

# Steps to Become a Better Parent

## Objective

To improve your parenting skills by taking seventeen simple action steps.

## What to Know

Perhaps you wonder if there are ways you can be a better parent. Here are tips you can use to improve your parenting skills. You might even want to print this list and put it somewhere you can see it as a reminder to do at least one action every day.

**1. Empathize more.** Even if your child does not get their way, it is important they feel understood. When setting limits, acknowledge how they are feeling and the reason they might be saying or doing something.

**2. Explain what they *can* do.** Instead of, "Don't throw the ball indoors!" you might say, "Balls are for outdoor play. Indoors you can throw stuffed animals into the basket in your room."

**3. Laugh.** Laughter decreases stress and increases bonding hormones. When you laugh together, it strengthens your relationship.

**4. Say yes.** There are times you must set limits and say no. But when you can say yes, say it!

**5. Spend distraction-free, one-on-one time together.** If you want to strengthen your relationship with your child, show up and love your child without yelling or controlling them. Set aside at least 20 minutes a day to play with or talk to your child.

**6. Yell less.** When you are about to yell at your child, try to do the following:

- Stop (pause)
- Drop (your agenda)
- Breathe

You might say, "I'm sorry, I was frustrated. Let's try again. How can I help you? OK, let's do it!"

**7. Phone-free time.** Does your child think your phone is the most important thing your life? Instead of focusing on your phone, prioritize time with your child by putting electronic devices away.

**8. Get moving.** Each day children need fresh air, time outdoors, and movement to de-stress and be their best selves. Everyone does – so make it a priority to get outside and move together.

**9. Label and allow emotions.** Allow your child to express emotions even when you are setting a limit. Label the emotion, or help your child identify what they are feeling to help them learn to manage their emotions. You might say, "I can tell by your tone of voice you're upset. Tell me what's going on, and we can figure this out together." In addition, label your own feelings so your child understands that everyone feels sad, angry, disappointed, and so on.

**10. Take care of yourself.** Taking care of yourself might not be a priority, but when you effectively manage your own stress, it is easier to support your child. Get enough sleep, exercise, do things that make you happy, and eat well. Monitor your wellbeing each day. You are calmer and more in control of yourself and your emotions when you are taking care of yourself.

**11. Follow through.** Whether it is a promise or consequence, follow through – otherwise, you send mixed messages to your child. Teach your child you can be trusted to mean what you say.

**12. Do one consistent daily activity.** Each day, have at least one specific routine or activity you do with your child. For example, you can make and eat breakfast together or take a walk after dinner.

**13. Be generous with compliments.** Remember the 5:1 ratio – for every one correction or criticism, give five positive affirmations or words of encouragement. Focusing on this ratio helps build your child’s self-esteem bank account to cope with challenging times.

**14. Monitor screen time.** Participate in what your child is watching, reading, and doing online. Let your child know they can talk with you about what they see online. Use parental controls on phones, tablets, and computers, and set time limits and approve what content your child can see.

**15. Answer questions.** The more questions you answer, the more you help your child learn to think about themselves, the world, and their relationships. Even if the questions are annoying, try not to stifle their interest in learning.

**16. Ask questions.** While answering questions is helpful, also ask your child open-ended questions to stimulate conversation and help your child focus on the good things and what might need improvement.

**17. Model good communication.** Keep the lines of respectful communication open and listen fully. Be an active and engaged listener and demonstrate that you can handle what your child says and how they feel.

## **What to Do**

For the next month, refer to the above tips and write down what you do each day. Note the date, the action(s) you take, how your child responded, and how you felt afterward.





Did this exercise help you become a better parent? Why or why not?

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Do you have some other ideas about what it means to be a better parent? Be specific.

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How did your child respond to the actions you took? Explain.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise?

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What was the easiest part?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?

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