



# Top Tips for Parents

YOUR GUIDE TO POSITIVE PARENTING





## Introduction

### Changes To The Law

In September 2006, the law on physical punishment was changed. If a parent harms his/her child through physical punishment, the defence of reasonable chastisement will now only be considered if the harm is seen as minor:

Everyone accepts that children must learn right from wrong and develop the ability to get on with others. However, it is important to remember that you do not have a right to physically punish your child and you should, therefore, consider other methods such as positive parenting.

Being a parent is a wonderful thing; however, it's not always easy. Hopefully, the information in this booklet will show you how you can use techniques to guide, nurture and encourage your child and build your confidence as a parent.

We want our children to behave well, and to:

- have respect for themselves and others;
- be polite to others;
- know how to behave in different situations;
- be able to concentrate and pay attention;
- share and to take turns;
- know how to win and how to lose.

But children often behave quite differently, and we may feel annoyed, frustrated and embarrassed.

**This booklet suggests a few ideas to help you with your child's behaviour.**

Parents of teenage children or children with a disability may face additional challenges and pressures, which are not addressed within this booklet. However, there are details of organisations that may be able to help in the contacts section at the back of this booklet.





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## Top Tips for Parents

### Usual Behaviour

Children may:

- have tantrums;
- shout and scream;
- hit siblings, parents, friends;
- not do as they're told;
- break things, spill things, squash things;
- not listen or concentrate.

This is not unusual. Children are learning what happens when they have a tantrum, hit another child, say rude words.

Children will always push against boundaries. They are checking out what their parents will draw the line at, what they can and can't do. This helps them understand what is acceptable and what isn't.

Parents work out their own ways of looking after their children. There is no simple recipe; it takes time for children to learn how to behave, and for parents to work out the best way of getting the best out of their child.

### What makes children behave in challenging ways?

Children do not usually misbehave just to upset or annoy their parents. There is often a reason behind a child's behaviour.

It may be:

- they are upset or anxious about school;
- they feel jealous of their brother or sister;
- they want their parent to listen to them;
- they want their parent to spend time with them.

Behaviour patterns can get stuck. At some point most children will misbehave to get attention. If a parent doesn't pay much attention

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when children are behaving well, some children will try 'acting up' to get attention, even if it results in a telling off.

## Coping Under Pressure

Coping with your child's misbehaviour can be stressful. Sometimes it can seem like you're about to reach boiling point.

Parents need to find ways to reduce the pressure in the home and can do a lot to help their child's behaviour through positive parenting.

In fact, parents can make the difference between their child's behaviour getting out of control, and helping them manage everyday life in better ways.



## Tips for Helping With Children's Behaviour

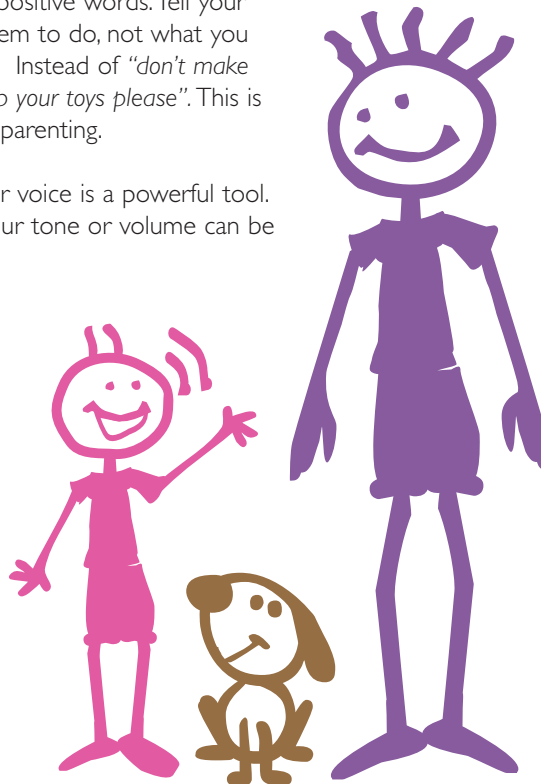
### Tip 1: Talk and Listen

As we know, all children are unique.

Getting to know your own child, and knowing what makes them angry or agitated can help you prevent angry or upsetting situations before they happen.

Talking and listening to your child helps them to understand what's going on:

- **Language:** Try to use positive words. Tell your child what you want them to do, not what you don't want them to do. Instead of "don't make such a mess" try "tidy up your toys please". This is an example of positive parenting.
- **Change your tone:** Your voice is a powerful tool. Sometimes changing your tone or volume can be enough to stop a fraught situation or get your child to do what you want. This can work equally well with older children. If you react or speak in a completely different manner to which they expected they might be surprised.





- **Listening:** Your child is trying out his/her new language and needs to be heard. Encourage your child to talk to you – sit beside him/her – they'll find it easier to talk and listen to you if you're not standing over them.

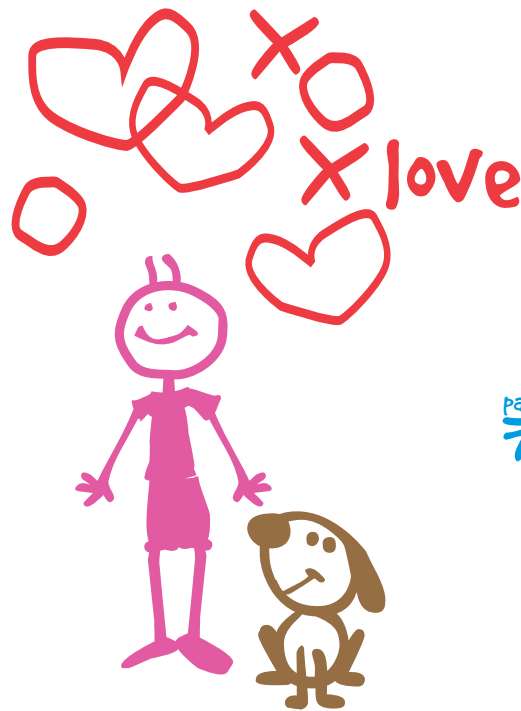
- **Feelings:** Help them find the words to tell you how they are feeling, even if it takes time.

- **Explaining:** If you have to say 'no', give your child a good reason and offer an alternative – "*Rosie is playing with the doll now, let's find you another toy*".

- **Involve your child:** Where possible talk with them about the rules and what you expect from them. Be clear.

- **Discussion:** As they get older discuss the setting of rules with them.

Tell them you love them, and show them by smiling, cuddling and kissing them. Tell them when you are cross, or when you are not happy with their behaviour. They need to realise that it's the behaviour you don't like and not them.





### Tip 3: Understand Changes As They Grow

Children's needs and understanding change as they grow, and what might be expected of a four-year-old can't be expected of a two-year-old:

- **Exploring:** Young children find out about their world by touching, shaking, tasting, pouring, squeezing...the list is endless! This isn't naughtiness, but a way of learning about their world. Make your home 'toddler proof' by storing valuables and breakables away from your child so they can explore safely. The mess of life with a toddler can be exhausting but think of all the learning they're doing!
- **Independence:** Part of growing up for your child will be pushing against the boundaries and becoming an individual. You can help them by letting them do as much for themselves as possible – for young children, keep toys at a child's height, let them dress and feed themselves.
- **Encouragement:** Your child will learn what's ok to do from you, so give lots of praise and attention to good behaviour. If you only pay attention to your child when they misbehave, they'll learn to misbehave to get your attention.

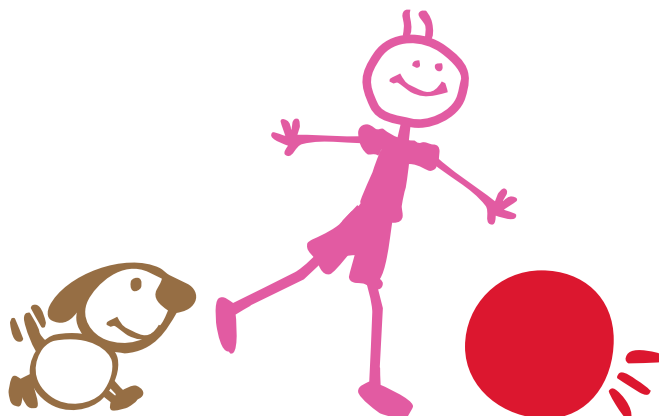




### Tip 5: Reward and Notice Good Behaviour

Sometimes it is easy to ignore your child when they are behaving well, and only notice them when they are misbehaving. Children love their parents' attention, and if they have to behave badly to get it, they will. Give them lots of praise when they are behaving well, rather than focussing on misbehaviour:

- Rewards do not have to be material things.
- Real praise and encouragement is the best reward as it can boost a child and build self-esteem and confidence.
- Try not to stress over the little things. If you are praising things they are doing well, and ignoring the small niggles, your child will learn that unacceptable behaviour no longer gets them the attention.





## Tip 7: Have Realistic Expectations and Allow Consequences

Children are children. They will be messy, noisy and, at times, disobedient.

- Give them the freedom to make mistakes.
- Encourage your child to think for themselves and take responsibility for their actions.

## Tip 8: Deal with Meltdown Moments Positively

There will be difficult times for every family – usually when there's too much to do in a short space of time, or when what you need to do, clashes with what your child wants to do.



### Recognise Triggers

There might be some specific triggers or times when your child misbehaves. Be aware of these and try different approaches.

### The morning rush

- "I try to get clothes out and make up their packed lunches the night before – it gives me a bit of extra time in the morning."
- "Getting them to do a bit for themselves always helps, even if it's just getting a bowl and a spoon. They feel like they're helping and it's one less thing for me to do."
- "I get up before everyone and have five minutes on my own for a quick coffee each morning."





### Early evening to bedtime

- “When I get in from work, I try and have five minutes just for them – once I’ve heard about their day, it’s easier for them to let me get on and cook tea.”
- “We’ve just started giving him a five minute warning so he knows that he’s got a bit more time to play then it’s bedtime.”
- “We have a ‘bedtime routine’ of a bath, book and then bed!”

### Other things you may wish to try:

- **Distraction:** For young children, try distracting their attention away from what you don’t want them to do.
- **Time out:** One alternative to physical punishment is to put your child in a dull but safe place for a period of time. The child should be of an age and ability to understand that they are to stay there until you tell them otherwise. The time limit should be one minute for every year of the child’s life.
- **Withdraw privileges:** For dealing with serious misbehaviour, try withdrawing privileges, for example, favourite programmes, playing with games, loss of pocket money, grounding etc.
- **Be a role model:** It is your responsibility to set an example for your child, by your own behaviour and attitude.



## Tips for Helping With Children's behaviour

### Tip 9: Look After Yourself

If you make sure you get a break to relax, this may help you cope better:

Try to:

- take time for yourself;
- keep interests outside the home;
- take up the offer of help from family and friends;
- get rest when you can;
- look after your health;
- know your limits;
- get together with other parents and their children – children also need company.



## Tip 10: When Things Are Getting Difficult



- Stay calm.
- If it is impossible to stay calm, leave the child in a safe place and leave the room for a few minutes. This will give you breathing space to think.
- When you return, talk to your child about what has happened and how you will deal with it.
- Think about what happened, what set off the behaviour, has it happened before and what could be done differently?

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- Ask for help and advice – nobody gets it right all the time.
- As a general rule, try and give five times more praise than criticism.
- Don't try to change too much at once – take one tip and use it until you've worked it out and then try another.
- Flexibility is fine – life can be chaotic and having a flexible approach will help your children learn to do the same.

### And Remember

The most important thing is that your child feels loved and happy even when sometimes things are difficult.



## Here Are Some Useful contacts



**Barnardo's: 028 90672366**

Offers services for children, young people and their families, and help children who are young carers.

[www.barnardos.org.uk/northernireland](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/northernireland)

**Contact a Family: Freephone Helpline 0808 808 3555**

Provides advice, information and support to the parents of children with all disabilities and health conditions.

[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

**Disability Action: 028 90297880**

Works to ensure that people with disabilities attain their full rights as citizens by supporting people with disabilities.

[www.disabilityaction.org](http://www.disabilityaction.org)



**Employers for Childcare: 0800 028 3008**

Provides assistance to working parents with dependent children to get and stay in work.

[www.employersforchildcare.org](http://www.employersforchildcare.org)

**Family Caring Trust: 028 30264174**

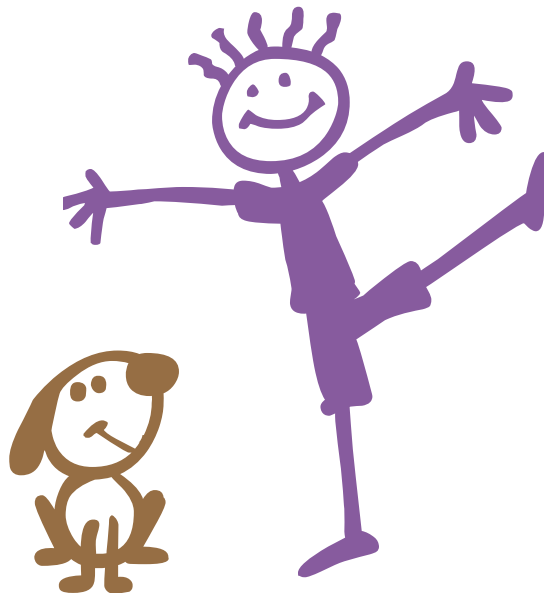
Supports and empowers parents by providing practical, skill-based resources to improve family relationships.

[www.familycaring.co.uk](http://www.familycaring.co.uk)

**Gingerbread: 0808 8088090**

Supports and works with and for one-parent families in Northern Ireland.

[www.gingerbreadni.org](http://www.gingerbreadni.org)





## Here Are Some Useful contacts

**Home-Start Northern Ireland: 028 90460772**

Helps families with young children

[www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)

**Lifestart Foundation: 028 71365363**

Early years project with focus on families with children from birth to 5 years.

[www.lifestartfoundation.org](http://www.lifestartfoundation.org)

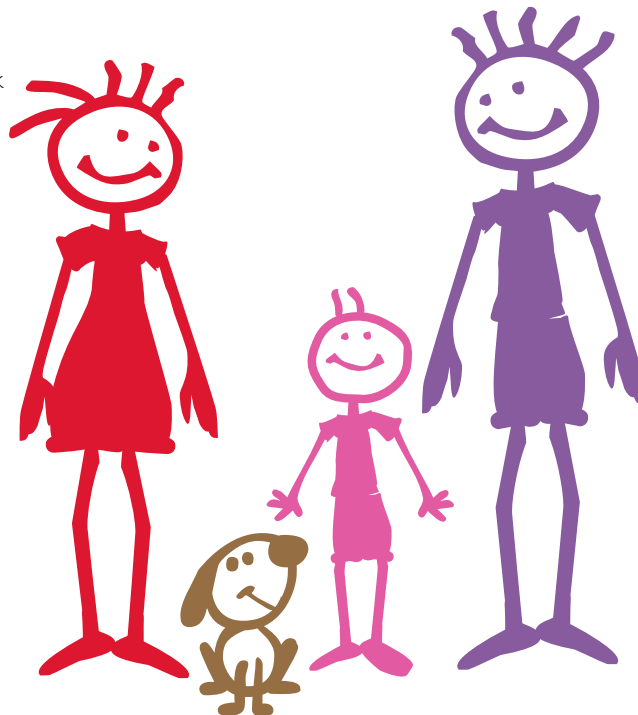
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**MENCAP: 028 90691351**

Information Service 0845 7636227

Works with people with a learning disability and their families and carers.

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)





**NCH: 028 90460500**

Helps children, young people and families facing difficulties such as poverty, disability and abuse, achieve their full potential.

[www.nch.org.uk](http://www.nch.org.uk)

**NIPPA: 028 90662825**

Promotes high quality childcare for children aged 0-14 and their families.

[www.nippa.org](http://www.nippa.org)

**NSPCC: 0808 8005000**

Works to end cruelty to children.

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**Parents Advice Centre NI: Helpline 0808 8010722**

Supports parents and other family members to improve their ability to function within the family.

[www.pachelp.org](http://www.pachelp.org)







## Comments

We would like to hear from you. We are interested on your views about this booklet.

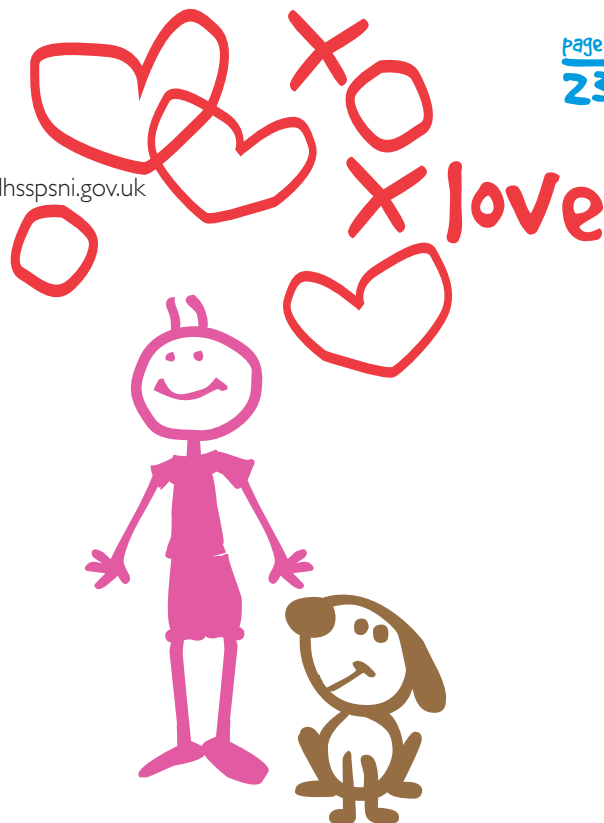
- Have you found it helpful?
- What in particular has been of help/interest to you?
- What additional information should we consider making available?

Please forward your comments by post to:

'Top Tips for Parents'  
Family Policy Unit  
Room C4.22  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3SQ

or email: [familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

or tel: 028 90 520528





Notes

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This booklet has been produced by the Inter-departmental group on positive parenting.

The Group consists of representatives from: office of Law Reform, DHSSPS, ofMDFM, DENI, Barnardo's NI, NCH, NIPPA, NSPCC NI and Parents Advice Centre.

Permission has been given by the Family and Parenting Institute and the Welsh Assembly for the use of material included in this booklet.

