

Smart Parenting: A step-by-step guide For Young Parents



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Abstract

Becoming a parent is one of life's most rewarding yet challenging journeys. For young parents, the path can often feel overwhelming as they navigate the complexities of raising a child while balancing their own personal growth and responsibilities. In today's fast-paced world, where information is abundant but time is limited, it's easy to feel lost amidst the countless opinions and advice on how to be a "perfect" parent. However, smart parenting isn't about perfection; it's about making informed, thoughtful decisions that prioritize your child's well-being while also caring for yourself.

This step-by-step guide is designed specifically for young parents who are looking for practical, down-to-earth advice to help them through the early years of parenthood. Whether you're expecting your first child or have already begun this incredible journey, this guide will provide you with essential tips, strategies, and insights to help you navigate the joys and challenges of parenting with confidence. From understanding your child's developmental milestones to managing your time effectively and fostering a strong parent-child bond, this guide covers the essentials that every young parent needs to know.



1. Introduction

As you embark on this incredible journey, remember that parenting is a continuous learning process. No two children are the same, and what works for one family might not work for another. This guide embraces the idea that smart parenting is about adapting to your child's unique needs and finding the balance that works for your family. It's about being patient

with yourself as you learn, growing alongside your child, and understanding that mistakes are a natural part of the process. With each step, you'll gain more confidence, and over time, you'll develop your own parenting style that reflects the values and love you want to instill in your child. This guide aims to empower you with the knowledge and skills to navigate the ups and downs of early parenthood, helping you build a strong foundation for your child's future and your own peace of mind.

2. Set a Schedule for Toddlers



Setting a schedule for your toddler has many perks, from giving your toddler more confidence and stability to making your life easier as a parent. The key to creating a good schedule for your toddler is a mix of structure, comfort, and fun. You should put the schedule into practice right away so your toddler gets used to their new routine and be willing to adjust the schedule as they get older to better fit their needs.

Creating the Schedule

Establish a wake up time. Start your toddler's day by setting a wake up time. Most toddlers get up early in the morning, around 6:30-6:45 am. If your toddler tends to get up later than 6:45 am, do not try to wake them up earlier. Let your toddler decide when they will wake up.

Include a breakfast time. Depending on the needs of your toddler, you may actually schedule breakfast time before they brush their teeth and get dressed, as some toddlers wake up hungry. You can decide to feed your toddler first so they are more cooperative when it comes time to get dressed and brush their teeth.

Create a late morning routine. Once your toddler is done with breakfast, you should create a late morning routine. Start with 1 hour of play time after breakfast where you read books together or allow your toddler to play with siblings or family members.

Include a lunch time and a nap. You should stick to an afternoon lunch time, ideally at 12 pm. Allow your toddler 30-60 minutes to wash up and eat lunch.

Put in a late afternoon routine. After your toddler's nap, you should plan a few activities for the late afternoon. This should include a light afternoon snack and some time outside, if possible. Plan for an activity outdoors like going for a walk to a nearby playground or running around outside in the yard.

Make a before dinner plan. You should start getting your toddler ready for dinner about 30 minutes before dinner time. Try to establish a routine of washing their hands and face and changing out of any dirty clothing before dinner time. This will ensure your toddler knows what to expect before they sit down to eat.

Include a before bed routine. It can be tricky to get your toddler to go to bed. But if you stick to a consistent day schedule and establish a before bed routine, your toddler may be more apt to go to bed. You should try to stick to the same before bed routine and the same bedtime every night. Most toddlers should be in bed by 8 pm to ensure they get enough sleep.

View the schedule as a whole. Once you feel you have a complete schedule set for your toddler, you should write it down and view it as a whole. Make sure you include enough daily activities that are active and also calming. You should also make sure you establish set wake times, nap times, and bedtimes for your toddler. Your schedule may look like this:

Putting the Schedule into Practice

Create a poster of the schedule. You can reinforce your toddler's schedule by creating a poster or image of the schedule and placing it in their room. This way, your child can look at the schedule every day and know exactly what the plan is. You can also refer to the schedule throughout the day to remind your toddler what they should expect.

Be flexible when needed. Though it is important that you maintain a set schedule for your toddler, you should not be too rigid or set about the schedule. You want your toddler to learn consistency and stability but you also want to be sure they can be adaptable in the event of a change.

Add variety to the schedule. You should also try to vary up who does what for your toddler throughout the day. Adding variety in terms of who does what role in your toddler's schedule will ensure they do not become too dependent on one person.

Include incentives for your toddler to follow the schedule. You should make sure your toddler's schedule includes enough time for them to have fun, explore, learn, and engage with you on an intimate level. You should also make sure your toddler feels they are benefitting from the schedule in tangible ways. Use the routines in their schedule as incentives so your toddler is more interested in the schedule and follows it willingly.

3. Personal Hygiene For Children



What is personal hygiene for children?

Your child needs to keep themselves clean to remain healthy and to feel good about themselves. Good personal hygiene will help boost their self-esteem and confidence.

Teaching your child good hygiene habits

We all need to keep clean to avoid harmful germs and avoid getting sick. Good personal hygiene also boosts confidence by dealing with problems like bad breath or body odour.

For children, the basics of good personal hygiene are:

- washing their hands
- covering their mouth when they cough
- having regular baths or showers
- brushing and flossing their teeth

You may have to help your child learn and practise good personal hygiene habits. These will become even more important as they grow older and approach puberty.

Being able to talk openly and honestly about keeping clean is important. This will help you manage more difficult personal hygiene issues that are likely to come up when they are teenagers.

Washing hands



Most germs are spread through hand contact. Regularly washing hands will prevent your child and others from getting sick.

Encourage your child to wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds:

- when their hands look dirty
- before eating or making food

- after touching raw meats, including chicken and beef
- after touching any body fluids like blood, urine (wee) or vomit (sick)
- after touching animals (including cats and dogs)
- after blowing their nose, sneezing or coughing
- after going to the toilet

Showering and bathing

Children need regular baths or showers. You can include a bath or shower at the end of the day as part of their bedtime routine. Your child's hair should be washed 1 to 2 times a week. If their hair is very oily, it might need washing more often.

Make sure your child washes all of their body, including:

- under their arms
- their genital area
- their anal area
- between their toes

Make sure that their body is thoroughly dry before they get dressed.

Brushing teeth

Children should brush and floss their teeth twice a day (in the morning and before they go to sleep).

They should brush with a pea-sized amount of children's toothpaste that contains fluoride. You will need to help your child brush their teeth until they are about 7 years old.

Clothes and shoes

Doing the laundry uses significant quantities of water, energy, and chemicals. It is also the most demanding stage of clothing's life cycle. This use of resources needs to be balanced with the need for children to wear clean clothes. That is clothes that are not obviously dirty and don't smell.

Socks and underwear should be changed when dirty and at least every day.

Once your child starts school, they can hang up their uniform to air at the end of each day.

4. Connect Better With Children



Effective communication is vital for a strong parent-child relationship, encompassing both the quantity and quality of interactions. It plays a fundamental role in enhancing the bond between parents and children.

While families are intended to be havens of safety and solace, children, particularly during their formative years, may seek alternative sources of comfort or withdraw from their parents due to fear of judgment or frequent disagreements.

While it is beneficial for children to find outlets for expression, strained parent-child relationships can have detrimental consequences, such as:

- Stifling discussions on sensitive subjects
- Increasing a child's vulnerability to substance abuse
- Eroding trust and security
- Causing self-doubt and low self-esteem

So, creating an accepting and open space where communication can thrive is crucial.

To ensure that your parent child-relationship is nurtured and remains a resilient and harmonious bond, here are some things you need to keep in mind about communicating with your child.

1. Reduce the chaos, increase the disclosure

A 2023 study published in the Journal of Family Psychology sheds light on the challenges faced by households immersed in chaos, revealing a notable difficulty in establishing meaningful conversations with their children.

“Stressful experiences, such as living in a chaotic home environment, can deplete parents’ regulatory abilities, making it more difficult for them to remain responsive and positively engaged with children over the course of the day,” explains the lead author of the study, psychologist Jackie Nelson.

The research underscores the importance of implementing consistency and routine within the family setting as a means to facilitate effortless and fruitful conversations, ultimately fostering the development of meaningful connections. Some things that may help are:

- Sharing meals together
- Designating a recurring "family day" every few weeks
- Consciously carving out daily dedicated quality time for interactions

These strategies aim to create a stable and predictable family environment, which has been shown to bolster effective communication and strengthen the parent-child bond.

2. Be authoritative, not authoritarian

Although there isn’t a definitive handbook on perfect parenting, one key lesson gleaned from years of research is that not all ‘effective’ parenting styles are healthy. Understand the difference between being an authoritarian parent and being an authoritative parent.

Authoritarian parenting. This style of parenting exhibits a rigid and controlling demeanor, emphasizing dominance and rule enforcement.

Authoritative parenting. This style of parenting embodies a stance that prioritizes structure, yet also nurtures autonomy.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Child and Family Studies highlights the favorable outcomes associated with authoritative parenting. By embracing an authoritative approach, parents can set their children up for a life of greater well-being. Here are some benefits of being an authoritative parent:

- You help your children achieve emotional independence
- You grant them the freedom to express their thoughts and share their experiences
- You help them develop a sense of security and emotional resilience

- You promote healthy self-expression
- You help them cultivate unique perspectives

By balancing authority with warmth, understanding, and thoughtful boundary-setting, parents cultivate an environment that promotes their children's emotional well-being and fosters a culture of open communication.

3. Show trust and patience, even when you may not want to



A 2015 study published in the British Journal of Developmental Psychology found that children begin exhibiting concern for their self-presentation as early as their preschool years and were more likely to disclose information, both positive and negative, in supportive environments. This has real implications on how we think about vulnerability in children.

For some parents, navigating this need of their child to present themselves through disclosure can be challenging. For one, being emotionally invested in your children could sometimes lead to conflicts in how you want them to behave versus how they want to behave.

Nevertheless, in the interest of fostering open lines of communication and creating a safe space, parents must exercise trust and patience, restraining themselves from impulsive reactions or intrusive probing.

This restraint not only promotes an atmosphere of trust but also paves the way for children to confide sensitive personal information, enabling parents to guide them effectively and ensure their well-being.

5. Spend Quality Time With Your Kids



Want to improve your relationship with your child while encouraging their social and emotional development? Spending time with them can do these things—and more.

Whether you're a parent who works outside the home or one who works at home, one thing is certain: Life is busy. Parents often find themselves zooming from one task to another, with little or no break. We are the keepers of schedules, the makers of meals, and the menders of boo-boos. We are also world-class entertainers, homework helpers, teacher's aids, and (unofficial) social workers. And let's not forget our most important job: chauffeur. Driving our children from school to extracurricular activities is a job in and of itself.

Of course, this leaves most of us with little downtime. There aren't enough hours in the day for the tasks at hand. But the chaos of day-to-day life doesn't just impact us, it also impacts our kids in Sydney and the quality of the time we get to spend together. Research has found that quality time impacts the parent-child relationship, which ultimately affects children's social and emotional development.¹ Luckily, there are lots of great, low-stress ways to spend quality time with your kids.

Read on for nine different ways to get quality time with your kiddos that help you get to know them better and make them feel appreciated, supported, loved, and understood.

Have a Daily Check-In

As soon as your kids get home from school, you ask how their day was, and, 9 times out of 10, you'll get the run-of-the-mill, "It was good." But was it really? Whether it's over dinner or when you're tucking them in for bed, take time to find out how their day really was.

One way to do this is to ask a mix of open-ended and specific questions: What was the most interesting thing they learned in class? Did they try something new at lunch? Who did they play with at recess? If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be? The key to these conversations is making them less of a routine questioning and more of a launching pad for quality time, talking about things that are important in your child's day-to-day routine.

Use Special Rituals Like Bath Time and Bedtime

Let's face it: Life moves more smoothly when routines and rituals are in place. They help us—and our children—know what to expect, and what comes next.² But instead of using this time to hurry along the moments before bed, for example, use it to create quality time with your kids in Sydney.

Sing to your child during their bath, picking a favorite song or a new tune you both just heard. Make teeth brushing a game. If your child is into outer space, for example, you can pretend they are destroying asteroids with each and every stroke. And read a story at bedtime. If your child is older, let them read to you. When you take time to share things that pique their interest, they feel heard, seen, and appreciated.

Celebrate Achievements and a Job Well Done



Anytime you have the opportunity to celebrate your kids, do it! And no, we aren't just talking about when they get an "A" on a test or perform exceptionally well at a sporting

event. Have they stepped outside their comfort zone to try something new? Did they give their all and put lots of work and thought into a project? Celebrating the effort they put in, their successes, and how they learned from mistakes are all great opportunities for quality time that also reinforces positive behaviors.

Let Your Kids Choose

Ask your child how they want to spend time with you. Do they want to play together, color together, or craft together? Maybe throw a baseball, play a board game, or have a dance party? Giving them the reins isn't just empowering, it can be a pleasant surprise (i.e., you might learn something about their interests you didn't know before).³

Power of Play in Early Childhood. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2021.

Keep It Low Tech

There is no escape from technology in your day-to-day life. From school and work to the nightly news and winding down, screens are everywhere. They play a role in our lives but we can all use a break.

Baking together or reading a book are great ways to bond. Getting outside to bike, walk, or hike keeps kids active and engaged in Sydney. You can do a scavenger hunt or obstacle course, too. The important thing is to choose an activity that encourages healthy media habits, stimulates the senses, and fosters connection.

Have a Day Date

Plan some time in your schedule that's free, and do a fun activity. You can paint pottery, go to the library, or even take a picnic lunch to the playground. Quality time isn't about the amount of time (or money) you spend together, it's about what you do together to create memories.

Plan a Family Movie or Game Night

Another fun way to spend quality time with your kids is to introduce them to games and shows you grew up with as a kid. Many games involve strategy and math skills, which help make learning fun. Many old shows and movies tell timeless tales and teach valuable lessons too. Both you and your kids will be amazed at how quickly time flies when you're having fun together.

Create and Cook Together

Even the pickiest of eaters will be on board with the opportunity to help plan or make their own meals and snacks. Cooking and creating together is a real-time example of showing your children that their ideas and opinions matter.

Offer a Yes Day

When parents offer their kids in Sydney a "yes day," they're essentially agreeing to say yes to every request their kids have (within reason) for an entire day. While some parents might be frowning their brows and rolling their eyes at the thought, saying yes for an entire day won't be the headache you anticipate. There is even research that supports this.

"Research has found—as far as what leads to happiness in people and not just children—that saying 'yes' gives a sense of control in one's environment, and children often don't have a sense of control," says Kamala London, PhD, a developmental psychology professor at the University of Toledo.

6. Rewarding and Praising Your Kid



For many parents, trying to get a two-year-old to do almost anything can be challenging. It's no wonder then, as children move through toddlerhood and into preschool age, parents are eager for solutions.

One that initially seems very appealing is rewards. Whether it's a sticker, an ice cream or a coveted coin, rewards can appear incredibly motivating for young children. But according to Alfie Kohn the problem with rewards is that, like punishments, they can only produce one thing: temporary obedience.

Alfie is an educator and the author of fourteen books, including *Punished By Rewards*. He speaks widely on human behaviour, education, and parenting and lectures at education

conferences and universities. Alfie says rewarding children is problematic in a number of ways.

“Rewards can never help kids develop a commitment to whatever it is they were rewarded for doing, nor do they help children become responsible, ethical, decent people. In fact, research has repeatedly shown that the more you reward people for doing something, the more they tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. So rewards aren’t just ineffective – they’re actually counterproductive,” says Alfie.

The problem with using rewards



Alfie says it’s not the reward itself that’s objectionable — instead, it’s the practice of using something as a reward that causes the problem.

“Telling children to ‘Do this and you’ll get that’ feels controlling, causes dependence, and may spoil our relationship with our children,” he says.

Additionally, Alfie believes that dangling incentives in front of children is a way of doing things ‘to’ them, as opposed to working ‘with’ them.

“It’s a form of sugar-coated control. In the long run people react badly to being controlled, even if they like the goodie itself,” he notes.

Part of the issue is that there are different types of motivation. The type of motivation a child feels towards the task is key.

“If children are intrinsically motivated to engage in an activity that means they find it valuable or satisfying in its own right. If they are extrinsically motivated they are simply doing it to get a result outside of the task, such as a reward,” he says.

It’s intrinsic motivation which parents should be aiming for. However, this requires teaching our children to look inside, rather than towards external validation.

“Only extrinsic motivation can be increased from the outside, so that’s what schools focus on with grades, points, awards, praise, and the like,” says Alfie.

What about praise?

Given the challenges of getting young children to cooperate, it’s perhaps unsurprising that if parents aren’t working on rewards, they’re heaping praise on their child for doing the right thing. But Alfie says research shows it is worth pulling the reins in here too.

“Several studies have shown that children who are frequently rewarded or praised tend to be somewhat less generous and caring than their peers. Furthermore, the negative effect is strongest when they're rewarded or praised for being generous,” he says.

The problem, Alfie says, is that praise isn't substantially different from tangible rewards.

“It's really just a verbal doggie biscuit. In fact, praise adds a new problem; in addition to being manipulative it communicates conditional acceptance and care. Children may come to feel they're loved (and lovable) only when they please or impress the praise-giver.”

Instead, what kids actually need to flourish is the very opposite of praise.

“They need unconditional love,” he says.

Of course, there are times when praise is appropriate and guidance is necessary — especially with toddlers and preschoolers.

“But a constant stream of value judgments is neither necessary nor useful for children’s development,” Alfie says.

He points out that the much-used expression ‘Good job!’ is just as much an evaluation as ‘Bad job!’.

“The most notable feature of a positive judgment isn’t that it’s positive, but that it’s a judgment. And people, including kids in Sydney, don’t like being judged. I love occasions when my daughter does something for the first time, or better than she’s ever done it

before. But I try to resist the knee-jerk tendency to say, 'Good job!' as I want her to share her pleasure with me, not look to me for a verdict. I want her to exclaim, 'I did it!' instead of asking me uncertainly, 'Was that good?'," he says.

If not rewards, then what?



Alfie says that rather than asking how we can get our children to do what they are told, we should consider a different question.

"We should ask instead, 'What do kids need – and how can we meet those needs?'," he says.

If our goal is to help our children longer term, bringing them onboard in the decision making process is the best way forward, according to Alfie.

"You might say: 'I've noticed that lately it's taking you a long time to get dressed in the morning, honey. How do you think we can solve that?'"

We also have to reconsider some of our requests.

"Instead of bribes to get a four-year-old to sit through a long dinner, we might reflect on whether that expectation is age-appropriate," he says.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Smart Parenting: A Step-by-Step Guide for Young Parents* is more than just a manual—it's a companion designed to support you through the rewarding and sometimes

challenging journey of raising your child. As you grow in your role as a parent, remember that perfection isn't the goal; instead, focus on being present, adaptable, and loving. By applying the insights and strategies shared in this guide, you'll find yourself better equipped to handle the joys and challenges of parenthood with confidence and grace. Trust in your instincts, be patient with yourself, and know that every step you take is contributing to the well-being and happiness of your child. Embrace the journey, and take pride in the positive impact you're making in your child's life.

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