

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

September/October 2024

N F A P A

10 WAYS TO STRENGTHEN FOSTER PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Written by Dr. John DeGarmo

For a child placed into foster care, it is often a very difficult time. It is highly likely that the child placed in your home will be scared and frightened, full of anxiety. In addition, there are many times issues of trust and attachment. Here are 10 ways you can help to build positive relationships with a child placed into your home.

1. Gift of Time

The best gift you can give the child placed in your home is the gift of time. He will need time to grieve the loss of his family; time to fully understand why he is in your home; time to learn your rules and expectations. He will need time to adjust to a new home, new family, and new school. He will also need time from you; time for someone to listen to him, to guide him, and time to instruct and teach him. It will also be very important for his mental well-being if you give him the time to laugh, to play, and most importantly, time to be cared for and loved. This time often leads to the beginnings of trust.

2. Provide Emotional Support

Your child from foster care needs your help, your support, and most importantly, your unconditional love. As many of these children are coming from homes and environments

where they have experienced abuse and neglect, as well as a host of other problems, they may be resistant to your help, and to your love. Do not be discouraged, as this is quite normal with foster children. Remember, they have been taken from their homes and their families, and are now living with strangers. No matter how poorly they have been treated, no matter how much abuse they have suffered, they still want to be with their

family members, as it may be the only love they have experienced.

3. Words of Praise and Encouragement

Children need a cheerleader. They need to know that someone believes in them. They need to know that what they do matters. This is especially true for children in foster care. When you tell a child placed in your home that you are proud of him, it only encourages them to work even harder. Celebrate each little success a child has, no matter how small it might be.

4. Words of Love

Sadly, I have found over the years as a foster parent that so many children have never heard these three important words. Yet, these three words are the most important words that they need to hear. Indeed, one can never say "I love you," to a child enough times. They need to and deserve to hear it several times a day. "I love you," reminds children that they are valuable, that they matter, and



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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Corinne@nfapa.org, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Sept-Oct2024>

We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. Fill in the blanks. Children are inherently prone to....
2. True or False. Trust can be built by showing your child from foster care that you care for him.
3. Fill in the blanks. The child placed into your home more than likely has gone through a _____.
4. True or False. Foster youth provide valuable insight and voice into potential improvements to the structure of child welfare because they have intimately experience it.
5. List three things to keep in mind that will help you help kids process their emotions.
6. Fill in the blanks. Having _____ with your kids can be important for your relationship and their peace of mind.
7. List 8 ways you can help build a positive relationship with a child placed in your home.
8. List the 5 stages of grief.
9. True or false. When you tell a child placed in your home that you are upset with him, it encourages them to work even harder.
10. Fill in the blanks. Mistakes help me _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

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that someone truly cares for them.

5. The Power of Listening

The child placed into your home more than likely has gone through a great deal of trauma. Feelings and emotions are swirling up inside of him, and your child will need an outlet. Simply by putting all else aside at the time, sitting down, and listening, this will help him develop a better sense of self-worth, as you validate your child's thoughts, feeling, and emotions. As the child has had many experiences outside your own home, it is important to remember not to judge you're him, or be critical as you listen. Simply let him talk, while you listen.



6. Quality Time

Nothing says you care for a child than spending quality time with that child. Spending time with your child from foster care and focusing on him is important for the mental health of the child. Including him in family activities is essential for the well-being of your household. These might include going to the movies, parks, church, and faith based activities as a family. If he is interested in joining a local sports team, like a recreational or school baseball team, than encourage the child to try out, as well as attend the games he plays in. Learn what hobbies your foster child enjoys, and join in with them. Invite him to help you make dinner, and eat as a family together. Above all, be excited and enthusiastic about your child from foster care and what his interests are.

7. Encourage Good Behavior

Like all children, the child placed into your home wants to feel like he not only belongs to your family, but that he plays an

important role in your household. If he does not believe that he contributes in a meaningful way in your home, he may seek someplace else to do so. This "someplace else" may not be the place where you want your child to be associated with. Thus, it is vital that you encourage good behavior in your home.

Find your child from foster care doing something well, and notice him for it. Tell him that you appreciate what he has done, thanking him for it. This can be as simple as cleaning up a room, taking the garbage out, playing quietly in a room, completing homework, hanging up a bath towel, or a number of small details that normally may go unnoticed. No matter how small the action is, it is essential to his well-being that he feels recognized and that his actions are significant.

8. Empathy

Many of the situations and environments the child from foster care left before coming to live with you are distressing, troubling, and even heartbreaking. As a foster parent, you will be able to build a stronger relationship with your foster child by trying to understand their feelings from their perspective. By doing so, not only do you better appreciate their feelings and emotions, but also why they may act a certain way, behave in a particular manner, and say the things they do. Empathy also helps in breaking down the walls between you and the child, as you compassion and love for the child grows.

9. Building Trust

Trust can also be built by showing your child from foster care that you care for him. Building a trusting relationship means showing him that you are concerned for his well-being, physically, emotionally, and mentally. Showing compassion for him is an important part of building a healthy relationship, as he needs to know and feel that you care for him. After all, close relationships between children and adults is a central part of avoiding further risky behavior. Trust, though, does take time, and for some children placed in foster care, it may take a very long period of time. Remember, you are planting seeds, here, that you may never see come to fruition.

10. Saying "I'm Sorry"

As foster parents, when we make a mistake and when we disappoint or hurt a child in some way, it is important for us to say that "I'm sorry." Pride should never get in the way of this. You should never be too proud to ask a child for forgiveness. Not only are we letting children know that we have accepted our own poor choices and mistakes, we are teaching children that it is important to take ownership of our mistakes.

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<https://drjohndegarmo.medium.com/10-ways-to-strengthen-foster-parent-child-relationships-7983296f6516>

EFFECTIVE PARENTING: EMBRACING DISCIPLINE OVER PUNISHMENT

Written by Ashley Martin

Many adults mistakenly equate punishment and discipline, assuming they are interchangeable terms. However, a closer examination reveals that they hold distinct meanings and approaches.

Children are inherently prone to making mistakes, testing boundaries, and occasionally defying instructions. These behaviors are entirely normal aspects of childhood development. It is essential for adults to recognize that young children do not possess an innate sense of right and wrong. This moral compass is cultivated through a series of complex cognitive skills that evolve over time, and its development is greatly influenced by role modeling and positive reinforcement.

As responsible adults and loving care providers, we bear the crucial task of guiding children toward a sense of morality and ethical behavior as they evolve into the best versions of themselves.

Punishment

Punishing a child for doing something wrong is never the answer. Some may argue there are forms of positive punishment, but I would simply call this discipline. Punishment means to make the child suffer. Examples of punishment include scolding, spanking, enforcing even more household rules, and demanding an immense amount of labor from a child. Each of these examples has one main theme in common; they hurt instead of teach the child. Punishments hurt children... physically, yes, but also mentally and emotionally.

Children can learn to self-regulate, handle their emotions, and be in control of themselves, which ultimately leads to self-discipline. Offering punishment, rather than taking the time to teach a child right from wrong, is doing them a disservice in numerous ways.

Children are growing at such a fast pace, and we cannot expect them to remember all the many things they are learning. They are learning new things at school, from their friends, from their extracurricular activities, and from their families. We often assume a child is being willful in their acting out, while many times, children are simply feeling overwhelmed and dysregulated, unable to access the new social-emotional skills they are still learning.

As adults, we are still learning as well. Stay curious about your own parenting triggers, and remember that learning how to use discipline instead of punishment in your parenting is a journey, especially if these skills were not modeled for you when you were a child.

Discipline

Discipline, which originates from the root word “disciple” focuses on teaching right from wrong by leading and guiding by example. By teaching rather than punishing, adults can turn challenging moments into teaching moments, with the added benefit of strengthening a child’s sense of trust, safety, and connection. For example, going with an upset child to a calming corner when he/she is overwhelmed or having a tantrum in order to help calm their body is an affirming way for children to learn how to manage frustration, disappointment, and ultimately, to form the neuro pathways they will need to be capable of self-regulation in the future.

Creating a space for children to practice calming down during a heated moment is the perfect example of positive discipline. The Calming Corner Bundle is a helpful set of guided resources for caregivers who are new to these concepts and could benefit from step-by-step support in shifting from punishment to positive discipline methods.

Communication is another key life skill children benefit from having modeled for them when they receive discipline rather than punishment. Once a child has calmed their body, it is crucial to talk to them about their feelings. Keeping this communication simple, concrete, and affirming is most conducive to their formative learning. For this reason, having a feelings chart and/or other tangible tools is ideal, assisting children as they practice putting words to their feelings, as well as the many thoughts and needs that often live underneath big feelings.

Discipline and consistency go hand-in-hand, therefore using familiar tools with young children again and again as you grow their capacity to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions is ideal, and opens up the space for children to both think and talk about what they want to do differently next time. Once calm and regulated, children can be guided through self-reflection for the learning and the growth the moment has to bring.

When we respond to the source of children’s “mis” or unwanted behaviors, rather than react to the behavior (aka the symptom) alone, children naturally stop repeating the same challenging behaviors over and over.

With positive discipline, young children learn the life skills they need to grow into compassionate and resilient adults, rather than being punished for not having been born with a mastery of them.

Adult Behavior Determines Child Behavior

Children are going to do wrong from time to time, but having the idea of making them “pay” for what they have done wrong is not okay. This can result in a negative observation of themselves, being frightened of others, or never truly learning how to actually behave. Truthfully, it teaches the child it is okay to inflict pain, embarrassment, and suffering. If a child sees their parents spank their sibling, they are going to be

extremely confused when they get in trouble for hitting their sibling. Adults must behave toward the child in the same way they want the child to behave. This is one of the exact reasons it is important to focus on positive parenting, rather than punitive parenting.

UNICEF has an interesting article called How to Discipline Your Child the Smart and Healthy Way. In this article, the author goes into great detail regarding the ins and outs of discipline and punishment. It states, “The evidence is clear: shouting and hitting simply do not work and can do more harm than good in the long run. Repeated shouting and hitting can even adversely impact a child’s entire life. The continued “toxic stress” it creates can lead to a host of negative outcomes like higher chances of school dropout, depression, drug use, suicide, and heart disease.”

The evidence is clear: when adults display aggressive behavior toward children, it inevitably has a detrimental impact on them. However, we possess the power to break this cycle. Instead of resorting to the punitive methods, such as corporal punishment, that many previous generations employed, we can choose more effective approaches. Raising a well-rounded child hinges on providing proper discipline, guidance... and love.

Reprinted with permission from:

<https://genmindful.com/blogs/mindful-moments/discipline-versus-punishment>

FOSTER YOUTH MONTH

In October, the Selfless Love Foundation leads Foster Youth Voice Month to amplify youth voices nationwide and influence policy. Participate in Foster Youth Voice Month, by highlighting the importance of youth voices in action and how young people’s experiences and ideas reshape the child welfare system and their personal journey. Foster youth provide valuable insight and voice into potential improvements to the structure of child welfare because they have intimately experienced it. Their voices must be heard to improve our system of care and individual case planning. We must empower youth to lead discussions about their futures while providing the support they need to achieve their goals and ambitions.

When adults create a safe space for young people, they are more likely to share their ideas, thoughts, and concepts. Supporting youth voices involves seeking input from them and providing opportunities for them to make choices or decisions. This helps to build genuine adult-youth partnerships, as trusting relationships are essential for successful youth engagement. It requires everyone involved to invest time and effort into every

interaction with a young person in their care.

It’s not just crucial, but imperative, that the opinions of young people are not just heard, but actively taken into account. The decisions made today directly affect them, who will be shaping the future. Today’s youth are not just strong and well-informed, but also deeply committed to driving change. Their voices hold significant importance and involving them in decision-making processes is not just an ethical choice, but a strategic one. We all share the aim of a society that continues to evolve, rather than stagnate, and it’s our collective responsibility to transform the current narrative into one that young people desire. By empowering everyone to be a change-maker, we affirm that the future belongs to young people, and we must work towards making society a better place for future generations.

Uplift October is Foster Youth Voice Month to inspire change!



HELPING KIDS PROCESS THEIR EMOTIONS FREE FROM SHAME

Written by Alex Petrou

Have you ever heard someone tell a child who is upset to stop crying? Maybe they lead with something like, “What are you, a baby?” Or maybe they add in some fear as well by saying, “Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.” Oof.

Most of us cringe to think these things are being said to

children (and they are) but are we aware of the more subtle ways we ourselves might be dismissing children’s emotions?

If you’ve ever caught yourself wanting to tell an emotional child to just stop, (so basically, if you are a human being) here are three things to keep in mind that will help you help kids process their emotions free from shame.

1) ALLOW FOR EMOTIONS: Kids can actually feel intimidated by their own emotions, especially when adults in their lives react negatively to the expression of those feelings. When we react to a child’s experience and make having big feelings “wrong”, no matter how inconvenient or annoying that experience might be, we are minimizing and at times denying that child the right to their own internal experience. And as tempting as dismissing and denying might seem because we think we are “nipping this bad attitude in the bud”, in actuality, we are likely making things worse; at times even increasing the likelihood that we will find ourselves back in this very place tomorrow. And really, who wants that?

The first step in helping kids learn to process their feelings is acceptance. We get to accept the fact that this child is feeling one form of not happy or another.

Allow for emotions. Period. End of story. Whether you see these emotions as logical or ludicrous is irrelevant. Hit a pause button on the inner dialog that wants to scream, “What is wrong with you!?!?” and make space for their emotions instead. You do not need to agree with someone’s emotions to make space for them. All you really need to do is allow and hold space for them.

In the face of screaming and whining, allowing is easier said than done, so it’s helpful to have a phrase in your back pocket you can turn to for strength. Mine is this:

“Emotions are sacred.”

For me, this means that emotions are not right and they are not wrong. They just are. Emotions are safe to feel, they matter, and they are always allowed. Kids are simply exploring a whole new world of feelings and benefit greatly when the adults in their world support this process.

2) RECOGNIZE EMOTIONS: Once you’ve made space for big emotions, the next step is to help children learn to recognize their feelings and the feelings of others. If kids are expressing their big feelings with actions like hurting others or otherwise acting out, see these actions as a form of communication - a cry for help. The phrase I turn to for patience and strength in these challenging moments is this:

“Misbehavior is an unmet need.”

Instead of the internal question, “What is WRONG with this child?!” this moves me into thinking, “What’s the need?” With my own energies centered, I am then better equipped to approach the situation, maintaining my boundaries and

respect the child at the very same time. Instead of punishment, when we center ourselves first, we are then able to help children:

- Think about and express how they were feeling.
- Draw a connection between their feelings and why/how they acted out.
- Consider their thoughts, words, and actions. Tools like this set of (free) printable calming strategies with cute pictures kids can color along with words (designed for ages 3 to about 9) from the Time-In Toolkit are helpful as are any number of play-based approaches to nurturing social and emotional skills in kids.

When we help children process their actions in connection to their thoughts and feelings, free from punishment, shame, and blame, we are teaching important social and emotional skills in the most powerful way possible... and that is by example.

3) MODEL FORGIVENESS: There are times that feel impossible for us to keep our cool. Take the mom in my last parenting class whose son threw a glass of water at her... a challenging moment to be sure. Despite our best intentions, we are going to get knocked off-center. Instead of beating ourselves up for our anger and frustration in times like these, we can see them as a teaching moment for us to model self-love and acceptance in the face of our own mistakes.

When we are aware of our own trigger moments, we can simply apologize. The catchphrase we use in my home in the face of our teaching moments is this:

“Mistakes help me learn and grow.”

When we model self-love and forgiveness, children learn self-love and forgiveness. Share how you were feeling, what you might have done differently and something you learned. In doing so, you are teaching children that it is possible for us to learn from our mistakes, free from shame.

Emotions in and of themselves are never a negative thing and everyday life affords us countless opportunities to support children in learning how to process their emotions. This is no small task, but the stakes are high and the rewards for doing so are even higher. Our very world and peace in our time depends on it.

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https://genmindful.com/blogs/mindful-moments/helping-kids-process-their-emotions-free-from-shame?fbclid=IwZXh0bGhZW0CMTEAAR1eo0wO16Zht5WB39vbqSKYTU69i96eDsE2XmNt1T17FDOIEwLjJdy5KQ_aem_ODSGZ3nJQ_rcNihK4VJUAW*



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FREE Virtual In-Service Training

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For Foster, Adoptive, Guardianship, Kinship & Relative Parents



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Date	Title & Trainer
<input type="checkbox"/> October 19, 2024	The Impact of Brain Injury on System-Involved Youth, Part 1 By Peggy Reisher, MSW, Brain Injury Alliance of NE
<input type="checkbox"/> November 16, 2024	Shared Parenting By Barb Clark, Director of Training for Families Rising
<input type="checkbox"/> January 25, 2025	Center Plains Center for Services – Providing coaching, educational and financial literacy services By Andra White, Chief Executive Director for Central Plains Center for Services
<input type="checkbox"/> February 22, 2025	The Impact of Brain Injury on System-Involved Youth, Part 2 By Peggy Reisher, Brain Injury Alliance of NE
<input type="checkbox"/> March 1, 2025	Understanding Problem Solving Teams and ADHD By Cami Bergman, School-Age Information Specialist, PTI Nebraska
<input type="checkbox"/> April 5, 2025	Child Abuse Hotline and Reporting Abuse & Neglect By Susan Ward, Hotline Deputy Administrator
<input type="checkbox"/> June 7, 2025	FASD 2.0 By Barb Clark, Director of Training for Families Rising
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HOW TO TELL YOUR CHILD THEY'RE ADOPTED

Written by Alex Petrou

Should parents be honest?

- When to talk to your child
- Talking honestly
- Next steps

At some point, most children ask where they came from. When your adopted child poses this question, what will you say?

Experts agree that telling your adopted child the truth is the best solution. But the question of how to tell your child they're adopted can feel intimidating to parents.

One thing is clear — even if you're not sure what to say, it's better to bring up the topic early than to postpone it indefinitely. The sooner your child knows the truth, the better.

If your child is young enough, you can make their adoption something they've always known about themselves.

Early disclosure means that when your child asks questions about who they are, you'll already have the topic of adoption woven seamlessly into the conversation. It will be as natural as the connection you have with them and an integral part of their understanding of themselves.

Should adoptive parents tell their kids the truth?

Children benefit from knowing the truth about significant identity factors, such as adoption.

Late discovery adoptees (LDAs) vouch very strongly for parental transparency on this subject. They cite distress and lower life satisfaction as some of the effects of not knowing the true identity of the adults who raised them and the existence of unknown biological parents.

It's not they were adopted that causes distress. Instead, LDAs experience emotional disruption because they were not told the truth about their identity.

Healthy attachment

When parents are honest with their child about adoption, they nurture trust, an important part of the parent-child bond known as attachment.

The American Psychological Association states that successful attachment creates a foundation for emotional, cognitive, and social development.

Talking with older kids

If you have an older child who doesn't know they're adopted, it's still important to tell them the truth.

While you're reminding them of their importance in your life, you can also explain that you weren't sure when and how to tell them. It's OK if parents don't have all the answers if your

conversation is sincere.

Benefits of being honest

Maintaining trust isn't the only benefit of telling your child the truth about their adoption. Other ways this information benefits them include:

- providing the opportunity to access their family medical history
- protecting them from the shock of finding another way, such as accidental disclosure from another relative or family friend
- offering them the chance to learn more about themselves, like whom they resemble or from whom did they inherit their hair color
- preventing the possibility of shame that may result from hiding their story

When should you talk with your child about adoption?

Most experts agree that the conversation about birth origin should begin sooner rather than later.

It's recommended that you start with the very basics when your child is young. As they grow and ask questions, you can provide more detail.

Age-appropriate conversations

It's OK if your child doesn't understand what adoption means when you first tell them. What matters is that when they are old enough to understand, they won't feel unsettled by the added information.

They'll already know they're adopted and feel secure that you haven't kept important facts from them.

A mixed-method study from 2019 involving 254 adopted adults revealed higher life satisfaction for those whose parents told them they were adopted before 3 years of age.

Normalizing adoption with open communication

Study participants said they preferred open communication and they benefited from supportive relationships. They also described contact with their birth parents and other adoptees as beneficial coping methods.

Consider regularly including the topic of adoption into your conversations, from the moment you bring your child home. Tell them how lucky you feel to have adopted them.

Normalize adoption by talking about all the diverse types of families that exist.

Talking with your child honestly

There's no one-size-fits-all script for your adoption dialogue. Each situation and every child are unique.

But there are various strategies to consider that could make your conversation easier:

Challenging conversations

Your child's adoption story might be complicated or difficult to discuss with them. If your child asks about their birth parents, you might not know what to say right away — and that's OK.

Having honest conversations with your kids can be important for your relationship and their peace of mind. People who are adopted often learn about their birth parents and origins eventually. Hearing their adoption story from a parent can strengthen your trust.

Keeping difficult information age-appropriate may ease stress for both you and your child. As your children grow up, you can revisit the conversation and explain more details.

For example, you might simply start by saying that your child's birth parents weren't well enough to take on the responsibilities of parenting.



Next steps

Wherever you are in your adoption dialogue with your child, keep in mind that you're not alone. It's OK to reach out for support from the people in your life and to build new connections with other adoptive families.

Children are resilient when they have secure and trusting relationships with parents, adoptive or otherwise. Your love and support help them navigate life's changes and challenges.

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https://psychcentral.com/lib/how-to-tell-your-child-theyre-adopted?fbclid=IwZxh0bgNhZWOCMTEAAROS8NvFMzVsI5nGpPzZNewcbMfC3iWuHkq7qGy3o7qng2cp0vvRD5jenxo_aem_d6JOZpmOGHAe_LL0ziA_LA#next-steps

WHEN CHILDREN GRIEVE: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM TODDLERS TO TEENS

Written by Amy McCreedy

When grief has seized control of our lives, we want to know—how long will the suffering last? When children grieve, the question becomes even more imperative.

Will the nightmares ever subside?

Will my son find joy in playing his instrument again?

Will my daughter smile again during our family game night?

We can't bear to see them in pain any longer than necessary—let alone at all.

Unfortunately, grief has no exact expiration. Nor does it play by the rules. The depth and duration depends on each child and each situation. And at least a portion of grief can stay with a child forever.

Many of us are familiar with the commonly referenced stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But perhaps fewer of us know that these grief stages, which can also be seen in children, aren't set in stone. In fact, it would be rare for grief to ever appear exactly as these stages describe or in such a specific order.

So, what can we expect from children mourning tragedy, death, and loss?

Re-Defining the Phases of Grief

Perhaps the best way to define the progression of grief is that we can't define it. Yet one reason the five stages of grief have become so widespread could be the sense of structure and reliability they convey. They offer sufferers specific feelings to look for and expect.

Even though we've established that grief follows no guidelines, it's easy to understand that people still want a concrete prescription to turn to. One possible alternative is Dr. Alan Wolfelt's 6 Needs of Mourning.

In it, he describes what all mourners experience at some point along their journey. This includes: acknowledging the reality of the death, embracing the pain of the loss, remembering the person who died, developing a new self-identity, searching for meaning, and receiving ongoing support from others.

While we can look for and recognize the processes our grieving children are going through, there are other common grief responses that children exhibit.

The intensity of these responses can vary, and they likely won't appear in a particular order. The emotions stemming from their grief may also range from confused, scared, and angry to anxious, depressed, and numb—and everything in between.

Typical Grief Responses in Children

Regression in Behavior and at School

A certain amount of regression in grieving children is normal. A night-trained 6-year old might start bedwetting, or a 4-year-old might start sucking his thumb.

A twelve-year-old that kicked the whining habit years ago might start up again. A teenager might forego her usual chores or avoid any extra responsibilities.

Unfortunately, behavior and progress at school can alter just as much as it does at home. A well-behaved pre-schooler might start getting in trouble by pushing friends on the playground or being disruptive at circle time. An advanced, all “A”s high-school student might start failing classes or forget to attend his extracurricular activities.

While we want to keep our kids on track as much as possible, we can be assured that the sudden setbacks are very likely a result of the grief they’re weathering. They’re simply overwhelmed—both mentally and emotionally.

It may be hard to see regression as anything but negative, but allowing grieving children some leniency is important. We can also remind ourselves that as children work through grief at their own pace, they’ll eventually return to the same level of success, independence, and functionality they had before their loss.

Separation Anxiety/Clinginess

Grief is a time when children may not want to be left alone. Little ones might cry when we leave the house—or even leave the room—more than they once did. Older kids could choose to tag along with us on errands they’ve avoided before.

When overcome with grief, children might find solitude not only intimidating, but unbearable. Maybe, after the loss of an older family member, they have a heightened fear of being abandoned. Or, perhaps they’re just afraid of their thoughts. Regardless, any needy, helpless, and unusually attached behavior reflects a need for companionship and emotional connection.

Letting our kids stick by our side, and even enlisting the help of family and friends to play with or “hang out” with grieving kids can give them the extra dose of care, affection, and even distraction they desire.

It’s also common for grieving kids to connect with a person, either a familiar face or a new one, that reminds them of a lost loved one. This can be beneficial and might fill a void—just as long as it’s understood that their loved one can never be fully replicated or replaced (which would also be an unfair—and impossible—standard for anyone to live up to).

Apathy or Withdrawal

It’s not unusual for children to sometimes act as though a loss never even occurred.

While children may appear unaffected by tragedy, death, or

loss, this is likely far from the case. Maybe they’re unwilling to confront the loss just yet, can only handle grief for brief spurts of time, or are modeling the restrained reactions of their parents or caregivers.

Children can also step in and out of grief more easily than adults.

“Children’s grief is like jumping in and out of puddles. They can be very sad one minute and very happy the next. You need to give them opportunities to be both.”

– Julia Samuel, British psychotherapist and counselor.

So while kids might be playful and acting normally one minute, they can also withdraw socially from friends and avoid activities the next.

They may also seem numb to things around them—like being uninterested in the fun day at the water park you’ve planned, the movie their friends are attending, or the fact that grandpa and grandma are flying in for a visit. In this case, the grief—like depression—is taking the joy out of normally pleasurable events.

On some level this is normal, especially considering the recency of the loss. But it’s always good to keep a close eye on signs of depression and anxiety. If you’re concerned, consider finding your child a counselor or therapist.

Physical Ailments & Sleep/Appetite Disturbances

We know that common stressors can keep us up all night, morph into back and shoulder pain, and even appear as bodily tics and twitches.

Imagine what grief can do.

We can expect a certain amount of sleeplessness, nightmares, and/or night terrors from a grieving child. We can expect a loss of appetite or bingeing on comfort foods.

But we can also see grief in a variety of physical ailments. It might be a teenager’s headache that has lasted for days or a toddler’s frequently upset tummy.

It’s helpful to know these physical responses can be common; but again, it’s important to see a doctor when we have concerns.

Guilt

Guilt is very common among anyone grieving death and loss, and children are no exception.

Younger children, when they don’t fully understand the concepts of death, may feel they’re responsible for the loss—especially when they’re wired to be more preoccupied with their own needs and have the belief that everything in the world revolves around them.

A preschooler who hit her friend—after she stole her toy last week—may feel she’s the reason her young friend tragically passed away.

Older kids are also susceptible to guilt. A teenager who gave his friend the cold shoulder last month may feel partly to

blame when that depressed, bullied friend takes his own life.

Naturally, it’s of ultimate importance to remind children they are not responsible for these tragic events. We need to also consider that it may take time and additional resources—like consistent counseling—for them to understand this fact.

Interest in Death

Grieving kids might ask questions about tragedy and loss repeatedly. Young kids might become interested in dead things like the upside-down beetle in the driveway and the lifeless bird on the porch. Older children might become drawn to darker themes in books, music, movies, and video games.

Even kids that aren’t dealing with grief are commonly obsessed with the morbid and bleak. They are trying to understand the world around them and the challenging concepts that even adults fail to grasp.

A loved one’s death or personal loss just intensifies these questions.

Risk-Taking & Aggression

One of the most distressing aspects of grief is the possibility that children will internalize it in a negative way.

Older children, especially, might engage in risky behavior. “They may drive recklessly, get into fights, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use drugs. They may become involved in sexual activity or delinquency.” After a Loved One Dies—How Children Grieve by David J Schonfeld, MD

Younger children can also express their grief through hostility and/or self-harm. A 5-year-old girl struggling with anger from her parents’ divorce might start bullying her younger brother or try pulling out her own hair.

Aggression, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts can all emerge during times of grief. Naturally, it’s imperative to intervene in any of these situations with professional assistance as quickly as possible.

Psychological Changes

Another serious concern is the prospect of grief leaving life-long, psychological implications. Children are still developing mentally—with rapidly evolving brains, personalities, and intellect—and it’s possible that grief can leave an intense, life-shaping impression.

Studies of adults with various mental disorders, especially depression, frequently reveal childhood bereavement, suggesting that such loss may precipitate or contribute to the development of a variety of psychiatric disorders and that this experience can render a person emotionally vulnerable for life. This special vulnerability of children is attributed to developmental immaturity and insufficiently developed coping capacities.- Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care

Regardless of these implications, please don’t be disheartened. By no means is it a foregone conclusion that children struck by

tragedy, death, and loss will have challenging futures.

On the contrary, grief can strengthen children and give them a greater appreciation for the beauty and complexity of life. But, grieving children do need appropriate support from loved ones and constructive coping mechanisms to shape their grief as positively as possible. The book Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care, states that children with a reliable adult addressing their needs—including the need to explore and express feelings of grief—can adapt and overcome loss in a healthy, positive way.

Disenfranchised and Secondary Grief

Disenfranchised Grief

Not all grief comes from death or tragedy. Children can feel intense sorrow from a variety of other situations and need to process these changes the same way other grievers do.

This is called disenfranchised grief.

It’s so-named because the cause of this grief isn’t considered—at least by society at large—a “justifiable” reason to mourn. Regardless, it is felt acutely by the person it affects and can’t simply be dismissed or ignored.

A 3-year-old could experience disenfranchised grief after the death of her pet gerbil. It could be a foster child distraught over moving to a new home. Maybe it’s your teenager, devastated after his girlfriend broke up with him. Or, it could be a preteen struggling with the reaction she received when she told her parents she’s gay.

No one, especially a parent, has the right to tell a child that his or her feelings are unworthy, unnecessary, or insignificant.

NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Please join us in one of our support groups where you can find mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

Live Virtual Support Group *NEW DAY

- Second Monday at 6:30pm (MT)
- RSVP required: Contact Jolie, (308) 672-3658 or Tammy, (402) 989-2197

Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

Parenting Across Color Lines

- Fourth Tuesday of the month — for multi-racial families.
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln. Pot Luck Supper prior to meeting.
- RSVP required — Contact Felicia, (402) 476-2273 or Jessica at mailto:jessica@nfapa.org

Meetup Adoptive Mom Support Group in Lincoln

- Second Friday of the month, for adoptive moms.
- 7:00-9:00 pm
- RSVP required, Felicia, (402) 476-2273

No matter the cause, our feelings are often out of our control. This is especially true for children still learning to manage their raw emotions. Teaching a child how to cope with grief, rather than dismiss it, will help them more than anything.

Secondary Loss/Grief

Secondary losses result from a primary loss. Essentially, they're the collateral damage produced by death, tragedy, and grief.

If your 10-year-old daughter just had to move to a new school due to your recent divorce from her father, the grief she feels from the loss of her school and friends would be secondary to the loss she feels from the divorce.

Just like disenfranchised grief, secondary losses may not be accepted or appreciated for their potential severity. If we are aware of them, however, we can better prepare our children and ourselves to cope with these added stressors.

The secondary losses and disenfranchised grief of a family member or friend can also affect a child. We all know that depression doesn't just hurt the people it affects. It harms all of the people that love them, too. So when a child's parent or caregiver is grieving, whether it's about bankruptcy, the death of a coworker, or a crisis of faith, children may grieve, too.

When to Seek Help

If all of these grief responses are common, when is it important to seek help? Especially if there are no set guidelines or timelines for grief?

Again, any signs of aggression or self-harm need to be addressed by a mental health specialist immediately. But for other common, less severe responses, the answer is less clear.

One of the best indicators that children are progressing healthily through grief is when the intensity and frequency of their grief responses lessen over time. If a teenager is averaging a little more sleep each week, he is improving. If a 5-year-old starts playing with her friends despite frequent tears, then she is recovering.

But, what if symptoms persist—or escalate?

According to the Child Mind Institute, "...symptoms that persist beyond six months or are very impairing can indicate that your child may need professional help to overcome her grief."

These symptoms can include the more common grief responses; from sleep and appetite disturbances to regression and apathy. If they worsen or linger longer than the six-month time frame, it's time to seek professional help from a grief counselor, support group, or psychiatrist.

Final Thoughts

Loss is both heart-wrenching and unavoidable at some point in all of our lives. While we hope our children will avoid exposure to death and loss in their childhood, we can't always protect them from life's most painful realities.

It could be a few weeks before they crack a smile or a few months before they laugh out loud. To a certain degree, some of the grief will always be a part of them.

But with our help and love, grief will never define them.

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https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/parenting/child-grief-at-all-ages?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR2_UxDkS2LmB6YBoCg8tn4y7H18s8fUcFwIMJ8k14uL3v2QM8ee6q7JC5Q_aem_q6yMiUUjh32aq3qji7HUYw



HOW TO DISCIPLINE A CHILD WHO WON'T LISTEN

Setting specific expectations and praising good behavior are crucial to cultivating discipline

It's a familiar drill. You've asked your child to do a simple task and they flatly refuse. You've tried all the tricks: You've used your "parent voice," counted to three and broken out all the stops, but your child still defies you. It's enough to make anyone frustrated!

When it's time to get serious and discipline your child, how do you know if you're disciplining them correctly? How can you be sure you're making the right choices? Where do you draw the line?

Pediatrician Edward Gaydos, DO, has some do's and don'ts to follow when it comes to disciplining your little one.

Disciplinary challenges and strategies by age

Your kiddo is learning and growing every day. It's a wonderful thing, but it can also make it hard to know what disciplinary strategy is best. Dr. Gaydos explains the unique challenges and opportunities that you'll encounter as your little one develops.

As you read, keep in mind:

- Not all children develop in the same way or at the same time — and that's OK. Take what works from this framework and leave what doesn't.

- Our brains don't finish developing until well into adulthood. So, don't expect your child to have the same reasoning skills or worldview you have. Even for teenagers, that's still a way away!

Babies (0–12 months)

Discipline isn't a big concern with infants, because ... well, they can't do much. That doesn't mean infants won't try your patience. They will. But they aren't old enough to correct in a meaningful or lasting way. They're still learning about their environment, so many of their day-to-day experiences are new.

With newborns and infants, your focus is protecting them from danger. For example, if your little one tries to grab your hot coffee cup, you might say "Hot! Ouch!" or hand them something safe to play with. Dr. Gaydos also recommends modeling good behaviors, like gently petting the cat. If you're lucky (rather, if the cat's lucky) they'll mimic you.

Toddlers (1–3 years)

Toddlers test boundaries. They still want and need attention, but they go about getting it slightly differently than they used to. Back talking, saying no, making demands and even biting — Dr. Gaydos says it's all part of a larger effort to build an identity and claim independence.

Toddlers have big ideas and even bigger feelings. But they lack the words and emotional regulation skills needed to communicate clearly. That frustration leads to tantrums and aggression.

Parenting a toddler can be tough. But staying calm, helping them express themselves, distracting them and strategic use of time outs can help manage the chaos.

Preschoolers (3–5 years)

Once your kiddo is preschool-age, they can better understand cause and effect and communicate thoughts and feelings more effectively. And so do their friends! Expect conflicts do arise as preschool-age children learn how to interact, follow directions and pay attention.

While their emotional regulation skills have improved since

toddlerhood, preschoolers aren't masters of self-expression. And they're still working on concentration and self-control. Anticipate plenty of whining and frustration at this age. You can also expect lots of imaginative storytelling and — as they don't fully understand the difference between right and wrong — outright lying.

According to Dr. Gaydos, this is a great time to build routines, set expectations, reward positive behaviors and establish consequences for misbehavior. But your kid is still young. You'll need to show them, remind them and explain repeatedly. And they'll still have occasional issues behaving or following through.

School-age children (5–12 years)

Once you have a school-age child, discipline can be a more co-creative activity. That means meaningful conversations with your kid about right and wrong, what it means to be in a family, what privileges and responsibilities are, how every action comes with consequences — all that good stuff.

But it's not all rainbows and roses. The older children get, the more individualistic and independent they become, which can lead to power struggles and disobedience.

Your child's still doing the hard work of figuring out who they are and what it means to be a responsible, ethical person. Dr. Gaydos recommends offering them plenty of opportunities to reflect — and doling out "do-overs" whenever possible.

"Let them make decisions, take on new responsibilities and face new challenges," he advises. "Making mistakes is how they learn."

Teenagers (12–18 years)

Oh, teenagerdom. Wasn't it fun? The raging hormones, outsized emotions, peer pressure and demands on your mental health. Wouldn't you love to go back and do it all again?

Yeah, we didn't think so.

Parenting a tween or teen is all about push and pull. Your child needs to make decisions, be independent and try new things. But they also need attention, clear boundaries, unconditional support and guidance. Neither of you is going to strike the perfect balance all the time. That's why Dr. Gaydos says active listening and clear, respectful communication is crucial.

Most teenagers occasionally break rules, challenge authority and make impulsive decisions. Minimize the damage by building a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Teens who feel they can confide in and confess to a parent still make plenty of mistakes — it's practically their job. But they're less likely to magnify their problems by hiding them.

Healthy discipline strategies

Every stage of child development comes with new disciplinary challenges. But some principles are evergreen. Dr. Gaydos shares 11 pearls of wisdom that'll serve you well throughout your parenting journey.

1. Don't be afraid of discipline

It's tempting to treat your kids like you're their best friend. But children need you leading and teaching them as they grow. Disciplining your child and setting limits instills confidence as they navigate through life.

"With discipline, we're not passive observers suddenly required to react. We're actively involved as teachers," says Dr. Gaydos. "It's an ongoing process that requires work."

It's not always easy, but discipline pays dividends as you watch your youngster grow, become more confident and develop a good moral compass.

2. Remember that discipline isn't the same as punishment

The word "discipline" may feel a bit icky, as though you're punishing your kids. But that's not quite right. Dr. Gaydos explains that discipline is a means of actively engaging with children to help mold their moral character — a way to teach them right from wrong.

"With discipline, we're teaching our children self-control and restraint," he explains. "Punishment is a direct, pointed penalty or a loss of privilege that serves as retribution."

Discipline is far more effective than punishment. It's also a process that requires more work.

3. Set and maintain limits

We all — as members of a society — abide by certain expectations. Your child must learn those boundaries, too.

Take the time to let youngsters and adolescents know the appropriate behaviors you expect from them. But once you set your limit, stick to it.

"We set these limits, then we follow through with them," states Dr. Gaydos. "If your child falters, they should know that there will be a consistent, expected consequence. There are no surprises, no new negotiations and no retractions."

Notice Dr. Gaydos' word choice: Consequences are more effective than threats. Nobody is the best version of themselves when they're operating from a place of fear.

4. Be specific

Don't assume your child knows what you want or expect of them. Being unclear only leads to frustration for both of you. Set clear, realistic rules and expectations ahead of time. And be specific.

Warning your child that "You better be good," is too broad and general a message, according to Dr. Gaydos. Instead, enumerate the tasks they need to complete or the way they should behave — and walk them through the how.

"Letting them know exactly what 'good' looks like in specific situations helps them understand what's expected of them," he adds.

5. Be positive

Let's be honest: the words "no" and "stop" are words we most enjoy hearing coming out of our own mouths. That's why the way you frame rules and corrections makes such a big difference. Here are a few examples:

Instead of...	Try saying...
No hitting!	Keep your hands to yourself, please.
Don't pinch the dog!	Pinching hurts and scares the dog.
Stop talking back!	We can talk when you're ready to speak respectfully.
No playing ball in the house!	If you want to play ball, you need to go in the backyard.
Don't throw your food!	Food isn't a toy.
No running!	Running isn't safe. Let's do something else instead.

Helpful as positive framing is, some occasions call for a hard "no." Try to reserve it for health and safety issues. That way, when you bust it out, they know it's serious.

6. Set your kid up to succeed

Let's say you want your child to put their toys away before school every morning, without having to be told. That seems like a reasonable ask. And it is, if:

- There are toy baskets (that they can reach) in all of their standard play areas.
- There's plenty of time carved out of their morning routine for toy reconnaissance.
- Your child's old enough to self-cue — and has a chore chart or morning checklist to remind them.

It's not about coddling your kiddo. It's about making sure they have the tools, training and time needed to follow your rules.

7. Model good behavior

Whether you're dealing with a toddler or a teenager, it's important to practice what you preach. After all, behavior that's important enough to teach is important enough to model.

That doesn't mean you need to be perfect. You're human, too.

If you lose your temper, Dr. Gaydos advises you to apologize. If you break a promise or family rule, discuss it with your child. Let them see you accept the consequences of your actions and problem-solve so it doesn't happen again.

8. Praise proper behavior

Discipline isn't just about pointing out what your kid does

wrong. It's equally important to pay attention to what your child is doing right, Dr. Gaydos clarifies.

Notice when your child is engaging in appropriate behaviors and compliment them accordingly. Positive attention goes a long way. It can help mold your child's behavior and build their self-confidence.

9. Communicate, communicate, communicate

Most people don't take kindly to arbitrary rules. Some quietly resent them. Others protest. Still others make a show of breaking them.

Kids need to understand the point of the rules, instructions and expectations governing their lives. "Because I said so" doesn't help them appreciate your goal or motivate them to do as they're told.

Maintaining an open line of communication with your child isn't always easy. It requires active listening and acknowledging their feelings — even when you disagree.

"Take the time to really hear what your child has to say, empathize and agree when appropriate," Dr. Gaydos encourages. "If you disagree, say so. But do it respectfully. And make sure you take the time to explain why. Parents who are available to — and show interest in — their children serve as excellent role models."

10. Don't hit or spank your child

The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) is crystal clear when it comes to hitting and aggressive behavior: Don't do it.

Their 2018 policy statement says hitting, spanking, yelling and shaming are unlikely to create the change you want to see in your child. They can also have negative psychological and behavioral consequences, from impacting brain development and self-esteem to raising your kid's risk of developing mental health issues later in life. The same principle applies to punishments that involve neglect, isolation or extended solitary confinement.

The (bad) lesson children learn from corporal punishment and verbal abuse is simple: Violence is an acceptable way to handle conflict.

Instead, Dr. Gaydos recommends speaking in a calm but firm voice, explaining why you're upset and — if necessary — using non-aggressive forms of punishment.

11. Pediatricians and teachers are your partners

Some of you reading this story are probably thinking Been there, done that. It didn't work!

All children are different. If nothing you've tried changes your kid's behavior, Dr. Gaydos recommends talking to their other caregivers, like their teachers and their pediatrician. Many health and developmental issues can impact a child's self-discipline. Sleep disorders, hearing loss or vision

impairment, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are just a few examples of conditions that can make rule-following difficult.

It might be hard to reach out for help with parenting issues. But there's nothing to be ashamed of. Nobody's got it all figured out. If you're advocating for and supporting your child, you're doing the right thing.

Don't forget to care for yourself

Teaching your child discipline is tough under the best of circumstances. So, it's natural to feel frustrated, impatient, disheartened — or even downright angry — from time to time. And no matter how hard you try, you're eventually going to play a wrong note. Dr. Gaydos urges you to show yourself the same grace and compassion you show your child when they fall short.

Also, be honest with yourself about — and prioritize — the things you need to be a good parent. That may mean making more time for self-care. It definitely means knowing when to ask for help.

- Do you feel like you lack the skills you need to discipline your children?
- Are you having a hard time managing your emotions or behavior when your child misbehaves?
- Does it feel like your fuse is always short?
- Is your child's behavior starting to scare you?
- Have you resorted to corporal punishment or verbal abuse?
- Do you ever worry you might hurt your child?

If your answer to any of these questions is "yes," Dr. Gaydos advises seeking out support.

In addition to healthcare providers and social workers, you can call or text the National Parent & Youth Helpline, join an in-person or online parenting support group, or turn to friends and family for extra help in difficult moments.

Taking care of yourself and asking for help when you need it sets a powerful example for your child — one they'll appreciate all the more if they go on to become parents themselves.

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