

PARENTING 101

NAVIGATING THROUGH THE
MOST CHALLENGING MOMENTS OF CHILDHOOD



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How can we effectively guide children towards positive behavior?

There is a saying, 'Happiness comes from getting what you want, but joy comes from giving', and this seems true. As parents, we have all come to understand that nothing makes us give more of ourselves than having children and nothing brings more joy than our own family. On the other hand, we have also come to experience more anxiety, doubt and frustration and to a much greater degree than before we had children.

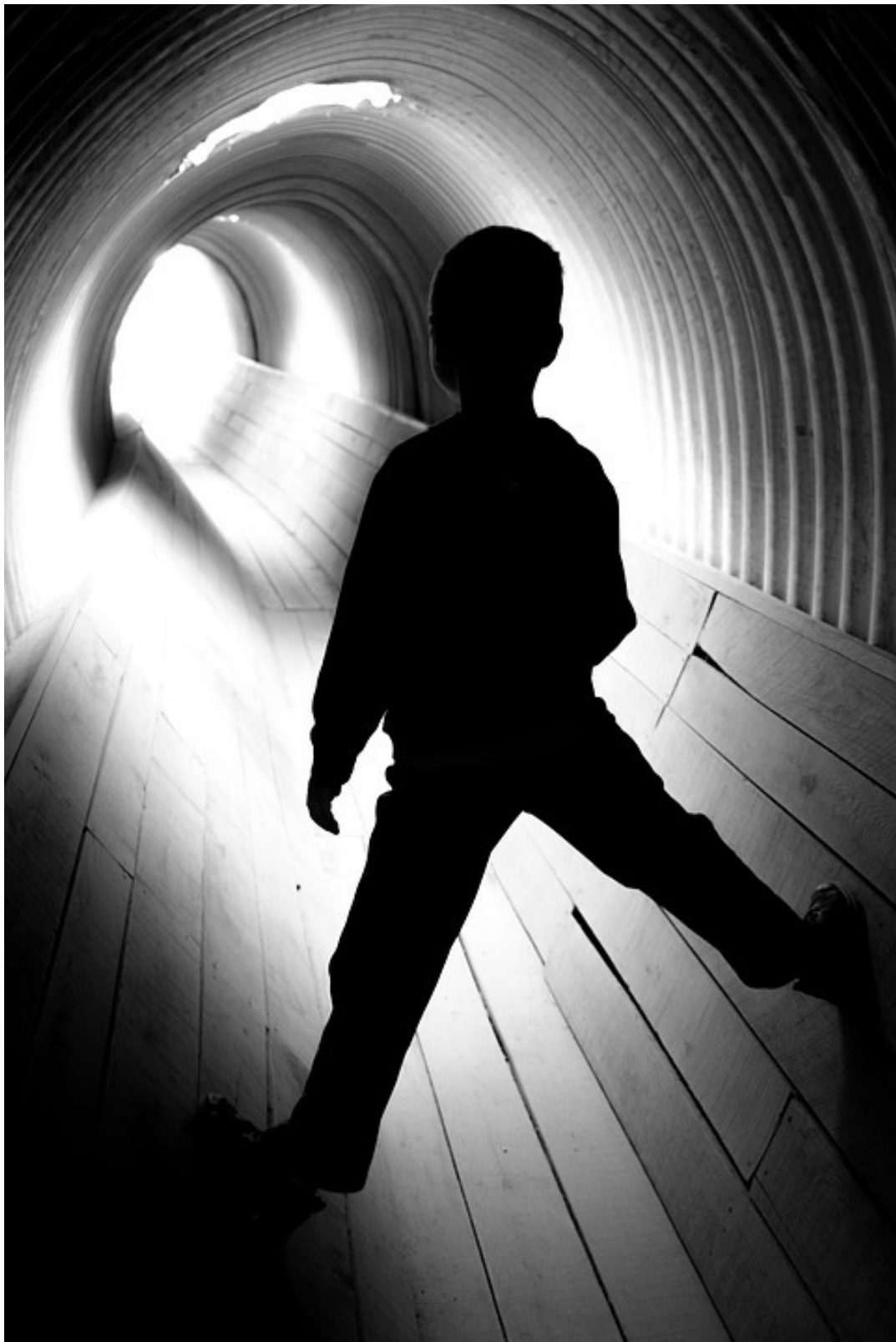
There is no such thing as stress-free, completely confident parenting. Even your neighbour who always seems so peaceful with perfectly well behaved children has days when she yells and says things she shouldn't.

None of us are perfect, the sheer amount of love we feel for our children, clouds our best judgment and casts doubt on our decisions. As parents, we worry all the time. We worry if our children are getting adequate nutrition, or if they are sleeping well. Why do they hurt themselves so often? Are they getting along well in school? Will they be able to cope with academic pressure? Will they find happiness, are we ruining their happiness? The list goes on.

When you love someone as much as you love your children, worry, doubt and uncertainty are inevitable.

As parents, we join a community of people who have confronted similar, everyday, ups and downs. Sometimes we can turn to our family and friends for advice and support; sometimes it is nice to learn more on our own.

This is why we put together this list of common ‘complex’ situations we’ve all been through or are going through and then looked at strategies to overcome them to live up to the ‘superhero’ title that we inherit as parents.



1. TANTRUMS

From the time children are born, they begin to separate themselves from their parents, first physically, then emotionally and so, a normal part of this separation is disagreeing with and contradicting their parents. These early disagreements often result in tantrums and are more common in some children than others. Tantrums can include a range of behaviours from screaming, whining, kicking or simply sulking. These behaviours are most characteristic of children from 1-3 years of age, when children have low emotional control and are not yet able to engage in more complex forms of argument. Although a 5-minute tantrum can seem like a lifetime, typically tantrums do only last that long. On some occasions, your child may have a tantrum that lasts longer. But more often than not, tantrums range anywhere from 30 seconds to 5 minutes.

2. THUMB SUCKING

This habit is also very common in young children. Beginning in the womb, children tend to perfect this throughout infancy and can continue with it as toddlers and occasionally as preschoolers. Most children give up thumb sucking between 2-4 years of age primarily due to peer pressure. It is usually a coping strategy that many toddlers use when they are seeking comfort.



3. MISBEHAVIOUR

Like adults, children are social beings. They want to feel appreciated and to be the centre of attention. They like to be in control and exert power. They also feel helpless and vulnerable at times. Like us, they want to be heard and don't like to be told what to do. Like adults, they are different people with different temperaments; hence a cookie cutter solution will not work. However, unlike adults, their ability to regulate their feelings and understand social behavior is still at an early developmental stage. It is our responsibility to help them on this journey to understand their feelings and to help them develop skills and strategies to self-regulate.

4. LYING

When our children lie, we often do not know how to react. We cannot fathom why they lie or how they can lie with such ease. Having said that, when we reflect on our lives, there are surely times when we were guilty of stretching the truth and lying to some degree; sometimes to ease us out of a situation, sometimes to not hurt another person's feelings or sometimes to hide something that we are not proud of. It doesn't make us bad people. With children too, in most cases, it is their way of finding their moral compass.

As adults, it is our responsibility to establish a moral code for our children because they pick up what they see. They observe us and our reactions, how we negotiate with others, the tone of our voice and body language. **Avoid asking questions which invite your child to lie.** "Did you create this mess?" Well, of course not. Any child is likely to lie when they feel they are in danger of being admonished.

We also play along with children's fantasies. Think of Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. How many times have we 'lied' to our children in order to indulge their imagination or have a bit of fun with different holiday celebrations?

As children get older (around 5 years), they develop an understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, as well as a stronger understanding of the differences between fantasy and reality and therefore an understanding of truth and lies.

5. SHYNESS

Like adults, children are born with their own unique temperament. Some are 'shy' and stay away from large crowds; some are naturally gregarious and chatty. Some will find it very easy to speak in front of a group of friends and some will dread the day they have to.

How many of us can deliver a talk in front of a large crowd? Even the best orators have revealed their fears of speaking in public. Public speaking is indeed a great skill to have but it is also overrated. It is therefore wrong to expect every child to be an articulate and confident communicator.

The unique tendencies in children develop into their unique personalities as they grow up. As parents, we should appreciate and celebrate these differences and nurture our children to fulfill their aspirations to their fullest potential.

There are, however, situations where the child can be inordinately 'shy', recoiling to a corner of the room even in a familiar environment. There are ways in which we can identify and alleviate these insecurities to ensure that they develop into confident and secure individuals.



6. BULLYING

Bullying can do serious and irreparable damage to the lives of children. It usually starts in the early primary years. However, in the context of millennials, it can start as early as pre-school. Many young children, boys and girls, go through a period in pre-school or early school years where they may take advantage of other children, by experimenting with name calling or aggression. **It is important not to think of children as either 'victims' or 'bullies', as the lines of behavior and communication are rarely that clear.** It is important to be aware of what is happening with your children and their friends. Severe bullying leads to psychological and self-esteem problems. Bullying comes in various forms - physical, verbal, racial, emotional, sexual and cyber bullying.

What causes tantrums? And why are tantrums more common in toddlers? There is a scientific explanation for this. Inside our brain, the prefrontal cortex, which is a tiny blob of gray matter, regulates our emotions and controls social behavior. It usually begins to mature at around 4 years old. During this time, children are acquiring languages which are a critical element for social competence. As children develop their language skills, they are able to communicate and regulate their emotions.

The second reason is stress - that makes us react to the slightest provocation. Stress causes the release of cortisol in our body that increases our blood pressure and heightens our sense of anxiety. Imagine your life as a child. We all had 'unfounded' fears as children - about monsters under the bed or lurking in the dark.

As explained by Gina Mireault, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Johnson State College, in Vermont **"Children this age think magically, not logically. Events that are ordinary to us are confusing and scary to them"**.

Now multiply this anxiety several-fold with the noise and light pollution and the pace of life our children have to contend with today. This heightens anxiety to a point where there is plenty of cortisol released in the body. Someone wise has called this stressful combination 'tantrum juice'. What you get as a result of all these complex situations are episodes of screaming and crying, which are more often than not in public places.

It is however important that you remain calm and consistent during these times. This, of course, is easier said than done. **But if you relent or lose your temper, it will only accentuate the problem and the situations will get more frequent and complex with time.** A consistent and firm approach that is respectful of the child will go a long way in making these situations far easier as you go along your journey of parenthood.

Parenting 101s

1. Stay calm.
2. Talk to your child. Your child may not be communicating verbally but it is still significant to her if you speak to and communicate with her.
3. Acknowledge your child's feelings and articulate them. This helps with language development and helps children cope with difficult situations in the future.
4. Articulate coping strategies like "Should we play with the other toy while we wait for our turn to play with this one?"
5. Don't begin by saying 'No'.
6. Assess the external circumstances to understand the reason for this behavior. Could it be a lack of sleep, or your child coming down with an infection etc?
7. Do not use words children don't understand, such as 'share'. Do we, as adults, like to 'share'?
8. Do not lose your temper and raise your voice or use threatening language.
9. Do not humiliate your child by shouting or hitting.
10. Always hold your ground and remain consistent in your response. Children pick up behavior patterns very promptly.
11. Always remember to respect your child and her feelings.
12. Try journaling a meltdown with your child after it has happened. Write down in your child's words, what caused the tantrum, her feelings before and during the situation and how the issue was resolved.
13. If tantrums happen every day and without the slightest provocation and if they continue to take place regularly even as your child grows older, it may be useful to get professional help.

THUMB SUCKING

What causes thumb sucking? It usually happens when children are looking for a source of comfort, when they are tired or bored or sick or trying to cope with separation anxiety. Not all thumb sucking is bad. You shouldn't worry about it if it is a passive habit. It does not usually affect the alignment of teeth if it is not very intensive. In any case, the first permanent tooth comes in at age 6. It is very common for infants and toddlers to suck their thumb. Most children give up this habit in pre-school.

"Thumb-sucking is an appropriate and useful behavior for very young children," says Linda Goldstein, MD, a Washington pediatrician. ***"It allows them to comfort and entertain themselves."***



1. Identify the reasons that trigger this habit and address them. If she is hungry, bored, or tired, actively resolve the situation.
2. Don't nag or punish your child. It is her way of coping with a situation while looking for a sense of calm and comfort.
3. Distract your child with another activity. Give her a rubber ball or a favorite toy to play with.

MISBEHAVIOUR

Writing down all the possible reasons for misbehaviour in children in this document will not do justice to the subject. Psychologists have written reams on it and you can find plenty of information on the Internet. To summarize however to provide context to the 101s, let's look at the most common reasons for misbehaviour.



Attention – when children seek attention and are denied it, it often leads to them seeking negative attention through misbehaviour. Negative behaviour always gets lots of adult's attention. Often the reaction is negative and the adult tends to reprimand the child. However, in the absence of positive attention, children will seek negative attention as it is better than no attention at all.

Power - this becomes the reason for misbehaviour when there is a struggle. When the child is 'told' what to do oftentimes and rarely given any choice, when the child is almost never 'listened to' or when wishes are rarely considered or respected, this leads to a situation where the child is craving power over themselves and others. This struggle often leads to unwanted behaviour.

Revenge – this is often aligned to the child's feeling of disappointment or inadequacy. The desire to hurt another child - to get even - is a way of coping with poor self-esteem. When children are labeled as 'naughty' or 'stupid', this leads to very low self-esteem where children develop their own coping mechanisms. They hurt other children or develop a cocoon of banality around them where they do not try anything new.

1. Give your child the freedom to choose. If the choice poses a danger to the child, explain the same to them and make them see reason in your argument. Simple choices around what to wear, or eat (from a predetermined set of healthy choices of course), which toy to buy (within the budget clearly articulated) develops in children a sense of independence and positive self-esteem that addresses inappropriate behaviour.

2. Do not label your child. It is not fair or respectful to be labeled. As adults, we don't like being labeled. Why shouldn't you treat your child the way you'd like to be treated?

3. Give your child your undivided attention for at least some time everyday. Try and not upload Facebook posts while listening to your child talking about her day in school. Having said that, your child should also learn to respect your personal space and your need for 'quiet time'. Lay down ground rules when you are talking on the phone or doing your yoga session at home. You need time alone. Give your children the same sense of privacy by respecting their need for personal space.

4. Model behaviour. This is a no-brainer, but we tend to forget all about this in the heat of the moment. Be conscious of the language you use, the tone of voice with your partner, helper, colleague, service staff, with everyone. You are your child's best role model. Your child's attitude and behaviour towards others is a reflection of yours.

5. Don't forget to show your affection.

Sometimes, a hug is all your child needs. A smile and loving "Good morning!" at the start of the day, reading a book every night, tucking in your child to bed every night and telling them that you love them every day is as fulfilling for you as it is for your child.

6. Share a laugh together often. Humour helps to solve most situations. It also helps to distract your child and diffuse a problem. Use it to your advantage and have a good time while at it.

7. Talk about boundaries and rules of behaviour with your child. There should be a shared understanding on this. The boundaries should identify what is a complete no, such as acts that might danger the child or those around, being kind and considerate at all times, using magic words when interacting with others. It may be useful to articulate these boundaries and print them out for reference.

8. Personal space and downtime is what everyone needs, even children. As adults, we tend to forget this when we over-schedule our children's lives. Remember to plan for plenty of downtime and resist the temptation to sign up for that extra enrichment class that your neighbour's child is going to. Remember, quality is always better than quantity. Cherry-pick classes based on your child's interests and invest in them.



BULLYING

There are several causes for bullying. But one that is definitely in our control is to be good role models. Most bullies, when asked why they bully, say it's because they have been bullied themselves and think it is how things are done. They generally do not feel much remorse or guilt when they indulge in this behaviour, unless they are encouraged to take the perspective of the other child. Bullies will often feel that the other child deserved the bad treatment because of something they had said or done.

Occasionally, becoming a bully is because of peer pressure, to 'belong' to a group or go with the flow when it is acceptable behaviour amongst peers. Bullies also tend to pick on the 'weaker' ones and this gives them a sense of power and control.



Parenting 101s

1. Be good role models that I am sure you all are. You need to make sure that those who interact with your child are good role models too.

2. Be respectful of people and their differences. If your child hears you comment on someone else's appearance, they will think it is okay to do it. Next time you are tempted to label someone else, 'naughty', 'fat' or 'stupid', pause for a moment and imagine what it would be like to have to defend that same behaviour in your own child. Imagine sitting across from another parent and having to explain why your child called their child 'fat' or 'stupid'.

3. Share strategies with your child on how to react to bullying. Discuss non-violent ways of responding to a bully, like walking away and playing with other friends. Remember to also emphasize the importance of talking it out and sharing such instances with you.

4. Encourage your child to stand up for what she believes in. Encourage freedom of thought and expression at home.

5. Speak to your child's teacher and also the head of school if required to understand how to address a situation where a child is bullying yours. It is best not to speak to the parent of the other child directly.

6. Compliment your child on her positive behaviour and build her self-esteem to model good behaviour.

7. Have conversations with your child on a daily basis on what happened in school. Very often, you will get monosyllables as a response – "fine", "nothing", "the same" etc. Use creative questioning strategies such as "If a space ship were to come to your school and take someone away, who do you think it should be?", "What was the best part of your day?" or "If there was anything that you'd like to change about your school, what would it be?".

8. Be vigilant and watch out for signs of interpersonal difficulties such as loss of friends, poor grades, lack of concentration or interest in activities that were previously popular with your child, reluctance to go to school, or difficult to explain injuries.

9. It is hard for parents to believe that their child is a bully. But if this happens it is important to remember that this behaviour can be unlearned. If your child is overly aggressive, often fights with siblings, is an arrogant winner and sore loser, it may be her way of dealing with anger, frustration or a sense of inadequacy. Talk to your child about these feelings, encourage instances of good behaviour, identify circumstances at home and school to determine what is causing this behaviour, discuss with your child how such behaviour is not okay and that everyone should be treated with kindness and respect.

LYING

Why do children lie? Earlier on, we identified some of the reasons for lying. Primarily arising from the developmental stages where children are evolving an understanding of the rules of social behaviour. **There are many reasons children can get into a habit of lying - getting out of a situation where they made a mistake, or when it is something they do not want to do, or simply emulating adult behaviour.** Remember that if you call in sick because you really want to spend the day at the spa or haven't met a deadline, children will pick that up as acceptable behaviour and use this as a precedent to not go to school to skip a test.

1. Be consistent in your interactions with your child while establishing rules around social behaviour. Be conscious of your language and actions. Remember that very little escapes your child's notice.
2. Set the right example. It's true that children make us better individuals. They make us reflect on our actions and develop the agency to do the right thing. Living with honesty and integrity is the best way to nurture these qualities in your child.
3. Do not label your child as a 'liar'. Think about all the reasons behind why your child may be saying something that is different from the truth. If it's a fantasy coming to life in your child's imagination, talk about how you wish that were true. Gently, help your child to see the difference between reality and fantasy while encouraging their creativity in the process.
4. When your child is caught in a situation when she has lied blatantly, it is best not to coax her to come out with the truth. Instead, reiterate the facts of the case, highlight the consequences of the actions, talk about how the lie might affect someone else, refer to rules of acceptable behaviour but do not label your child in any situation. It only accentuates the situation and makes it harder for the child to shake off the label.
5. Talk about this situation at a later time and discuss strategies through which your child can resist the temptation in the future.

SHYNESS

The goal is not to eliminate shyness but to help the child work within her own personality to do the things she wants to do.
- Barbara Markway, PhD, author of Nurturing the Shy Child (St. Martin's)

What causes shyness? In most cases, it is the child's natural tendencies that we must not attempt to change; some of us are big talkers while others prefer to sit quietly and listen. There is a difference between accepting this temperament and encouraging your child to develop confidence vs coaxing them to come out of their shell. Labeling your child as 'shy' sets the behaviour in stone and makes it hard for them to change.

Shyness can sometimes be a learned behaviour. This can be observed when a child is otherwise confident in a social context but shies away from certain situations. When a child is shy, she loses out on opportunities to learn and interact with others.

Here are some ways you can help your child to overcome their shyness:

1. Identify your child's strengths. It is important to articulate them, so that your child can develop confidence in her abilities. It will then help her to see that when you are encouraging her to be more social, it is because you want her to enjoy herself and not because you feel she is inadequate in any way.

2. Talk to the people in your child's ecosystem - teachers, family, friends. Ask them to give her time to warm up to a new situation.

3. Don't give up easily. If your child is clinging to you at a large gathering, don't pack up and leave. It is important that you help your child to cope with a situation that is causing her anxiety. You can then slowly help your child initiate an interaction with an individual child to break the ice.

4. Get your hands dirty. If you have to roll up your sleeves in a mud kitchen, do that and encourage your child to join in. This will build confidence in your child to try new and unfamiliar things while referring to you as her emotional anchor.



Here are some 101s for you

1. It is important to remember that it is okay to make mistakes. We all do. Instead of feeling guilty about it, we should be grateful to have learnt from our mistakes, avoid repeating them and move on.
2. Working in a team is always better. Other than your partner, you have a wonderful community of parents around you. You can find them on Facebook, book clubs or in your condo or gym. Reach out, share, have a cry and a laugh together. It will always make you feel better.
3. Exercise – you need the endorphins to give you energy and make you happier. Don't shy away from a workout. Remember that it will get easier with time and the benefits you will reap will make you a happier and fitter parent and person.
4. Have a break – listen to yourself and take a break every now and then. Don't give up on your dreams just because you are a parent now. Continue to build your own unique interests and identity.
5. Share your interests with your child. Whether it is reading, or yoga or cooking or singing, plan for moments when you can share this passion together.
6. Remember to always have a laugh. Surround yourself with happy people and happy thoughts. Humour is indeed the best medicine!
7. Lastly, remember childhood is a gift! And like all good things, it comes to an end far too soon.
Cherish every moment with your child, say 'I love you' as often as you can and embrace life as a parent every day. It is indeed a special privilege!

This is, by no means, a comprehensive list of parenting to-dos. There is plenty of information and advice based on research and opinion out there for you to choose from. Parenting is never easy, but we all agree that it is an immensely fulfilling job and makes us all better people.



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About EtonHouse

The EtonHouse International Education Group is headquartered in Singapore with more than 100 international schools spread across 12 countries.

Over the last 21 years, EtonHouse has been at the forefront of international education offering innovative pre-schools and K-12 schools across Asia. The Group runs several primary and secondary schools offering the International Baccalaureate PYP, MYP, DP and IGCSE programmes.

The Group is deeply committed to research and professional development and excellence in educational practice. It has an in-house research and professional development centre that provides continuous training and pedagogical support to its teaching staff.

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