

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

E-ZINE FOR FAMILIES

# COMPASS

**The Power of  
Connection**

**Dealing with a  
Challenging Teacher**

**Understanding  
After School  
Meltdowns**

**Stepping Into  
Your Child's Shoes**

**To End Back Talk  
& Defiance**

**3 Tools to  
End Bedtime  
Despair**



**How To Stop Yelling At Your Kids**

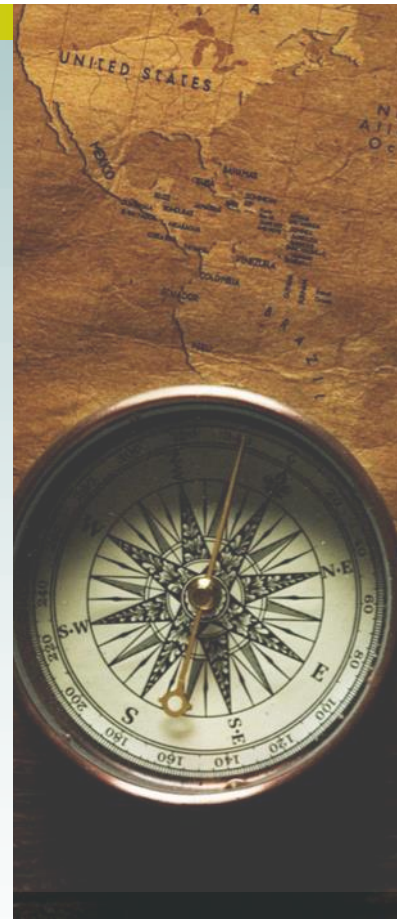
**Positive Discipline Tool: Limited Choices**

Issue 5 Fall 2015

FALL EDITION  
Issue 5

# COMPASS

Positive Discipline E-Zine for Families



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## A LITTLE BIT OF BACK TALK

*"Loved, loved, loved this latest edition of Compass! Many thanks for this stellar resource." Conny L.*

*"I printed several of the pages of Compass and posted them on my fridge as reminders to keep up with the PD way of parenting. So much helpful information here. " -Dayna B.*

Send us your feedback and questions. We love hearing from you. Write to: [info@parentcoa.ch](mailto:info@parentcoa.ch)



***I Want To Stop Yelling at my five year old. Please help?***

**Q:** I find that I yell a lot at my five year old. At age four she was very helpful and seems like now everything I ask is met with a "NO". I seem to "flip my lid" and yell at her much more than I would like to admit. What suggestions can you offer?

**-Pam M.**

## Questions & Answers

### Yelling Because of Back Talk: Connect before you Correct

by Ariadne Brill

**A:** Many parents will agree they are more likely to "flip their lid" and yell when they are feeling disrespected. Or overwhelmed, tired and stressed. Usually, children are feeling the very same way in those situations.

So, to stop yelling and invite cooperation, we must focus on returning to a place of respect and kindness. This can happen in many ways. Some ideas based on positive discipline tools are:

1. Adjust expectations—Is your child able to do what you are asking?
2. Break requests into smaller steps — or step in to work together.
3. Make a routine chart — this keeps things predictable.
4. Step into your child's world — consider their feelings and abilities!
5. **Connect before you correct** —get closer, use gentle hands and speak face to face. It makes a huge difference for everyone.

Lastly, don't forget to find time for yourself, to recharge and rest.

Read more on [Encouraging Children to Listen](#) by Ariadne Brill

Read more on [Connection before Correction](#) by Jane Nelsen.

**Plus check out the "How to Stop Yelling" article on page 13.**

## The Power of Connection

By Carol Schilling Dores



### **Belonging and significance drive everything that we do from birth throughout our lives.**

As babies and children, we grow, feel safe and thrive when we feel a sense of connection and belonging. As we get older, this continues to be important.

Think back to when you were in school (or earlier). How did you feel in your family? With friends? In school? If you had a strong feeling that you belonged and were part of each group, you probably feel good. If you were always being blamed or ignored or yelled at, you probably feel badly.

### **Now think about your children. Do they have a sense that they are an important part of your family and other groups? How do they know they are an important part of your life?**

### **Building Connections**

Let's look at how we can build connections with our children beginning with when they are newborn babies. They have a strong sense of smell, and recognize their mother. We initially may think that food is all that matters. Pretty soon they are responding to the sound of our voice, turning their head towards the familiar voice, even when they don't need to be fed or changed. They are already bonding and building a connection with us. Even at this young age, speaking gently, looking in to their eyes, and smiling are all ways to communicate love.

As babies become toddlers, building the connection continues to be important. Helping them learn what they can do rather than what they can't do is important. For example, "Touch nice" and taking their hand is more effective than "Don't hit", where what they will hear is "hit" and they aren't shown an alternative.

When they demand a cookie, giving them two acceptable other choices is setting boundaries, which helps children feel safe and loved.

Toddlers become school-aged children, entering a wider social experience than they probably have experienced. They need to know that you are there for them, no matter what. They will test their boundaries and you, and having patience to help them learn from their mistakes is important.

**Building a connection with your children does not mean giving in to every one of their desires.** It means being able to say, “I love you, and the answer is no.” Being clear about boundaries and then kindly and firmly sticking to them will go a long way to building your relationship. For many children, hormones begin to kick in as they enter their tween years. They want autonomy, yet are still children in so many ways. Scheduling special time with each of your tweens becomes more important, as you want to continue to connect. Asking your child what they want to do with your special 30 minutes together is important. Really focusing on them and what you are doing together will help continue to build your relationship.

**Really listen to what your children are saying. When they want to talk, stop everything you are doing, and focus on hearing what they are saying.**



Actively listen, by saying things like, “What I hear you saying is..... Is that correct?” They will be more likely to talk when they feel listened to, and you are helping them learn how to listen by demonstrating these skills. Once your child feels listened to you can also share your feelings.

As they enter their teen years, individuation begins, where their friends become more important than family. They may walk in to the house in a bad mood, and when asked if they want to talk about it, respond with, “Leave me alone!” Respect their space, and when they seem a bit better, say something like, “You seemed really upset before.” Then be quiet and listen. There is no need for you to fix their problem. They should be allowed to have their feelings.



**If you have built strong connections with your children, they are more likely to come to you when they are struggling with a problem or a decision.**

Asking “curiosity” questions, to help them explore the consequences of their decisions, rather than imposing consequences on them. Sincere questions open the heart and the rational part of the brain, helping build the connections with your children. For example, “What do you think will happen if you don’t finish your homework tonight?” It is important that your tone of voice is truly curious, or the questions could feel like blame and shame. No matter how young or old your child is, a hug can be really powerful and help build your relationship. It is respectful to ask, with either “Can I have a

hug?” or “I need a hug.” Often, you and your child will melt in to each other’s arms.

**As you build these connections, imagine a jar you are filling with love.**

There will come a time when you end up yelling instead of walking away to calm down. We are all human. Because of the love jar, your child will be more likely to forgive you, and the relationship will be intact.

By helping our children learn how to feel a sense of belonging to your family, you are helping them build their inner confidence and strength. They learn how to be in positive relationships, and communicate in a healthy way. They feel safe and secure, and trust that you are there for them, no matter what.



**Featuring Dr. Jane Nelsen, Founder of Positive Discipline, as Keynote Speaker**

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\*Choice of Four Morning Breakout Sessions:\*

\*Choice of Five Afternoon Breakout Sessions\*

\*CEs\* are available for psychologists, counselors, social workers and other healing professionals.



### **Carol Schilling Does**

Carol is the mother of two adult sons, and lives in Connecticut. She is a certified Positive Discipline Parenting and Classroom Educator and the co-founder of Positive Discipline of Connecticut. Carol is available to teach parenting classes, bring Positive Discipline in to schools and classrooms. She is also on the Positive Discipline Association Board of Directors. Email: [carol@positivedisciplinect.org](mailto:carol@positivedisciplinect.org)



## When Back To School Brings Out Back Talk and Defiance

By Ariadne Brill

For many families back to school also means back to battling. Back talking, arguments, tantrums and eye rolling moments.

While children are worrying about separating from you, try-outs, managing homework and projects, juggling activities, navigating social circles, and doing well in the classroom; Parents are feeling rushed about schedules, getting nutritious food on the table, teaching responsibility, checking reading assignments and so much more...

It can all bring into the home a lot of worry, stress and disconnection. Especially the rushing around!

And all that stress and worry can translate into some really bothersome behaviors, like not feeling motivated to do homework, speaking in "defiant" ways, arguing about everything. And parents can feel their buttons getting pushed and their lids being flipped faster than ever!

This stress, worry, defiance and button pushing doesn't have to rule your back to school experience. With small changes, you can drop the struggles and start inviting cooperation instead. And most likely as a result, your child will feel more at ease. And you can all enjoy the back to school transition so much more!

### Reduce Back Talk

- Avoid responding to back talk with more back talk. "You can't make me" and "How dare you talk to me like that!" are two sides of the same coin.
- Notice if you have been modeling "demanding" with your own requests so you can change them. For example are you saying things like? "I said right now!" and "How many times do I have to tell you to do this????!!!"
- Try instead making requests like this "I'd appreciate your help." and "We are short on time, how can we work together so we aren't late?"
- Keep Calm and Connect! Sometimes children just need reassurance that they are loved and back talking is a mistaken way to get needed attention!



## Ariadne Brill

Ariadne is the mom to two boys and one girl. She is a Certified Positive Discipline Parenting Educator and her specialty is helping parents find more calm and confidence on their parenting journey. Ariadne has training in Psychology, child development, communication and family counseling.

Connect with Ariadne over at the Positive Parenting Connection, an online resource for parents and caregivers dedicated to promoting peaceful, playful and positive parenting.

Let's Connect:



Positive Parenting  
CONNECTION  
*Cooperation Begins With Trust*

Here are three strategies to reduce defiance , back talk and button pushing in the new school year:

### 1. Make Agreements To Avoid Nagging

Instead of nagging your child about everything they must do each day, before and after school, involve your child in creating an agreement that is helpful to both of you.

An agreement may help you and your child reduce conflicts about many aspects of back to school, such as screen time, homework schedules, packing lunches and more.

To make a good agreement, make sure to take the time to talk about your concerns, listen to your child's concerns, then brainstorm possible agreements, find some potential solutions, and then choose something that will work for both you and your child.

### 2. Choose Encouragement over Praise

While saying "How smart you are getting an A in the first week!" may sound nice, praise can actually feed insecurity! Encouragement on the other hand helps your child feel capable, even during a struggle. And it builds her confidence from the inside - out. So don't tell your child how smart they are for finishing a homework or for getting an A's. Instead, strive to encourage the process of learning and the effort your child is putting forward:

Encouraging words may sound like:

"Seems like you are really enjoying being back in class. I noticed you have done homework each day this week."

"You haven't figured out this multiplication, yet. And I'm happy to sit here, reading my book and keep you some company while you figure it out "

Knowing that trying and putting effort forward counts more than the actual outcomes can make a big difference in how confident and well your child feels. And



when children feel well they are more able and likely to behave well too.

### 3. Step Into Your Child's Shoes

If your child seems to be giving you a hard time before or after school, try to step into your child's shoes. Remember what it is like to be in school, juggling friendships, listening to teachers, following the school rules etc...Your child may have a lot on her mind.

A lot she may be struggling to tell you about. Because she isn't so clear about it all herself.

**So very often, the "I can't believe it's pasta again" complaint may be more related to feeling discouraged or emotionally spent over several events from the whole day than with what you actually made for dinner.**

Behind back talk and defiance is usually a message. It may be one of discouragement. Or a message that your child is asking to have more control over her life. Like having more choices, or time, or a chance to just relax a bit after school before following all the rules and agreements at home. Maybe the school rules are feeling difficult to follow, being away from you is tough or maybe friends are being bossy. Maybe your child just had one of those really crummy days.

Back talk pushes buttons for sure. It can feel disrespectful and ugly... It lights up all sorts of warning signals to us parents to step in and "FIX" behavior... And yet, it can be an opportunity to offer guidance. To connect before you bring on a correction. A change to pause before offering a teachable moment.

So, just for a moment, when you hear those complaints from your child: the inability to take out the trash, to put some laundry away, to do homework before turning on the tv...**step into your child's**

**shoes.** Imagine what they might be feeling and thinking...Create a moment of joy by offering a smile. Empathize. It may just transform the back talk and defiance into a memorable moment.



Find many more tools and ideas for transforming conflict into cooperation, including how to create a personalized calm down plan for your child in the book *Twelve Alternatives to Time Out* by Ariadne Brill. **Now Available on [Kindle](#).**



### Casey O'Roarty M.Ed.

I am a wife, mother, Certified Positive Discipline Trainer and life coach. I have a BA in Sociology from the University of Arizona, and earned a M.Ed from the University of Washington. I teach teachers and parents all about how to build stronger, more authentic relationships with the children in their lives.

*Please check out all of my offers, my blog and podcast at [www.joyfulcourage.com](http://www.joyfulcourage.com) and life "Joyful Courage" on [facebook!](https://www.facebook.com/joyfulcourage)*

casey@joyfulcourage.com

## Ending Bedtime Despair By Casey O'Roarty

I have a dream...I have a dream of children who come to me at the end of the day with a kiss and a sweet smile. They look at me with love and say, "goodnight." Then they walk to their rooms and go to bed.

*Does this happen at your house? Are you living this dream?*

*I used to think, when they are older bedtime won't be so annoying.... One day they will put themselves to bed....*

Don't get me wrong, my kids are nine and twelve and bedtime is a lot easier now than it was five or six years ago. *Way* easier.

But even at nine and twelve, my kids still need me. They still want to feel connected, to be the ones getting kissed goodnight. **I still find myself *engaged* in the routine with them.**

There are nights when things spiral a bit. The kids share a bathroom and some nights they really know how to get on each other's nerves... And no amount of *it really doesn't help me want to spend time with you when you act like that* helps.

*Lets break down the bedtime drama, shall we?*

**Kid's Experience:** *There are still things I want to do... I don't want to go to bed yet... I don't have to if I don't want to...*

**Parent's Experience:** *I am so tired and so ready to be done with parenting for the day.*

**Kid's Experience:** *I feel disconnected because my parents are telling me to go get ready for bed, they don't want to spend time with me...*

**Parent's Experience:** *Why can't they just do what I say? Its bedtime! What am I doing wrong?*

**Kid's Experience:** *I want to play with my sibling and it's the end of the day so I will see how far I can push it...*

**Parent's Experience:** *I don't understand why they can't be in the bathroom together without starting something.... They have no respect for me.*

**Kid's Experience:** *No body's paying attention – how can I get them to notice me?*

**Parent's Experience:** *I will just stay in my room to show them I won't engage when they act like this...*

**Kid's Experience:** *I'm sad/angry/frustrated it's bedtime already, everyone else should feel this way too...*



**Parent's Experience:** *I am so done. These kids are out of control and making me so mad...*

Does any of the above sound familiar? I am drawing from my own parenting experience. One thing I have come to know is, if this is an experience I am living through, I know other parents are too...

## Here are Three Tools for Taking Back Bedtime

**Revisit (or create) a routine** -- Yup, routines aren't only for our littlest kids, they continue to be really valuable for our older kids as well, especially the ones that tend to get off track. Routines create consistence and clear expectations. When created together they invite cooperation. Routines can be revisited over and over and tweaked as the kids get older. For support in creating a routine *with* your child, check out [Chaos to Calm](#), a free four part video offer from Joyful Courage.

**Continue to connect** - This is the biggest thing to remember at bedtime. Our kids feel our energy. They know that we are looking forward to saying good night and closing the door. Rather than expecting them to "just get ready for bed," be a part of the action. It's a small thing really. I take the floss into their bathroom and invite them to my flossing party (because



doesn't *that* sound fun??) – I hang out and get my own bedtime routine tasks done as well. I lay on my daughter's bed while she gets ready for the next day. This is when we have some of our juiciest conversations. It takes away the urgency and replaces it with a lovely feeling of love and relationship. We still read aloud to our kids too. The books are *a lot* more interesting now that they are older. Both kids love that special one on one experience.

**Be kind and firm** – When you begin to notice that your emotions are getting the better of you (hello to the [emotional freight train](#)) take some time to connect with yourself, to calm your nervous system, and tell a different story. For example, *this kid doesn't care about anyone but himself*, can shift to, *wow, he is really needing to connect tonight*. Following through is key here too. If you are willing to read until 8:30 (that is our routine) then be sure to stop at 8:30, even if it's taken the kids longer to get their routine done. **This is where firmness shows up.** They will protest and you can say, "I know it's disappointing. I bet you can get your routine finished quicker tomorrow night."

## How To Stop Yelling At Your Kids

### By Debbie Zeichner

Yelling, for many parents, has become their “go-to” reaction. Many well-meaning, well-intentioned parents feel that yelling is the only way they can get their kids to listen or take them seriously. Been there? You’re not alone!

Although yelling may feel like the answer in the moment, it’s important we consider the longer-term effects this behavior has on our kids... especially when it’s happening often (or more often than we’d like!).

#### **Consider, for a moment, what it feels like to be yelled at.**

Yelling signals the brain that a threat is looming. When the brain senses a threat, it moves into fight/flight/freeze mode. This is when you may see, for example, defensiveness/back talk/yelling back (fight), running into another room (flight) or blank stares (freeze). Unfortunately, by this point, kids have already tuned out. They become more focused on self-preservation and will do whatever their temperament dictates as a way of “protecting” themselves. The original message gets lost and the relationship enters shaky ground.

***Many parents turn to yelling as a way to exert control, but have you ever noticed that you may resort to yelling when you’re actually feeling OUT of control? We can’t expect our kids to control their behavior if we’re unable to control our own.***



#### **Debbie Zeichner**

Debbie Zeichner, LCSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Parent Coach who has specialized in working with adults, children and families for over 18 years. As a Certified Parent Educator in both Positive Discipline and Redirecting Children's Behavior (RCB), Debbie facilitates engaging parenting classes, workshops and individualized coaching to assist parents in creating a sense of calm, confidence and connection within themselves and their families.

To learn more about Debbie and her parent coaching services, please visit:

[www.debbiezeichnerlcsww.com](http://www.debbiezeichnerlcsww.com)



So, to reduce (and ideally eliminate) yelling, begin by coming up with a *plan* for yourself.

## Here are 8 steps to help you *yell less and connect more*:

- 1.) Think about the situations that trigger you the most. Maybe it's when your child ignores you after you make a request. Or maybe it's when they talk back to you. Or maybe it's when they throw that wonderful meal you spent hours preparing across the room?
- 2.) Notice the feelings that come up. Anger? Irritation? Frustration? Powerlessness? Defeat?
- 3.) Pay attention to the thoughts that arise. "I can't believe he/she just did that! How dare he/she!" "I need to get a handle on this or he's going to turn into a delinquent!" "She sounds like such a spoiled brat!"



- 4.) Challenge and replace those thoughts – "My child is still learning." "My child is not out to get me." "I can help him/her learn a kinder way of speaking to me." "I can handle this calmly and respectfully." "I need to focus on connecting before correcting." "My child hasn't learned how to \_\_\_\_ YET."
- 5.) Commit to PAUSING when you notice any of the above and do something to TAKE CARE of yourself. For example, BREATHE (slowly and deeply), walk out of the room, count to 10, close your eyes, give yourself a hug (yes, a hug!), grab a piece of paper and write out your thoughts/feelings or just scribble!
- 6.) Let your kids know about your plan and the commitment you are making to reduce your yelling. Invite them to help you come up with a signal (for example - peace sign, hand over their heart, finger on their lips) they can use when they sense you're hitting your boiling point. Tell them it will serve as your reminder to pause and choose another tone. The discussion may sound something like, "I know I've been yelling a lot. I'm sure it doesn't feel good to you and it certainly doesn't feel good to me either. I love you and, it's not ok for

me to yell at you. I want to let you know that I've come up with a plan for what I can do instead of yelling. You may see me taking lots of deep breaths, or you may see me walking away. You may even see me give myself a hug! I yell when I'm angry/ frustrated (etc) and it's my job to take charge of my feelings and reactions and speak to you with respect. I may need some support and would love your help in coming up with a signal you can use when you see I'm starting to lose my patience (ask what signal they like best). That signal can help me get back on track. If you forget, that's ok. I'm working on remembering myself. Please know how much I love you and care about our relationship."

7.) If you end up yelling, do your best to recognize it, take responsibility by apologizing, let your child know what you will do differently next time and focus on reconnecting. For example, "I yelled at you and that wasn't ok. I apologize. It's not ok for me to speak to you that way. Next time, I will walk into the other room and take deep breaths like this (demonstrate). I'm sorry. I don't know about you, but I could sure use a hug!"

8.) Practice, practice, practice and be kind to yourself – you're learning new skills right alongside your kids! Mindful awareness of the effects of yelling, along with a commitment to try something new, are the first steps toward increasing cooperation, connection and a sense of trust. The added bonus is that you'll be modeling what respectful communication *looks* and *feels* like.

Remember, actions speak louder than words. Model the very behavior you want to see in your kids.

It starts with us!

All the best,  
Debbie



# Positive Discipline Bulletin Board



**JOYFUL  
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**Positive Parenting**  
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## “Free-Range” Kids: Neglect or Opportunity?

Cheryl L. Erwin, MA, MFT

**Picture this: a boy and his sister walk hand-in-hand down the sidewalk in a peaceful community, on their way to a local park that is less than a mile from their home.**

have mirror neurons that read the emotional energy, facial expressions, and body language of those around them. And when parents are tense and fearful, children know it—but often don’t fully understand the reasons.

**Kids frequently tell me they’re afraid of intruders, of strangers, and of natural disasters. They have nightmares and are unable to go on sleep-overs or spend more than a few moments away from their parents.**

They know where they’re going and how to return afterwards. There are no parents anywhere in sight, but the children are calm and confident, focused on the fun they’ll have together. It’s a scene that has played itself out many times in many communities over the years. So why did it result in national furor, social media outrage, and police involvement earlier this year?

In case you haven’t noticed, we live in an age of anxiety where parenting is concerned. And I mean that quite literally: as a therapist who works with children, I know that anxiety is the primary reason children and adolescents find themselves in a therapist’s office.

Recent incidents like the tragic murder of Maddy Middleton in Santa Cruz, California, only fuel the fire. Many parents see the outside world as a dark and threatening place where children are at risk for abduction, assault, and injury. And all too often, they communicate that fear to their children. Children, like adults,

They can’t cook because the stove is dangerous; they can’t play in the front yard because someone might take them—although stranger abductions remain extremely rare. These children may be physically “safe”, but what are they learning about the world around them, and about their own ability to live an open and engaged life? Obviously, no parent should ever place a child in danger. But is it wrong to allow a child to explore, to be alone, or to rely on her own skill and judgment to navigate her world?

The answer is, well, complicated. All children need opportunities to flex their independence and to strengthen their emotional and problem-

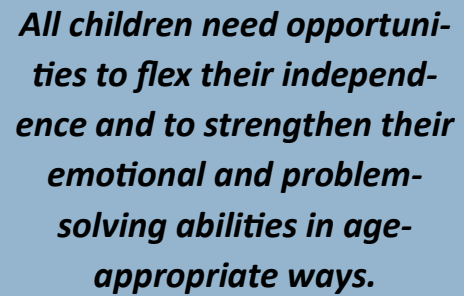
### Cheryl Erwin , MA, MFT

Cheryl Erwin is a licensed marriage and family therapist and parent coach with a private practice in Reno, Nevada. She is the author or co-author of several books in the bestselling “Positive Discipline” series and the “Everything Parent’s Guide to Raising Boys,” and has taught Positive Discipline in Egypt, China, Colombia, Singapore, Australia, and across the United States. She has a grown son who still likes her, and is delighted to be a new grandmother.

You can learn more about her work at

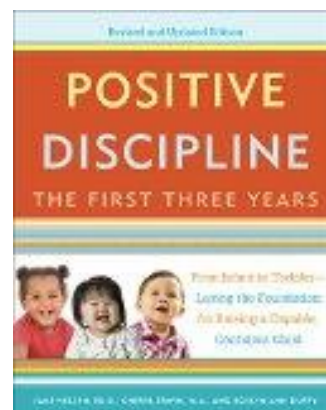
[www.cherylerwin.com](http://www.cherylerwin.com).





But I took a deep breath and thought for a moment. I'd roamed the mountains behind my southern California home in my childhood with no problems worse than getting in trouble for coming home late, and I remembered how wonderful those wild moments of independence had felt. So my son and I had a little chat. We talked about his route, how to avoid the busiest streets, how to walk his bike across intersections, and about wearing his helmet. I told him to take quarters from the jar on the kitchen counter, and to call me from the store. (Another throwback:

Think about the things you want for your child, the qualities you hope he has before he leaves your home. Now ask yourself how many of them he'll learn sitting in his bedroom, safe at home. Are there risks involved in letting kids go? Of course. But there are also lifelong rewards and opportunities. Take time for lots of training, know your child well, and let go when you can.



## When Opportunity Breaks In: Making the Most of After School Meltdowns

By Nathan M McTague

**It's** on once again, my friends! For most of us parents with kids old enough, the school season is already in high gear. And while there's *so much* that goes along with this well-trodden terrain, one of the most ubiquitous experiences of parents with young school-goers is the post-pick-up emotional crash and burn. *We're* happy to see them again; relieved that they've made it safely through another day; and hoping to reconnect in a positive, mutually satisfying way. *They're* surly, distant, maybe even down right unpleasant to be around, making whiney demands, punching siblings, or having a conniption about every-single-thing that happens from the moment they get into the family vehicle.

The bad news is, even I don't have a magic remedy for this all too common afternoon phenomenon. There just *isn't* a quick fix set of maneuvers to avoid the build-up of emotions that our kids store throughout their mild-to-extremely stressful school day. And in all honesty, we may not want one anyway. If we recognize what's happening, and can practice the skills necessary, then we can turn those after school explosions into tremendous opportunities.

But before I explain that, some good news! The really excellent truth is that if our children are unloading their feelings on us, it's because *they trust us*. And that trust is the critical basis of the relationship we want to nurture with our children. By answering their call, and stepping up to honour their emotional communications, we are cultivating that trust, proving its

integrity time and time again. Then, just a little while later – a mere flash in parenting time -- when they *really* need someone to trust, they'll think of us. And, when it comes right down to it, the more they trust us, the more we can trust them.

**Another great bit of news is that every time we successfully help our children off-load their pent-up, day or week or month's worth of hard, confusing, or otherwise stressful feelings, we are helping their brains learn better how to do it for themselves.** Every upset that comes our way is a new chance to help our kids grow synapses for emotional regulation, impulse control, self-awareness, and even empathy. And every time we help our children let out and recover from their overwhelming feelings, we help them process through the emotions, and get back those higher brain functions that shut off during emotional duress – again working both in the moment and to program their brains for future development.

**And finally, when the floodgates open, and the tears are pouring out, we can help our kids actually dig in and get rid of painful feelings that they may be storing. Often, especially in a school environment, children will stuff, hide, or try to ignore whatever uncomfortable feelings may arise during the course of the day.** When they don't have an opportunity to off-load those feelings, then they tend to carry them around under the emotional surface. Once "subterranean", these hidden emotions can continue to affect our children's outlooks, choices, and reactions; making them seem "hyper-sensitive", "bratty", or "difficult", when what they really are is *suffering*. To make matters worse, most young children don't have the emotional intelligence or awareness (yet!) to mitigate such scenarios, or navigate their own way back through unprocessed emotions. Until they have a chance to





unload with a trusted, empathetic caregiver, they will just carry-on mired in invisible feelings, leaking out painful emotion at inopportune times.

So if we're the ones who always get hit with the mid-afternoon monsoons, hopefully we can remember in the moment that this is opportunity breaking in the door. Hopefully we can remember that this is happening (*again!*) because our kids trust us and want to rely on that trust. Hopefully we can remember to make room for and offer an empathetic

ear to their emotional outpourings, so that they can let out their uncomfortable feelings, get back to higher brain functioning, and develop healthy neural architecture for processing their emotions.

### Here's what else we need to remember about how to make the most of our children's emotional off-loading:

**Logic does not apply!** The #1 thing that trips parents up in this arena is thinking (or worse *saying*) that the emotion doesn't fit the situation. The emotion doesn't care what situation is presented; and the kid is unaware of the disconnect between the emotion and the situation because s/he is stuck in the perspective of the emotion which is coloring *all* situations. The key here is to thank the trigger, not try to fix or argue against it. Whatever teeny, tiny, minor, little non-event becomes the trigger, our job is just to let the emotions flow!

**Empathy is our guide.** No matter what big hairy emotion comes down the pike, empathy will get us all through it. Now here, I want it to be clear that I mean *cognitive empathy*, not the *affective* variety. It is important for us to be *with* our children in the space of their feelings, and to seek to *understand* them, *not* to jump into the same space and *feel* the feelings themselves. From our personal place of peace, the empathy we extend can help our children let out more of their uncomfortable feelings, process them more completely, and learn from them. Our work here is to say what we see occurring, to ask clarifying questions, and/or to offer a quiet snuggle while they cry.

**"The crying is the healing, not the hurting".** That's one of my favorite Pam Leo quotes, and it comes back to me almost every time I need it to remind me to just breathe, and trust, and allow while my little ones let out. We don't need to protect our kids from being upset or stop the emotion, in fact, quite the opposite in this case – as much as we are able, and for as long as we can make time for it, we need to just stay with them and let them heal their lingering hurts.

**Wait!** As intimated above, patience is paramount in this process. The other side of the coin is that as soon as the crying stops, the healing stops. That's ok! As long as there is significant healing allowed first... The secret is to let our kids guide this part of the interaction. They will signal us (with a smile, a joke, a change of subject, a big hug, or other physical shift) when they have let out enough or processed the intensity of the emotion. Only when they let us know, do we consider the off-loading session complete.

**Back-process for information.** One of the mistakes I *still*(!) sometimes make when helping my girls with emotional processing is trying to "fix it" or give them information to make the scenario or situation itself easier for them. The trouble is that during emotional duress or processing, they can't hear



Drop your child  
off at school  
each morning in  
the emotional  
“green zone.”

our appeals to their higher brains – where they learn and store information – and *won't* be able to again until *after* the emotional processing is done. When they're feeling better, sometimes even hours later, then it makes sense for us to offer them information, or help them brain-storm, or team up to generate solutions to whatever remains of the original situation. Just as often, though, the emotional exorcism is more than enough to dissolve the initial “issue” (remember #1), and so the information we offer comes mostly in the form of recapping and paving the way for future emotional collaboration.

**Doing THIS helps our kids develop better and learn more.** As I've pointed out already, the more we give ourselves over to this process, the more we empower our kids to feel better both in the moment and in the long run. Getting unprocessed emotions out of their way means we leave our children's brains more available for all of the input we want them to get. This means they develop all of their neural real estate more fully, making the most of their immense potential. In fact, one of the best things we can do for our kids' education (aside from after school emotional processing) is to make sure to drop them off at school each morning in the emotional “green zone” where they are uninhibited by lingering stressful or upsetting emotions and more available for learning.

So we don't have to be afraid, gripping the steering wheel as we arrive at school in the afternoon, uneasily pulling into the parking area, hoping that our kids don't hit the proverbial fan as soon as they climb into the back seat. We can meet them where they are emotionally and allow them to rely on us to hold the space for them when they need to let out; knowing that when we do so, we are helping them to heal, to feel (and do!) better, and to grow their best.



**Nathan M McTague, CPCC, CPDPE**

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## Paige Michaelis

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# Teaching your Child to Handle a Challenging Teacher

## *Hello new school year!*

My how I missed you! The children missed you too- at least your initial “newness”, including a new teacher! Every year, most parents worry about the teacher their child will get. Questions such as, “Will they be nice?” “Are they competent?” “Will they be a good influence?” cross our minds. Some of us may even begin to reflect back on the teachers we experienced: “Oh, Ms. Aames was SO NICE” or “My goodness that Mr. Silver was SO Disgusting!” (Real teachers of mine. ☺) Mostly we just cross our fingers, hope for the best, and begin to make plans for what we will do if something does go wrong.

In all seriousness, this has been a difficult post to write. I thought it would be relatively easy, but after talking it through with a few teachers, my husband, and myself, I realized that there are too many variables that come into play here.

Initially I was trying to **define a “Challenging” teacher**- were they the yellers, the shamers, the ignorers? And then I realized that what might be acceptable behavior for my FAMILY may not be acceptable for yours. Each potential issue *is personal*- based on our own biases, experiences, and values. So I came to the conclusion that I wasn’t able to give guidelines across the board.

The second thing that I tried to **define was which CHILDREN were capable of handling a challenging teacher on their own**. Could I pick an age when they *should* be able to handle it? Shouldn’t high-schoolers be more capable than a 1<sup>st</sup> grader? You might think so, but I was reminded of the vast differences in maturity, development, temperament, capability and more. So I couldn’t really define that either...

And the third piece that came into play was US. **How comfortable are we in allowing our children to handle these challenges?** There is a *wide* variation between parents. While I may be ok with having my 1<sup>st</sup> grader discuss missing work with her teacher that may not be something that is ok with you. In essence, *my parenting style* may be different from your parenting style.

**So, how do we help our children tackle a challenging teacher?** All children will be up against this at some point, so how do we assist them in surviving it?

One of the best ways to begin is to ask ourselves the question: Is this something *I can and want to* teach my child to handle on their own or do I need to get involved? Why would we consider not getting involved? Because the *benefits of learning problem solving, developing resilience and capability, and getting one’s needs met in a healthy way are immeasurable*.

Believe it or not, children as young as age 4 can be empowered to solve challenges. And one of the best ways to not only get “all the information” to make



Parenting Education & Resources



your “can they handle it” determination, but to also empower and include, is to ask a lot of “curiosity” questions.

In a calm and non-judgmental tone ask: “What happened? And “Then what happened?” and “Who said what?” and “Who did what?”, and finally, if you determine they can handle it, “What do you think might be some solutions to this problem?” “How can you work this out?” And “Do you need some help coming up with a solution?”

But let’s say that you want to move beyond curiosity questions and into even more empowerment. Let’s say that your goal is to grow a child to handles these challenges on their own; maybe not right now, but moving towards the end goal.

### Here are a few suggestions that can set them up for high school, college and beyond:

1. Role play with them how to approach a teacher. What to say, how to say it. How to handle potential negative reactions.
2. Teach them how to use positive self-talk if necessary. “I can do this.” “I am safe”, “I am OK”.
3. Teach them about using “I” statements when speaking. “I feel nervous and scared when you yell all the time.” “I feel hurt when you put me or my classmates down.” “I feel angry when you embarrass me in front of my friends.”
4. Encourage them to “try it”. This may be a gradient process. First you are there with the teacher doing the talking, then both of you are doing the talking, then just him/her with you, then him/her alone.
5. Support them through it. There is value in trying and failing. If a child is taking a risk, they need our help and support to get through it if it doesn’t work out exactly as they had hoped. We can help by focusing on what they learned *from trying* not *from the perfect outcome*. Statements such as, “What did you learn?” “What could you do different next time?” “Good for you for being brave and trying it!” go a long way!
6. And finally, give them opportunities to practice being forthcoming and direct. [Family meetings](#) are a great way to do this!

The key here is balancing your connection with the development of the self-sufficiency tools they’ll need in adulthood. Letting them know that you support them and “have their back” will create an environment where “stretching” can occur.

Hope it helps!



## How to Parent in the Midst of Catastrophic Health Issues

By Lisa Fuller

This summer's been a doozy. What once felt like a series of mini health crises has come to feel like the norm with appendicitis, stress fractures, depression, drug addiction, cancer and even death becoming a more common part of life.

Last summer, I started writing a post about how to parent when you feel distracted or distraught by a loved one's suffering.

It's a hard topic. So hard, that I never completed the post. I couldn't bring myself to put a bow on it and send it to you. My thoughts never felt right or complete or enough.

Now, it's back around as I'm dealing with my own health struggles.

This week I had two areas of infiltrating basal cell carcinoma surgically removed from my face. With the surgery behind me and plenty of ice packs, I feel a sense of deep gratitude. My doctor described the tumors as nasty and aggressive and I'm lucky that they could be removed.

So I ask for myself and maybe you too - how do you parent when you're struggling with your own or a dear one's illness?

This is what I've gleaned talking with some of you and pondering the question these last 12 months:

**Keep it simple.** When your child's needs feel draining of the little resources you have serve macaroni and cheese or Cheerios and let them watch TV. It's okay.

**Prioritize.** Allow what's most important to rise to the top. Family, food, sleep, and exercise (if possible) make up my essential list.

**Say no mostly and yes only if that YES will enhance your life.** Time and energy are limited. Use yours wisely.

**Reach out intentionally.** Ask for help -- as my friend Liz says, "you may need to get over yourself" to do this. Remember that close friends *want* to lend a hand, particularly when a bigger situation leaves them feeling helpless.

*I "got over myself" this past week when my friend Carolyn came bearing flowers the day before my surgery. Having had a similar experience, Carolyn warned me that the hardest part for her had been after the procedure, when she had to remove and replace the bandages. **I immediately asked if she would be willing to come over and help me do that. She said yes, and little did I know just how important it was to have her for moral and physical support.** With 22 stitches across my hairline -- and as the doctor put it, "too many to count" in my nose -- I was weak and close to fainting. It took us an hour and a half to remove and replace all of the dressings that first time. I can't imagine what it would have felt like to do this alone.*

**Stick with the facts.** Depending on the age of your child, share relevant factual information, but only the surface story. They don't need to know the details and certainly not your "what if" fears. While your fears may be in the realm of possibility, they're not the facts.

**Be childlike.** As much as you can, allow your child's aliveness and awe

### Lisa Fuller

"My life's work is dedicated to helping you enjoy the precious time you have with your family."

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of life to touch you and lift you into the present.

**Dare greatly by saying no to guilt.** Instead, accept that you may be more foggy and distracted than you'd like to be with your kids. It's okay. Don't add parent guilt to the list of your full bucket of worries. In *Daring Greatly* Brené Brown writes, "To set down those lists of what **we're supposed to be** is brave. To love ourselves and support each other in the process of becoming real is perhaps the greatest single act of daring greatly" (Page 110).

**Lower your expectations.** Finally, be realistic about how much your kids, depending on age, will be able to empathize with you or the situation. In my experience that's NOT MUCH. They don't get it, nor should they.

*A few years ago, my brother's best friend and brother-in-law, Steve, died unexpectedly during a surgery. Because Steve was beloved by his community as a volunteer firefighter during the Easter Long Island pine barren wildfires, acting as Chief of the fire department at the time of his death, founder of the junior volunteer firefighter training program and a village civil servant, the community put on a huge uniformed procession for the funeral. Being family and a close friend, my brother delivered the eulogy. In the midst of the long funeral procession through town, his 8 year-*

*old son Aidan turned to him and asked in a tired voice, "when is this going to be over?" My brother was both heartbroken and relieved by the question. How could Aidan, who'd loved Uncle Steve deeply, be ready to move on? Be so oblivious to the gravity of the situation? Be so cold as to be DONE with Steve? At the same time – in Aidan's question my brother heard hope and the possibility that life could go on – that tomorrow would eventually arrive and maybe it was sooner than my brother thought possible. **In his son's words were the innocence and gravity of the truth that we do go on, even when we lose the unloseable friend, even when we suffer unimaginable pain.***

I've decided that it's okay that I don't have a bow on this one. It's a question that doesn't have a neat answer.





## Quit Whining & Do Your Chores!

By Sarina Behar Natkin, LICSW

Can you believe the kids today? Whining and complaining about chores, I just don't get it. **When we were kids, we did all our chores to perfection with a smile on our face and begged our parents to nag just a little bit more, right?** I think not. Why then do we expect our kids to be so different from us?

**Warning, this next sentence may hurt.** You actually have no control over how your child feels. I know we love to see our kids happy, but we can't make our kids love chores any more than we love coming home from a long day at work to three loads of laundry and a sink full of dishes. What we can do is set the stage for chores to be a regular part of family life, free from nagging, and full of teaching and learning valuable life skills. Here's some tips to show you how:

**Understand the purpose of chores.** Sometimes we get so stuck in power struggles around chores, that we forget the larger purpose. **Chores are about being a contributing member of the family, and about learning the skills necessary for functioning as adults.** So, step out of the power struggle, and think about how you learned these things and just how long it took to do so.

**Don't tie chores to allowance.** While it's tempting to dangle allowance over their heads when kids resist doing chores, allowance and chores are actually two separate things. **Receiving an allowance is about learning how to responsibly spend and save money. Chores are about being part of a family that takes quite a bit of work to run.** While allowance and rewards may motivate in the short term, they lose their appeal quite quickly and then you lose out on both teaching life skills and teaching about money.

**Involve them in choosing chores.** This may shock you, but each year on their birthday, my children get to pick a new chore. They talk about it for weeks before hand, excitedly thinking about what they will choose. How did we achieve this magic? We started when they were very young and made the kids a part of the discussion. We asked what they wanted to learn first and we started with that one. Again, it's easy to have an idea of what you want them to do, but **if you want them to whine just a little less, be sure and involve them in the process of choosing.**

When we needed a mid-year boost in responsibilities, we made a list with the kids of all the things it takes to run our family, from work to chores to er-



rand. We then asked the kids to go through and circle the item they were solely responsible for. As you can imagine, it was a small percentage of the list. Their reaction was priceless, "Wow, no wonder you need some help!"

We let them know that beyond help, what was really important to us was that they felt comfortable with many of these skills before they left for college. We then asked which things they were interested in learning first. Periodically, we check in and see all the things they have learned and see what might be next on their list. Notice this is not our list, but theirs, which goes a long way towards them taking ownership of learning these skills.

**Make a plan.** A good plan can make all the difference when it comes to our children following through. Have a discussion, and work through the logistics of chore completion. **Your plan should include specifics as to when the chore will be completed, how they will remember to do the chore, and how they will**

**communicate that it is complete.** This is also the time to add in any parts that are important to you. If your rule is that chores need to be done before screen time, you will want to make sure this is part of your agreement from the beginning.

Creating a plan creates clear expectations, helps us avoid nagging and helps kids learn to be responsible and really own their job. Let your child really be a part of the decision-making and yield where you can. Think recipes instead of rules.

**Take time for training.** Children often resist tasks when they are overwhelmed with what is being asked of them. **It does not matter if you know your child can do it; what matters, is that they believe they can do it.** Try these four steps when teaching your child a new chore: 1) Have your child watch you do it, 2) Have them help you do it, 3) Help your child do it, 4) Watch your child do it. This is more likely to help your child feel capable in doing the task and help them move through being overwhelmed.



**Don't expect perfection.** If you are expecting Martha Stewart like precision, your child might not be the only one miserable. When we started cleaning up after dinner together as a family, we knew that it would be a while before it felt like help. And boy did it! It took almost a full year before they were proficient at it. At six and nine years old, they do pretty well. In fact, they were so proud of mastering these skills that they recently kicked us out of the kitchen after dinner to clean up by themselves.

**Express appreciation, even if it wasn't perfect.** So often we discourage kids by criticizing their imperfections and focusing on what they didn't do right. Imagine if your boss was standing over you and every time you made a typo, they were right there to point it out. Sound like fun? Most of us can relate to that feeling of being micromanaged. It makes us want to say, "Why don't you just do it yourself!"

When your child complete a chore, say thank you. **Let them know how much you appreciate them pitching in to help the family run smoothly.** If you need to take more time for training, pick another time to bring that up.

**Follow through with kindness and firmness.** This helps you and your children learn to trust each other.

### **Here are some tips for helping both you and your child keep your agreements:**

- 1) If you have agreed that chores happens at a certain time, make sure that time is kept clear so they can follow through. If you need to schedule something during that time, ask them.
- 2) Give your child the benefit of the doubt and assume they will keep their agreement. It never feels good to have people second guess or micromanage us, and our children feel the same. This means giving a grace period before checking in on their plan.
- 3) If the agreed upon chore time has past and your child is still not getting started, check in calmly. You might say, "I notice its past 4pm, what's our agreement about what happens at this time?"
- 4) If they still are not jumping on board, avoid lecturing and nagging. The less words the better. Simply sit next to them and calmly wait for them to get to it, or put a gentle hand on them and point in the direction of the chore. You may be surprised at how well this

works, but don't expect them to be full of joy. **They will likely groan and stomp off. This is when we really need to keep our mouths shut and let them have their emotions.** All that's needed is a "thank you for keeping our agreement when they complete the chore.

While you can't make your child love chores, you can share control, teach important life skills and help them feel capable along the way. Not only does this increase their willingness to do chores, it often shifts their behavior in general as they begin to learn that they have a role and that matter in the family.



#### **Sarina Behar Natkin, LICSW**

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## Limited Choices By Dr. Jane Nelsen

Offering limited choices instead of making demands can be very effective. Children often respond to choices when they will not respond to demands, especially when you follow the choice with, "You decide."

Choices should be respectful and should focus attention on the needs of the situation. Choices are directly related to responsibility. Younger children are less capable of wide responsibility, so their choices are more limited. Older children are capable of broader choices, because they can assume responsibility for the consequences of their choice.


For instance, younger children might be given the choice of going to bed now or in five minutes. Older children might be given full responsibility for choosing their bedtime, because they also take full responsibility for getting themselves up in the morning and off to school without any hassles.

### Choices are also directly related to the respect for, and convenience of, others.

When getting ready for school, younger children might be given the choice of putting on their shoes before we leave in 5 minutes or putting them on in the car. Older children might be given the choice of being ready in 5 minutes or riding their bike. Either way,

mom has to leave in 5 minutes. Whenever a choice is given, either alternative should be acceptable to the adult.

### Limited Choices



Choices provide small steps in shared power.

- 1) It is time to leave. Would you like to hop like a bunny or clomp like an elephant to the car?
- 2) If your child doesn't want to leave, kindly and firmly say: "Staying is not a choice," and repeat the two choices.
- 3) It can be empowering to add, "You decide," after giving two choices.

Quotes from the Positive Discipline books © Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott

My first try at choices was to ask my three year old, "Do you want to get ready for bed?" She didn't.

Obviously, the choice I offered was beyond the need (mine and hers) for her to go to bed, and the choice I offered did not include an alternative I was willing to accept. I waited five minutes and started again by asking, "Would you like to wear your pink pajamas or your blue pajamas? You decide." She chose her blue pajamas and started putting them on. Adding, "You decide," after a choice is very empowering. It adds emphasis to the fact that the child does have a choice. What if they don't want either choice and want to do something else? If the something else is acceptable to you, fine. If it is not, say, "That isn't one of the choices." And, then repeat the choices and, "You decide." Children may not have a choice about many things, such as whether or not to do their homework. Homework needs to be done, but children can be offered a choice as to when they would like to do it, such as right after school, just before dinner, or after dinner.

As with every Positive Discipline tool, it is important to remember that there isn't one tool that works for every child in every situation. That is why we offer so many Positive Discipline tools. It is also important to remember that the feeling behind what you do is as important as what you do. The key is to be kind and firm at the same time.



# Positive Discipline

Creating Respectful Relationships in Homes and Schools



# Spending Special Time Reduces Jealousy among Children

By Kelly Pfeiffer, Positive Discipline Trainer



**Kelly Pfeiffer**

A Certified Positive Discipline Lead Trainer, Kelly teaches live interactive workshops to parents and child care providers on child development, social-emotional skills, self-care for parents, conflict resolution for families and Positive Discipline tools. She's authored over 100 web articles on child development topics, blogs about Positive Discipline parenting and also teaches creative writing as a writer artist in residence in elementary schools.

Sibling relationships are full of ups and downs. No matter how hard parents try to treat children equally, many children have jealous feelings about a brother or sister. Quality time with parents is something that all kids want. In addition to building the bond between parent and child, spending special time also can improve the relationship between siblings and reduce sibling rivalry.

## How Quality Time with a Parent Reduces Jealousy for Children

Most children in multi-child homes wonder if parents love one child more than another. When children wonder about being loved less, they often feel jealous and act out in hurtful ways involving parents and siblings, resulting in intense sibling rivalry "A major reason kids fight is to get you involved. Kids want you to take their side by blaming and punishing the other child," writes Nelsen, Lott and Glenn in *Positive Discipline A – Z* (Three Rivers Press, 1999).

Some sibling rivalry is normal but extremely jealousy among children can be a major stressor for parents and kids. Spending special time with children is one way for parents to show that they love all of their children enough to spend quality time with each one. As well, spending quality time together strengthens the bond between parent and child and sends a strong message of love. The "Sibling Rivalry" section of *Positive Discipline A-Z* recommends for parents to spend special one on one time on a regular basis.

When parents confirm love through regular parent quality time, a child's jealous feelings can be greatly reduced. When doubt of love and hurt are removed children can begin to build a sibling relationship on having fun together.

## Arranging Family Schedules for Child-Parent Quality Time

Many parents want to spend quality time with children, but have difficulty fitting special time into their family's busy schedule. Children's individual activities, video time and regular household maintenance seem to get the way of parent quality time with kids.

Some families decide to limit the number of individual child activities to one or two per week allowing more time for parents and children to spend spe-



cial time together on a weekly basis. Other families have found ways to plan special time with one child while another child is attending an individual activity. Still other families designate one night a week as parent-child night and plan sandwiches for dinner in order for parents to spend quality time with children.

Even with the best of intentions, most parents find that spending special time with children does not happen unless parents mark a specific time on the family calendar. It helps if families establish a weekly routine that includes parent quality time for all children in the household. A child can then count on and look forward to one on one time quality time with a parent, which reduces feelings of jealousy for children.

## Ideas for Spending Special Time with Each Child

Many parents mistakenly think that special time has to be about entertaining children and spending money on children. Providing entertainment won't help improve sibling relationship issues. It's the parent-child bonding that counts towards reducing jealous feelings.

There are many low cost ways to spend quality time with children. Kids enjoy doing a variety of simple activities such as playing ball, playing cards, playing a board game, bike riding, cooking or taking a walk together. Activities that involve eye contact and interaction offer better chances for parent-child bonding and reducing jealousy among children than activities focused around a media screen.

Parents and children can decide together how to spend quality time or parent and child can take turns choosing how to spend special time together. Families can also decide on a modest monthly budget for child-parent quality time, so that special time provides opportunities for teaching money management skills as well as for bonding.

Spending special time won't eliminate all conflict in sibling relationships. All healthy relationships involve conflict. But spending quality time with parents can reduce conflicts caused by children's jealous feelings and decrease sibling rivalry issues.



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