NEW PARENTS: OFF TO A GOOD START

Presented by
Cigna Employee Assistance Program
SEMINAR GOALS

- Examine the emotional challenges of becoming a parent
- Discuss new parent stress and the impact on relationships
- Learn useful coping mechanisms
- Review key early years cares and concerns
- Explore how to create a positive parenting path for the early years and beyond
- Understand the benefits of your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
POLL 1

Where are you on the parenting path?
Are you:
• An expectant parent
• A new parent
• A friend or family member
• Just curious
The **days** are long, but the **years** are short.

*Gretchen Rubin, “The Happiness Project”*
TRUTHS FROM THE TRENCHES

- A baby changes everything
- Your experience will be unique
- You will figure it out

Online book retailer, Amazon, currently carries nearly 71,000 books on parenting.
THE NEW NORMAL … BRINGS NEW STRESSORS

- Adapting to a new role
- Pressure of new responsibility
- Steep learning curve
- Financial strain
- Social life transformed

Healthy self-care choices are vital. Remember to “take your oxygen first” to stay well and energized.
Disrupted sleep, and the exhaustion that results, may make it more difficult to cope with the intense emotions of early parenting.

- Disillusionment
- Fear
- Guilt
- Frustration, anger, loss of control
- Sadness
- Intense love
- Fierce protectiveness
RELATIONSHIP, WHAT RELATIONSHIP?

• Expect it to be different
• Make expectations clear
• Accept that your styles may differ
• Actively support one another
• Nurture your “couplehood”
A DAD’S PERSPECTIVE

- Worry about ability to provide and protect
- Have concerns about partner’s health, intimacy
- Struggle with loss of status
- May assume “mother knows best”
- Can experience sadness, postpartum depression
POLL 2

Which of these issues are you the most concerned about right now?

- Getting enough sleep
- Re-establishing a routine
- Maintaining relationships
- Having “me” time again
- Weight of responsibility
- Finding good child care
NEW PARENT TOOLBOX - COPING MECHANISMS

- Sleep when the baby sleeps
- Ask for and accept help
- Cut yourself some slack

Broaden your perspective to include choices you might not have considered before the baby.
NEW PARENT TOOLBOX - COPING MECHANISMS

- Establish patterns
- Connect with others
- Find “time off” (work doesn’t qualify)

Connect without leaving home
There are currently 3,900,000 “Mommy Bloggers” sharing their thoughts online.

Source: Laird, Mashable.com, 2012
NEW PARENT TOOLBOX - COPING MECHANISMS

• Prioritize communication
• Have a plan for when overwhelmed
• Develop your flexibility

Remember the phrase:
“This too shall pass”
Safety and Health

• Find a pediatrician who is a good fit
• When in doubt, call the doctor
• Be proactive and stay current
• Be aware of and manage parental stress
CARES & CONCERNS

Sleeping Issues
- Shape the environment
- Have consistent schedules
- Try new approaches

Eating Issues
- Don’t let food become a battle
- Trust that your baby won’t starve
- Breastfeeding may require support
Challenging Behaviors
• Review developmental stages
• Know that it is too early for discipline
• Honor your child’s timing
• Give yourself a time out
• Respond gently
BUILDING YOUR PARENTING PATH

Create a strong foundation
- Accept your child for who they are
- Build supportive boundaries
- Learn to respond rather than react
- Make your love unconditional

Start with the idea that your goal as a parent is to help your child be the best person they can be.
WALKING YOUR PARENTING PATH

Course correction reminders

• What you do usually matters more than what you say
• Understand that you are learning too
• Slow down and experience the here and now
BENEFITS OF THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

- Face to face sessions
- Confidential
- Prepaid
- Unlimited telephonic consultation
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Household benefit
- Work/Life support such as eldercare, childcare and pet care
- Financial services
- Legal services

Benefits vary by employer. Please check with your HR for your specific EAP benefits.
REFERENCES


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Your Company:

Seminar: New Parents: Off to a Good Start

Please complete this form and fax it to 1.952.996.2702, or email it to eshcomments@cigna.com.

Please state your agreement/disagreement with the following statement using this scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2 Agree</th>
<th>3 Disagree</th>
<th>4 Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. Overall I was satisfied with the seminar presentation.  

2. Seminar Content:
   a. The information I received was helpful.

3. Speaker Evaluation:
   a. The speaker was knowledgeable and presented the information clearly.

Suggestions that would improve the content/delivery of the seminar:

What other seminar topics would interest you?
For working parents, finding the right child care arrangement can be challenging and stressful. Experts recommend starting your search well before your return to work date. The first question to consider is what type of care you feel will work best for you. The many different types of arrangements and providers can make decision-making more difficult, but generally means you will be able to find a good fit for your family.

**Family Child Care** – Licensing and regulation of family child care, also known as home day care, varies from state to state. Generally home-based providers are regulated if they care for four or more children. This means they must meet minimum care and safety standards. Background checks and training standards are required in most states. Caregiving may be less structured in this type of setting, but many people prefer the more home-like environment. Family day care is often less expensive than a care center and may offer more flexible hours.

**In-Home Care** – A nanny, housekeeper, or an au pair (a young live-in caregiver from another country) are examples of in-home care providers. The caregiver comes to your residence to care for your child. They can live in your home, if you wish, and can be full or part time. Duties may include helping with some of the household chores. Nannies are often placed through an agency which screens and does background checks on potential candidates before they can interview with a family. This arrangement may provide the most flexibility, control, and security from a parent’s viewpoint. Cost may be a factor, but if care is provided for more than one child, the cost may be similar to other types of care.

**Child Care Centers** – Child care centers, also called day care centers, must be licensed by the state. The licensing sets minimum health, safety, and training requirements but does not regulate the quality of care. Programs tend to be structured, take place in large spaces with plenty of toys and equipment, and be well staffed. Care centers usually offer a specific curriculum for age-appropriate learning, stimulation, and interaction with other children.

**Friends, Relatives or Neighbors** – Many people turn to people they are closest to for child care in their own home or that of the provider. While unlicensed, this choice offers a known caregiver and generally low to no cost. Some states may require a background check and minimal training even for this type of informal caregiver.

**Resource and Referral**
National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRR)
www.naccrra.org
1-800-424-2246
The NACCRR program, Child Care Aware® of America, oversees a network of state child care resource and referral offices that help families find, evaluate and, in some cases, pay for quality child care. This can be a good place to begin your search.

**Work/Life Benefit** – Check with your HR department to see if you have a Work/Life benefit. If so, Cigna EAP can provide child care resources.
Choosing Child Care

Making the choice to return to work and have others care for your child is a difficult decision. It is important to research, visit, and evaluate your options carefully. You will want to take into consideration basics, like cost and distance, as well as your child’s individual personality and comfort with others. Each child will be different. One thing that stays consistent is the need to choose quality care. There are some universal aspects of quality care that you can use as your baseline to help make an informed choice.

Quality care includes:

1. A safe and healthy setting.
2. A qualified, caring, attentive provider who gives your child care and guidance. Those caring for your child should partner with you to make sure your child is happy, secure, and developing in a positive way.
3. A setting with activities and materials that promote age-appropriate learning and stimulation. You should expect to see an emphasis on helping a child develop mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially.

Explore your options

Once you have narrowed your options to a limited number, visiting the provider is your next step. Plan to spend at least an hour to ask questions, watch activities and interactions, and to check out the surroundings. In some cases you may want to visit more than once and at different times of the day.

Questions to ask

What is the philosophy or mission of the program?

Is the program accredited by a national organization? (Being accredited means the provider has voluntarily met standards for child care that are higher than most state licensing requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) and The National Association for Family Child Care (www.nafcc.org) are the two largest organizations offering accreditation.)

How many children are in the program?

What are the qualifications and education level of the provider(s)? Does the provider have training in early childhood development? Is there continuing education for providers?

How many children are there for each adult? What is the ratio for infants?

Have caregivers all undergone background checks? Do they have first-aid and CPR training?

Do caregivers know and use safe sleeping procedures?

How is communication handled with parents? Are parents welcome to drop by without notice?

Are children supervised at all times, including when sleeping?

How are emergencies handled (medical, lost child, fire, or weather events)?

Is there a curriculum that is used? Does it change as the child grows? Is there a mix of structured and unstructured time?

Is there a balance of indoor and outdoor activities? Are field trips or special onsite programs offered?

Is the approach to discipline positive, consistent and fair? (Does it match how you handle discipline?)

What are the hours of operation? Is there any flexibility? Is there a trial enrollment period?
Observations
Look at how security, safety and sanitation are handled. Are good practices being followed? (Pay attention to diapering, hand washing, childproofing, locks, and admittance procedures)

Do you see different types of toys? Do they have play equipment, art supplies, reading material? Are the items age appropriate and in good condition? Are there separate areas for active and quiet play?

Is there an outdoor play space? Is it fenced in? Are the play structures clean and safe? Can the children be seen at all times?

Are sleeping infants on their backs with no pillows, stuffed toys, or soft bedding in the crib?

Do the children seem happy? Are they encouraged to explore and learn?

Are the caregivers warm and welcoming? Encouraging? Comforting? Do they respond to the children?

Are you seeing a lot of smiles from both caregivers and children?

Is the environment cheerful and child-friendly?

Do you see a mix of learning activities and play time? Do they have story time? Singing? Art making?

How do you feel in this environment? Do you think your child would like it there?

Questions for in-home providers
You are likely to have many questions for someone you are hiring to care for your child in your home. Here are some key questions you will want to be sure to include.

Why did you choose to become a child care provider?

How do you handle disobedience? What is your discipline approach for a (your child’s age) year old?

Have you ever been in an emergency situation? How did you handle it?

What are some behavior problems or other challenges you faced with children you have cared for?

How do you handle tantrums?

What type of activities would you do with a (your child’s age) year old?

Can you drive (any driving convictions)? Cook? Swim? (Or other activities you would require.)

References


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New Parents: Off to a Good Start

Returning to Work

Making the transition back to work, after having time off with your baby, can be hard. You may be thinking ahead on some issues, such as arranging child care, but others may not be on your radar yet. It is helpful to consider potential emotional challenges in your return to work planning.

Choosing and adapting to child care – Understanding that others will be caring for your child and actually handing the baby over are two different things. It is important to take the time to make a choice you feel good about. See the Choosing Child Care handout for some helpful resources. Remember, help finding child care is available to you at no cost, if you have Work/Life benefits through your EAP.

Know your options – If you are struggling with the idea of returning to full time work, look creatively at what your options might be. Flex time, part time, job sharing, or a leave of absence may be possible. Perhaps your partner’s job is more flexible, and they could be the primary caregiver.

Understand leave policies – Get up to speed on your company’s maternity, paternity, and family leave policies to use the time available to you, and avoid any surprises.

Financial issues – Parents may feel stressed by the push/pull nature of this stage of parenthood. You may feel distanced from work yet, more than ever, needing the income. It is important to talk with your partner about how you plan to manage this piece of your new normal. Be sure to cover budgeting, work hours (who, how much), and long-term planning. Check in with one another from time to time to be sure you are on track.

Breastfeeding – For breastfeeding moms, a return to work takes a little extra effort. Get a jump on it by researching how you will handle pumping at work. Many companies have spaces set aside and policies in place that support mothers who are breastfeeding. If you don’t already do so, introduce breast milk in bottles to your baby well in advance of your first day back at work.

Feel differently about work – Your focus and investment in your job may take a dip when you first become a parent. It takes time to sort out how you will manage both responsibilities. New moms can also struggle with “baby brain” – temporary issues with memory and focus. Disrupted sleep is usually the culprit. It will get better, but, be aware in the meantime, that you may need more backup support than usual.

Emotions – It is natural to experience sadness when you shift out of a 24/7 caregiving role. You might also feel anxious about leaving your child in the care of others. And guilt can really do a number on your emotions when you go from full time caregiving back to full, or part time work. Being confident about your choice of a quality caregiver helps take away some of the worry. As much as possible, leave work at work at the end of the day. Consciously de-stress on the way home, to use the time you do have with your child to the fullest.
New parents often feel stressed by the concern that their child is not developing “on schedule.” It can be reassuring to remember that every child develops at his or her own pace.

However, it is also helpful to know the common developmental milestones to look for at each age. Knowing what your child’s limitations may be and what skills they are learning can help you to be a more effective parent.

Be sure to talk to your child’s doctor if there seems to be a delay in reaching any of the developmental markers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What most babies do at 2 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social and Emotional</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begins to smile at people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can briefly calm himself (may bring hands to mouth and suck on hand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tries to look at parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language/Communication</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coos, makes gurgling sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns head toward sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pays attention to faces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begins to follow things with eyes and recognize people at a distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begins to act bored (cries, fussy) if activity doesn’t change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movement/Physical Development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can hold head up and begins to push up when lying on tummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes smoother movements with arms and legs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talk to your child’s doctor if your child:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t respond to loud sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t watch things as they move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t smile at people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t bring hands to mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t hold head up when pushing up when on tummy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What most babies do at 4 months

**Social and Emotional**
- Smiles spontaneously, especially at people
- Likes to play with people and might cry when playing stops
- Copies some movements and facial expressions, like smiling or frowning

**Language/Communication**
- Begins to babble
- Babbles with expression and copies sounds he hears
- Cries in different ways to show hunger, pain, or being tired

**Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)**
- Lets you know if she is happy or sad
- Responds to affection
- Reaches for toy with one hand
- Uses hands and eyes together, such as seeing a toy and reaching for it
- Follows moving things with eyes from side to side
- Watches faces closely
- Recognizes familiar people and things at a distance

**Movement/Physical Development**
- Holds head steady, unsupported
- Pushes down on legs when feet are on a hard surface
- May be able to roll over from tummy to back
- Can hold a toy and shake it and swing at dangling toys
- Brings hands to mouth
- When lying on stomach, pushes up to elbows

**Talk to your child’s doctor if your child:**
- Doesn’t watch things as they move
- Doesn’t smile at people
- Can’t hold head steady
- Doesn’t coo or make sounds
- Doesn’t bring things to mouth
- Doesn’t push down with legs when feet are placed on a hard surface
- Has trouble moving one or both eyes in all directions

### What most babies do at 6 months

**Social and Emotional**
- Knows familiar faces and begins to know if someone is a stranger
- Likes to play with others, especially parents
- Responds to other people’s emotions and often seems happy
- Likes to look at self in a mirror

**Language/Communication**
- Responds to sounds by making sounds
- Strings vowels together when babbling (“ah,” “eh,” “oh”) likes taking turns making sounds
- Responds to own name
- Makes sounds to show joy and displeasure
- Begins to say consonant sounds (jabbering with “m,” “b”)

**Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)**
- Looks around at things nearby
- Brings things to mouth
- Shows curiosity about things and tries to get things that are out of reach
- Begins to pass things from one hand to the other

**Movement/Physical Development**
- Rolls over in both directions (front to back, back to front)
- Begins to sit without support
- When standing, supports weight on legs and might bounce
- Rocks back and forth, sometimes crawling backward before moving forward

**Talk to your child’s doctor if your child:**
- Doesn’t try to get things that are in reach
- Shows no affection for caregivers
- Doesn’t respond to sounds around him
- Has difficulty getting things to mouth
- Doesn’t make vowel sounds (“ah”, “eh”, “oh”)
- Doesn’t roll over in either direction
- Doesn’t laugh or make squealing sounds
- Seems very stiff, with tight muscles
- Seems very floppy, like a rag doll
### What most babies do at 9 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Emotional</th>
<th>Movement/Physical Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May be afraid of strangers</td>
<td>Stands, holding on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be clingy with familiar adults</td>
<td>Can get into sitting position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has favorite toys</td>
<td>Sits without support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language/Communication</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands “no”</td>
<td>Pulls to stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes a lot of different sounds like “mamamama” and “bababababa”</td>
<td>Crawls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies sounds and gestures of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses fingers to point at things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watches the path of something as it falls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks for things he sees you hide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays peek-a-boo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puts things in her mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves things smoothly from one hand to the other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picks up things like cereal o’s between thumb and index finger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Talk to your child’s doctor if your child:**
- Doesn’t bear weight on legs with support
- Doesn’t sit with help
- Doesn’t babble (“mama”, “baba”, “dada”)
- Doesn’t play any games involving back-and-forth play
- Doesn’t respond to own name
- Doesn’t seem to recognize familiar people
- Doesn’t look where you point
- Doesn’t transfer toys from one hand to the other

### What most children do at 1 year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Emotional</th>
<th>Movement/Physical Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is shy or nervous with strangers</td>
<td>Looks at correct picture or thing when it’s named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cries when mom or dad leaves</td>
<td>Copies gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has favorite things and people</td>
<td>Starts to use things correctly; for example, drinks from a cup, brushes hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows fear in some situations</td>
<td>Bangs two things together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands you a book when he wants to hear a story</td>
<td>Puts things in a container, takes things out of a container</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeats sounds or actions to get attention</td>
<td>Lets things go without help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puts out arm or leg to help with dressing</td>
<td>Pokes with index (pointer) finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays games such as “peek-a-boo” and “pat-a-cake”</td>
<td>Follows simple directions like “pick up the toy”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language/Communication</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responds to simple spoken requests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses simple gestures, like shaking head “no” or waving “bye-bye”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes sounds with changes in tone (sounds more like speech)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Says “mama” and “dada” and exclamations like “uh-oh!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tries to say words you say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explores things in different ways, like shaking, banging, throwing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finds hidden things easily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Talk to your child’s doctor if your child:**
- Doesn’t crawl
- Can’t stand when supported
- Doesn’t search for things that she sees you hide
- Doesn’t say single words like “mama” or “dada”
- Doesn’t learn gestures like waving or shaking head
- Doesn’t point to things
- Loses skills he once had
## What most children do at 18 months

### Social and Emotional
- Likes to hand things to others as play
- May have temper tantrums
- May be afraid of strangers
- Shows affection to familiar people
- Plays simple pretend, such as feeding a doll
- May cling to caregivers in new situations
- Points to show others something interesting
- Explores alone but with parent close by

### Language/Communication
- Says several single words
- Says and shakes head "no"
- Points to show someone what he wants

### Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)
- Knows what ordinary things are for; for example, telephone, brush, spoon
- Points to get the attention of others
- Shows interest in a doll or stuffed animal by pretending to feed

### Movement/Physical Development
- Points to one body part
- Scribbles on his own
- Can follow 1-step verbal commands without any gestures; example, sits when you say "sit down"

## What most children do at 2 years

### Social and Emotional
- Copies others, especially adults and older children
- Gets excited when with other children
- Shows more and more independence
- Shows defiant behavior (doing what he has been told not to)
- Plays mainly beside other children, but is beginning to include other children, such as in chase games

### Language/Communication
- Points to things or pictures when they are named
- Knows names of familiar people and body parts
- Says sentences with 2 to 4 words
- Follows simple instructions
- Repeats words overheard in conversation
- Points to things in a book

### Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)
- Finds things even when hidden under two or three covers
- Begins to sort shapes and colors
- Completes sentences and rhymes in familiar books

### Movement/Physical Development
- Plays simple make-believe games
- Builds towers of 4 or more blocks
- Might use one hand more than the other
- Follows two-step instructions such as "Pick up your shoes and put them in the closet."
- Names items in a picture book such as a cat, bird, or dog

### Talk to your child’s doctor if your child:
- Doesn’t point to show things to others
- Can’t walk
- Doesn’t know what familiar things are for
- Doesn’t copy others
- Doesn’t gain new words
- Doesn’t have at least 6 words
- Doesn’t notice or mind when a caregiver leaves or returns
- Loses skills he once had

It may also help to know that...

- Along with a developmental timeline, your child comes with his or her own unique personality. Even in early infancy, a child's personality or temperament affects how they behave and interact with the world. Some babies are calm and easily soothed, while others may be active or fussy. Their personality may be different from what you expected and very different from your own. Learning to pick up your baby's cues and working with, not against, this personality blueprint can help smooth your adjustment to new parenthood.

- Children are not able to reason before age three, which makes traditional approaches to discipline, such as time outs and reasoning, ineffective. Knowing that a toddler simply cannot understand an instruction to “be good” helps you to choose a more appropriate approach to keeping them out of trouble. Experts recommend that you supervise, distract, and redirect your toddler instead.

- Surveys show that there are certain areas where parents commonly under or overestimate their child’s capabilities. Social-emotional development is one such key area. Specifically:
  - A majority of parents (69%) were not aware that babies can experience fear and sadness as early as 6 months.
  - Research shows that children are capable of feeling good or bad about themselves starting between ages 1-2. A majority of parents (53%) thought this didn’t develop until later.
  - 43% of parents thought their child should be able to control their emotions (frustration resulting in tantrums) by age 3. The ability to do this does not develop until age 3-5.

Reference

Every stage of your child’s life will bring joys and challenges. Being thoughtful about what kind of parent you would like to be now, when your child is young, will help you to be prepared for the twists and turns of the future. Each time you are faced with a new parenting hurdle, you’ll already have a path to follow.

**Think about how you would like to shape your parenting style**

Here are some questions to ask yourself, and your child’s co-parent, to help you set your parenting course. It may be useful to get information from parenting professionals and to talk about these topics with others who care about your child.

**Questions**

What are the most important things I want to accomplish as a parent?

What is my parenting “mission statement?”

What are some child rearing techniques I have seen others use that I would like to incorporate into my parenting style?

What are some child rearing approaches that I would like to avoid?

What are some aspects of my personality that might make parenting more challenging?

What important things do I want my child to learn? How will I teach him/her?

How will my child know that I love him/her?

What actions, words, and attitudes will communicate my respect for my child?

How can I enforce rules and deal with disobedience in a fair and positive way?

How can I manage my commitments in a way that includes plenty of time to connect with my child?

How can we support and develop our family as a unit?
Exercises

Try imagining your child's world from time to time. How do they experience life? What are their challenges? Are there things you could do differently to make a smoother path?

Teach the power of apology. Even very young children can respond to the emotions of a true apology. Help them understand what saying "I'm sorry" means. Show them how to say it in a real and healing way.

Practice listening – at first to moods, cues, and non-verbal requests from your infant, later to curious questions and your child's unique view of the world. Listening carefully, without judgment, will help you respond more effectively and offer a glimpse into the amazing inner life of your child.

Strive for consistency. From infancy on, children thrive in a world that is predictable. Help them, and yourself, by setting clear guidelines and consistently following through.

Jot down quick memories of tender moments, funny words, special experiences, or just fleeting observations. Big baby books can be overwhelming. Try keeping a simple pocket notebook handy to record a written snapshot of your child as they grow. It will be a precious keepsake later on and can, on tough days, be a reminder of the things you love about your child.

Stop and imagine how you appear and sound from your child's viewpoint. Is it how you intend to come across? How could you change your approach to be more in line with the way you want to connect?

Decide how you want to teach values. Developing core values early in life increases the odds that your child will grow up to be happy and find success. For example, think about how you would like to teach your child responsibility (give ownership, but ask for accountability), respect (give what you expect to get), and kindness (have an open heart).

Play. It is harder than it sounds. Let go of schedules, rule-making, teachable moments, and all the other tasks of parenting and simply have fun. Fully engaging with your child on their level, at their pace, in their world will connect you and your child in a way that nothing else can – from infancy to adolescence.

Tell yourself it is okay to limit activities. For today's parents, the push to expand their child's world starts at birth – brain stimulation exercises, infant swimming classes, baby play groups, and the like. Activities and interaction can be a plus at all ages, but more is not necessarily better. In fact, a tightly packed schedule is not a necessary part of a rich childhood. Medical professionals stress the need for unstructured time at all ages. It offers a chance for kids to figure out how to amuse themselves and builds creativity.

Develop a good advice filter. Don't believe everything you hear (or read) about what makes a good parent. Be open to and seek out the wisdom of others, but be prepared to throw away the pieces that don't fit. In general, your own intuition and the advice of your pediatrician tend to be the best sources.

Put yourself, and your adult relationships, first from time to time. Being a fully engaged, well-rounded person will help you be a better parent. While it is easy to get lost in “baby world,” push yourself to connect with friends, create meaningful times with your partner, and do things that feed your own spirit.

Review your day or the last week. Have you modeled the behaviors, attitudes, and values that you would like your child to develop? If not, choose one change you could make to reach that goal.

Give yourself a parenting pep talk. Use this tool on days when the job of being a parent is especially hard. Take a few minutes in a quiet spot to think about what is going right. Identify one specific thing (even very small) that was a success. Think of one thing you need in order to feel better, and how you will get it.

Concentrate on seeing the child you have… not the one you imagined. Celebrate that person. Look at how they approach the world, identify their strengths, and imagine how behaviors that are challenging now may work for them in the future. Tell them all the good things you see.

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