other influences on your child's confidence. "You are not the only person influencing his self confidence but you are the most powerful," says Dr. Ludwig. "You must build the foundation of their self confidence but peers, teachers, the media and more will influence them." You shouldn't spy, but having kids feel comfy in your home will allow you to see if your child is choosing friends that support his identity.

If you see a friend engaging a rude behavior (maybe texting constantly or saying nasty things about a teacher), use it as a lesson on how not to behave.



Want to Prevent Bullying? Focus on Early Childhood

More attention needs to be paid to identifying, researching and preventing the roots of bullying behavior in young children.

How do we prevent bullying? Despite decades of study and numerous programs claiming to be the solution to bullying, few programs have actually been shown to be effective. One of the main issues is that "bullying prevention" is often a misnomer; instead of trying to stop the behavior before it begins, the focus of many programs is on reducing already high rates of bullying. By the time students enter sixth grade, the earliest grade for which nationally representative data is collected, nearly 28 percent of children have been targeted in the past year. For younger children, data are far more limited, but suggestive. The National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence found that 20.4 percent of children ages 2-5 had experienced physical bullying in their lifetime and 14.6 percent had been teased (verbally bullied).



ing that the behaviors observed in young children are often not what we traditionally think of as bullying, but are developmental in nature, as children first begin to navigate interactions with peers. Many young children who are aggressive with their peers will not engage in bullying behaviors in later childhood and adolescence. Likewise, being the target of an aggressive behavior does not mean that child will be victimized for life. Still, these early aggressions (and conversely, the early skills of sharing, listening, and empathy) are precursors to later behavior, and it is important to intervene early. More research is needed to understand the trajectory of early aggression into bullying behaviors.

Despite the limited literature, four key factors consistently seemed to be related to bullying behaviors in young children:

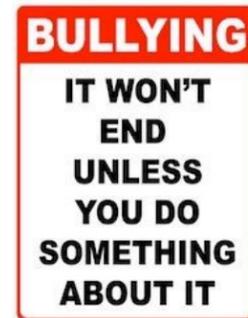
- 1) Parents' treatment of each other, their children, and others influences how young children treat their peers. Specifically, parents' use of harsh discipline and children's exposure to domestic violence are related to increases in bullying behavior, while parents' positive engagement in their children's lives, such as through interactive play, reading, and meals together, seems to be protective against bullying behavior. Parents serve as role models for their children, and modeling empathy, concern, and care for others may help deter later bullying. Resources such as those provided by the Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education can help parents expand their own "circle of concern" and help their children do so, too. (It should be noted here that the majority of current research looks at the behaviors and characteristics of mothers; studies looking at the role of fathers are more limited, primarily because mothers are more likely to be the primary caregiver for young children and more likely to respond to the research. Some effort is being made, however, to address the role of fathers in bullying prevention.)

Research on bullying and early childhood development is limited. When we talk about bullying, the early childhood audience is often forgotten. There remains immense debate in the field about how to distinguish between typical, sometimes aggressive behavior that young children show and the more strategic and deliberate behaviors that define bullying. In preparing their uniform definition of bullying, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defined bullying as being between "school-aged youth," recognizing

tures, which can lead to developmental deficits including in the social and emotional domains. Early intervention is critical to help stem these delays. Adults and Children Together (ACT) Against Violence Raising Safe Kids, an evidence-based program specifically aimed at helping reduce child maltreatment and promote positive parenting strategies, is one approach that shows promise.

3) Television and other media can contribute to the development of both aggression and pro-social skills. Screen time for young children is one of the most debated subjects among early childhood advocates. Research shows that increased television watching is related to increases in aggressive behavior even if the content is not inherently violent. Conversely, when shows are specifically designed to promote skills such as sharing, empathy, and other pro-social skills--shows like Sesame Street, Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, or in past generations, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood--children are more likely to engage in these behaviors after viewing.

4) Building young children's social and emotional skills and promoting welcoming classrooms can significantly reduce aggression. Evaluations of several evidence-based social and emotional learning programs for young children, such as PATHS for Preschool, Second Step, and Al's Pals, show that helping children understand and control their own emotions, and understand those of others, can significantly reduce conflict and aggression. Even without these formalized interventions, teachers of young children (and parents for that matter) can work to reduce bullying behaviors. The *Guidance Matters* column in the professional journal *Young Children* provides a number of resources that can support these efforts.



Overall, it is clear that more attention needs to be paid to identifying, researching, and preventing the roots of bullying behavior in young children. It is only when we recognize that bullying behaviors do not simply appear in elementary or middle school, but may be part of a developmental trajectory, that will we be able to stop bullying.

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