



Raising Children – Art based in Science

Perfect parents don't exist. But Temple University psychologist Laurence Steinberg says that if you can practice principles of good parenting, the better off your child will be.

“Most parents are pretty good parents,” says Steinberg, a nationally prominent expert on adolescent development and parenting. “But I’ve never met a parent who is perfect 100 percent of the time. We all can improve our batting average.”

Good parenting, says Steinberg, is “parenting that fosters psychological adjustment—elements like honesty, empathy, self-reliance, kindness, cooperation, self-control and cheerfulness.

“Good parenting is parenting that helps children succeed in school,” he continues. “It promotes the development of intellectual curiosity, motivation to learn and desire to achieve. It deters children from anti-social behavior, delinquency, and drug and alcohol use. And good parenting is parenting that helps protect children against the development of anxiety, depression, eating disorders and other types of psychological distress.”

Here are Steinberg's **Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting** (from his new book by the same name):

1. **What you do matters.** “Tell yourself that every day. How you treat and respond to your child should come from a knowledgeable, deliberate sense of what you want to accomplish. Always ask yourself: What effect will my decision have on my child?”
2. **You cannot be too loving.** “When it comes to genuine expressions of warmth and affection, you cannot love your child too much. It is simply not possible to spoil a child with love. What we often think of as the product of spoiling a child is never the result of showing a child too much love. It is usually the consequence of giving a child things in place of love – things like leniency, lowered expectations or material possessions.”
3. **Be involved in your child's life.** “Being an involved parent takes time and is hard work, and it often means rethinking and rearranging your priorities. It frequently means sacrificing what you want to do for what your child needs you to do. Be there mentally as well as physically.”
4. **Adapt your parenting to fit your child.** “Make sure your parenting keeps pace with your child's development. You may wish you could slow down or freeze-frame your child's life, but this is the last thing he wants. You may be fighting getting older, but all he wants is to grow up. The same drive for independence that is making your three-year-old say ‘no’ all the time is what's motivating him to be toilet trained. The same intellectual growth spurt that is making your 13-year-old curious and inquisitive in the classroom also is making her argumentative at the dinner table.”
5. **Establish and set rules.** “If you don't manage your child's behavior when he is young, he will have a hard time learning how to manage himself when he is older and you aren't around. Any time of the day or night, you should always be able to answer these three questions: Where is my child? Who is with my child? What is my child doing? The rules your child has learned from you are going to shape the rules he applies to himself.”
6. **Foster your child's independence.** “Setting limits helps your child develop a sense of self-control. Encouraging independence helps her develop a sense of self-direction. To be successful in life, she's going to need both. Accepting that it is normal for children to push for autonomy is absolutely key to effective parenting. Many parents mistakenly equate their child's independence with rebelliousness or disobedience. Children push for independence because it is part of human nature to want to feel in control rather than to feel controlled by someone else.”
7. **Be consistent.** “If your rules vary from day to day in an unpredictable fashion or if you enforce them only intermittently, your child's misbehavior is your fault, not his. Your most important disciplinary tool is consistency. Identify to your child that you are non-negotiable. The more your authority is based on wisdom and not on power, the less your child will challenge it.”



★ 8. **Avoid harsh discipline.** “Of all the forms of punishment that parents use, the one with the worst side effects is physical punishment. Children who are spanked, hit or slapped are more prone to fighting with other children. They are more likely to be bullies and more likely to use aggression to solve disputes with others.”

★ 9. **Explain your rules and decisions.** “Good parents have expectations they want their child to live up to. Generally, parents over explain to young children and under explain to adolescents. What is obvious to you may not be evident to a 12-year-old. He doesn’t have the priorities, judgment or experience that you have.”

★ 10. **Treat your child with respect.** “The best way to get respectful treatment from your child is to treat him respectfully. You should give your child the same courtesies you would give to anyone else. Speak to him politely. Respect his opinion. Pay attention when he is speaking to you. Treat him kindly. Try to please him when you can. Children treat others the way their parents treat them. Your relationship with your child is the foundation for his relationships with others.”

★ Article reprinted with permission from Health-e headlines ™

