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Parenting Emotionally Healthy Children

As working parents of two young school-age children, it's a continuous juggling act to spend even a little bit of time each evening as a family. I want to make sure that our children grow up emotionally healthy in today's environment. What can I do to assure that I am raising emotionally healthy children?

Raising children presents dozens of challenges every day; whether it's getting them to eat healthfully, do their homework, or make safe choices. But a good parent must also focus on a child's emotional health. And while dealing with emotions may seem more taxing than the day-to-day challenges of parenting, emotionally healthy children will be more successful at school, work and life in general. Below are a few tips that might help you get through these important years with young children.

- Do your best to provide a safe home and community for your child, as well as nutritious meals, regular health check-ups, immunizations and exercise.
- Encourage your child to express his or her feelings; respect those feelings. Let your child know that everyone experiences pain, fear, anger and anxiety. Try to learn the source of these feelings.
- Help your child express anger positively, without resorting to violence. "Use your words."
- Promote mutual respect and trust. Keep your voice level down even when you don't agree. Keep communication channels open.
- Listen to your child. Use words and examples your child can understand. Encourage questions. Express your willingness to talk about any subject.
- Provide comfort and assurance. Be honest and focus on the positives.
- Look at your own problem-solving and coping skills. Are you setting a good example? Seek help if you are overwhelmed by your child's feelings or behaviors, or if you are unable to control your own frustration or anger.
- Set goals based on the child's abilities and interests, not someone else's expectations.
- Celebrate accomplishments.
- Don't compare your child's abilities to those of other children; appreciate the uniqueness of your child.
- Spend time regularly with your child.
- Foster your child's independence and self-worth. Help your child deal with life's ups and downs. Show confidence in your child's ability to handle problems and tackle new experiences.
- Discipline constructively, fairly and consistently. Discipline is a form of teaching, not physical punishment. All children and families are different; learn what is effective for your child. Show approval for positive behaviors and help your child learn from his or her mistakes
- Love unconditionally. Teach the value of apologies, cooperation, patience, forgiveness and consideration for others.

Don't expect to be perfect, parenting is a difficult job. By supporting your child in a positive and encouraging manner, you will arm him or her with a sense of capability that will increase self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of well-being.