

# Positive Parenting

## Tips for Parents

Courtesy of UNICEF

**T**he past months have been tough on everyone, and children are particularly vulnerable to emotional distress. Parents can help them through these tough times. Here are a few guidelines to help you build and maintain strong, trusting relationships and navigate challenging situations.

**Guide the conversation, prepare what you want to say, find the right time and place even if your schedule is busy, be ready to do a lot of listening, and reassure your children that you love them, always.**

**Think about what you want to say.** It's OK to practice in your head, in front of a mirror, or with another adult. Some advanced planning may make the discussion easier. You won't have to think about what you want to say off the top of your head.

**Find a quiet moment,** such as after dinner or while preparing the next day's lunch. Pick the best time and place to let your children be the center of your attention.



**Find out what they know.** For example, if there was a shooting at a school, a military incursion took place, or missiles have been fired, ask them, "What have you heard about this?" And then listen. Listen. Listen. And listen more.

**Share your feelings with your child.** It is all right to acknowledge your feelings with your children. They see that you are human. They also get a chance to see that even though you are upset, you can pull yourself together and go on. Parents hear it often: Be a role model. This applies to emotions, too.

**Tell the truth.** Lay out the facts at a level that your child can understand. You do not need to give graphic details. For young children, you may need to have the conversation about what death means (one no longer feels anything and is not hungry, thirsty, scared, or in pain; we will never see them again but can hold their memories in our hearts and minds).

**Say, "I don't know."** Sometimes the answer to the question is "I don't know." The question "Why did the bad people do this?" can be answered with "I don't know."

**Above all, reassure!** At the end of the conversation, reassure your children that you will do everything you can to keep them safe and watch out for them. Tell them that you will be available to answer any questions or talk about this topic again in the future. Reassure them that they are loved!

**Engage in physical activity.** Do something that will lift your spirits and those of your family.

**Create structure.** The home is your child's first environment and the place where they spend the most time over the course of their childhood. Your home is also the most important environment for developing resilience.

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Key principles to support a healthy development in the home include fostering close, warm relationships and providing structure. Children need to know what to expect and what is expected of them. Structure provides a sense of security and comfort and helps reduce the sense of chaos or disorganization that can be created by stress.

Warm relationships help children feel secure, especially when faced with ongoing daily stress.

It is possible to maintain a warm, nurturing relationship and establish strong rules and expectations at the same time.

**Establish and stick to family routines,** including

- ✓ Mealtimes
- ✓ Bedtimes
- ✓ Homework times
- ✓ Hygiene routines

**Maintain or build traditions.** Children need to have fun routines with the family even under duress. Try to engage in some type of family activity such as family game night, weekend walks, or movie night.

**Talk about emotions.** Children need to learn how to appropriately express and regulate emotions. They look to parents as models for all sorts of behaviors, including emotion regulation.

**Express your feelings, including anger and sadness.** "When accidents happen, I feel frustrated/sad/angry."

**Talk about the emotions** expressed in the world around you. Discuss how characters in books or movies feel about what is happening, how siblings, relatives, or classmates feel about events, or how it might feel to experience something new.



**Talk to your child about their emotions, both positive and negative.** Talking with children about their feelings helps them recognize these feelings and learn how to regulate them effectively.

**Model and discuss self-control.** The ability to regulate emotions and behavior is essential for succeeding in school, at work, and in social relationships. Talk about how you feel; also talk about what you will do to appropriately express or release feelings that cause distress. Model the behavior you want to see in your child, including responses to anger. Play games that support self-control, such as musical chairs or red light/green light.

**Model and discuss problem solving.** Share how to you resolve problems, large and small. Play games that ask your child to come up with solutions. When your child has a question or a problem, instead of offering suggestions immediately, start with questions, such as, "What do you think might work?" Help them think through their ideas before offering your suggestions, and discuss them too.

**Build strong communications skills**

- ✓ Both understanding and using language are important for successful interactions. Communication skills, including a strong vocabulary and correct language use, are strongly linked to academic success.
- ✓ Make up stories in which family members take turns adding something.
- ✓ Talk to your child about your day and ask about their day.
- ✓ Read together every day, if possible, from birth. As your child begins to read, take turns reading to each other.
- ✓ Sing and dance together.

