

On being a parent...

You are the most important person in the life of your child.

- ♦ Children, even infants, are learning all the time...
 - Very young children, through their relationships with the adults they see most often, are forming models about how relationships and the world work. “Can I depend on others, is the world basically a safe place and how much control do I have over my life?” are some of the questions that are “answered” by what children learn from us.
 - Very young children are also learning about experiencing, expressing and regulating emotions. As they get older what they learn will impact the way they face challenges, their ability pay attention, their ability to calm themselves when upset as well as a host of other skills.
 - ♦ Both the relational and the physical environment you provide for your child are important...
 - The relational environment...
 - Children (and adults!) need consistency and predictability in relationships. They want to know who is picking them up, for example, and when they will see mommy, daddy, grandma, or other regular caregivers. It is good to share this even with babies (“I’ll see you tonight, sweetie!”).
 - The physical environment...
 - Consistency and predictability are important to children. Having regular routines (bedtime, mealtimes, playtime, and the like) are comforting and help children feel secure.
 - Let your child know what their day will look like, and when a transition from one location or activity to another is coming up.
 - A calm environment without a lot of background noise and distraction helps children focus on their play (which, for young children, is their work) or, for older children, their school work.
 - ♦ When children are upset...
 - We always want to understand what is behind the upset. Children are not bad, though sometimes we would like them to make different choices. If behavior is a concern, we need to ask, “What is the child communicating through this behavior?” Many times children simply lack the skills to express what they want in culturally acceptable ways.
 - Acknowledge what they want (“You really want to keep playing in the sandbox, huh?”), and validate their feelings (“You got really mad when I told you it was time to come in.”). Then once the child knows you understand them (you’ve connected with them), it is easier to redirect the child, which might include offering alternatives to what the child is doing, or coming up with other times when they can continue their play.
 - Provide rhythmic, repetitive sensory input to help calm children. This includes activities such as walking, rocking, chanting, dancing, laughing and singing.
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- Provide quiet spaces if that is something that helps calm your child.
- ♦ Create positive experiences for children...
 - Find opportunities to empower your child.
 - Create opportunities for your child to be successful in their play, social situations and in learning new tasks.
 - Offer choices when possible.
 - Simply noticing and expressing lots of interest in what your child is doing is as meaningful or more meaningful than praise.
- ♦ Instead of simply offering solutions, help your child learn new skills by engaging them in problem solving. As an example, we might say, “Hmm, there’s only one book here and you both want it, I wonder what we should do?”

When you spend time with your child, find things to do that you both enjoy!

