

## Parents' Survival Guide

Parenting isn't always easy. Although it's often amazing and rewarding to watch your children grow, and to help them learn to be independent, it can also be really hard work.

If you think your child is unhappy or if you are worried about their behaviour, it's easy to be hard on yourself and think you aren't doing a good job.

The following tips are for any parent who is worried about their child, or their own parenting skills:

### You and your child

- Make sure they know you love them and are proud of them. Even when things are busy or stressful, and it feels like you are in survival mode, a word or a hug can reassure them a huge amount. Praise them for what they do well, and encourage them to try new things
- Be honest about your feelings – you don't have to be perfect. We all get things wrong and shout or say unkind things from time to time. If this happens, say sorry to your child afterwards and explain why it happened. They will learn from you that it's OK to make mistakes and that it doesn't make you a bad person
- Be clear about what is and isn't acceptable – and tell them why. Children need to know what is OK and what isn't, and what will happen if they cross the line. Follow through on what you say as otherwise they may get confused or stop respecting the boundaries
- Own your own role – you are the parent, so don't be afraid to take tough decisions. If your child sees you are scared of their reaction and always give in to them, it can make them feel very powerful, which can be frightening. Children need to know that you are there to keep them safe.

### Helping your child

- Worrying or difficult behaviour might be short-lived, so give it some time. All children go through stages of feeling anxious or angry and they can show this in lots of ways, for example, tantrums, crying, sleeping problems or fighting with friends or siblings. They might be adapting to a change in the family or in their school life, or just trying out new emotions, and will generally grow out of worrying behaviour on their own or with family support
- Talk to your child: Even young children can understand about feelings and behaviour if you give them a chance to talk about it. Take it gently and give them examples of what you mean, for example, 'When you said you hated Molly, you looked really angry. What was making you so cross?' or 'When you can't get to sleep, is there anything in your mind making you worried?'
- With older children, they might not want to talk at first. Let them know you are concerned about them, and are there if they need you. Sending an email or a text can work better if this is the way your child likes to communicate
- Ask your child what they think would help – they often have good ideas about solving their own problems

- If you can, talk to your child's other parent about your worries, when the child is not around. They might have a different take on what's going on. Try and sort out how to deal with the behavior together so you are using the same approach, and can back each other up. Children are quick to spot if parents disagree, and can try and use this to get their own way
- More advice on when to think about getting professional help, and what to do, if you are concerned about your child's behaviour.

### **Looking after yourself**

- If your child is having problems, don't be too hard on yourself or blame yourself. Although it can be upsetting and worrying if your child is having a bad time, and it makes your relationship with them feel more stressful, you are not a bad parent. Children often take it out on those closest to them, so you might be feeling the effect of their very powerful emotions
- If you had a difficult time growing up yourself, or have had emotional problems or mental health problems, it can be very worrying to think that the same thing might happen to your child. But the love and care you show them and the fact that you are trying to help will protect against this. Getting help for them and perhaps for yourself too can give them the best chance of feeling better
- If things are getting you down, it's important to recognize this. Talk to someone you trust and see what they think. Many people go on struggling with very difficult situations because they feel they should be able to cope, and don't deserve any help
- Friends and family can often help – don't be afraid to ask them to have your child for a bit if you need some time out to sort out your own stuff. You can repay them when things get better for you!
- It's easy to say take some time for yourself but in reality this may not feel possible. You might be too busy, exhausted or hard up for exercise or hobbies. But even a night in with a friend, a DVD box set or your favorite dinner can help
- Go to your GP if things are really getting on top of you. Asking for some support from your doctor or a referral to a counselling service is a sign of strength. You can't help your child if you are not being supported yourself. Some people worry their parenting will be judged and their children will be taken away if they admit they are struggling to cope. This should only happen if a child is being abused or neglected and the role of professionals is to support you to look after your child as well as you can.

### **REFERENCES**

[http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for\\_parents/parents\\_guide](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/parents_guide)