

# Parenting

*the most important job in the world*

6-12yrs

CARING FOR CHILDREN

## TIPS ON COPING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR



TAMING A TV ADDICTION

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE

**DOWN ON THE FARM:  
TIPS ON CHILD SAFETY**

**"ARE THEY READY TO  
BE LEFT HOME ALONE?"**

Families First in NSW



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

### The Department of Community Services (DoCS)

DoCS provides services from a network of 84 Community Services Centres across NSW. You'll find their phone numbers in your local telephone directory under 'Community Services, Department of'.

**Parent Line** 13 20 55  
Advice and information for  
parents with kids up to 18 years  
statewide (voice and TTY)

**Family Support Services Association** 02 9743 6565  
Support services for families  
experiencing stress

**Relationships Australia (NSW)** 02 9418 8800 or  
(freecall outside Sydney) 1300 364 277

**Centacare Relationship Counselling** 02 9283 4899

**Lifeline** 13 11 14 statewide

**Salvo Care Line** 02 9331 6000 statewide

**Dial-a-Mum** 02 9477 6777 statewide

Telephone counselling for  
anyone of any age

**Kids Help Line** 1800 55 1800

**Kidsafe** 02 9845 0890

**Poisons Information** 13 11 26

**Children's Hospital Randwick** 02 9382 1111

**Children's Hospital Westmead** 02 9845 0000

### After Hours Emergency Child Protection and Family Crisis Service

24 hours (freecall) 1800 066 777

**Domestic Violence Line** 1800 656 463  
1800 671 442 TTY

### Centrelink

- Family and parenting payments 13 13 05
- Multilingual information 13 12 02

Find out about parenting courses by contacting your local  
Early Childhood Health Centre or Children's Hospital.



Visit our **Parenting Website** at

**[www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)**

to get copies of all our parenting magazines:

**Parenting:** the most important job in the world

**Caring for babies & toddlers** (0 to 5 years)

**Caring for children** (6 to 12 years)

**The teenage years** (13 to 18 years)

### FAMILY HELP KIT

The NSW Health Department has developed the Family Help Kit to assist families to better understand and recognise mental health problems in children, adolescents and young people. It also provides information and contact details on how and where to get help. Topics contained within the kit, include: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Problems, Challenging Behaviours, Grief and Loss, Fears and Anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress, Depression, Psychosis, Suicide Prevention, Body Image and Eating Disorders.

Copies of the Family Help Kit are available from the  
Better Health Centre  
LMB 5003  
Gladesville NSW 2111  
Telephone 02 9816 0452  
Fax 02 9816 0492

TV...OFF 'N' ON PAGE 2

BEDWETTING PAGE 6

FARM SAFETY PAGE 8

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS PAGE 10

# CONTENTS

**Photography by:**

Warwick Orme and John Halfhide

**Special thanks to:**

Parenting SA,  
South Australian Government

NSW Health Department

Alex, Erik, Louisa, Nicholas,  
Gilbert, Hannah, Mollie  
and all the other children,  
teenagers and adults appearing  
in our magazine.

BULLYING PAGE 12

DISCIPLINE PAGE 14

COPING SKILLS  
FOR CHILDREN PAGE 16

HOME ALONE PAGE 18

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT  
MENTAL HEALTH PAGE 20

Produced by the  
NSW Department of Community Services  
164 - 174 Liverpool Road  
Ashfield NSW 2131

Copyright © Parenting SA,  
Government of South Australia (1996)

ISBN 0 7310 4290 5 August 1999

# tv off 'n' on



Television and videos entertain us all, but for children they also provide a window onto the world. That world influences their development. They take in messages about lifestyles and behaviour. They can be overburdened with the harsh realities of life and given messages that are harmful to their development. They can also have positive experiences and be shown responsible ways of acting in the world. Children need the opportunity to be exposed to a wide range of attitudes and behaviours and to experience the world outside of television. They need to talk, play, daydream and read, as well as watch TV.

## How does TV affect your child?




While children's reactions differ *your child's age and stage of development* will make a big difference.

**Children under 6 years** have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality on TV. They don't follow plots, tend to focus on the exciting bits and don't understand cause and effect. They can see cartoon characters as real and are open to the appeal of advertising.

**Children from 6 to 9 years** still have some difficulty working out the difference between fantasy and reality, especially if it looks like real life. Boys tend to admire and want to be like the powerful male hero.

**Older primary school age children** are likely to be disturbed by material which is based on fact, as it could mean it could happen to them. They are curious about the teenage world, sex and fashion and can be misled by the way boy-girl relationships are shown in soaps.

***The extent to which your child is affected by what they watch is influenced by how real they believe the program to be. They judge this in three ways.***

-  They recognise things on TV which they've experienced, eg 'It is real because there is a dog in the program like mine'.
-  They think programs are 'unreal' if they clash with their experiences, eg 'People don't really have special magic by wriggling their nose'.
-  They understand how programs are made, eg cartoons or that people are actors. 9 to 10 year olds are much clearer about people playing a part, whereas 6 to 7 year olds can believe TV families are real or Sesame Street is a real street in the USA.

You can help your child learn about advertising by talking about what they see on TV, how the ad might have been made and looking at the product in real life.

Some images may be frightening, although this depends on the child. Some children even enjoy being frightened a little, but only when they are secure. Knowing they are really safe allows them the freedom to experience 'thrill' feelings. The more children are shown frightening programs, the more they believe the world is a frightening place. This can make them anxious.

How your child thinks about themselves can also be influenced by popular figures they admire. Their ideas of what is good, how to behave and what to value can all be shaped by famous people they see on the screen, as well as from you.

## Advertising

Advertising influences children. Most children under 8 years believe what ads tell them. Children 8 to 10 are aware that ads don't always tell the whole truth, but are not sure how to tell when they are not.

Where well known people sell products, children are easily persuaded. With advertising techniques children can be misled by the shape, speed, size and way a product works.

Children with little understanding of language can get the wrong meaning, such as thinking 'good to eat' or 'fruit-flavoured' means 'good for me'.

## Violence

Most parents worry about the effect that watching violence has on children. Different children will be affected differently. *Children of all ages will be disturbed when they see violence to other children and to animals and by violence in the home.* Young children (under 8 years) may take from cartoons the message that 'violence works and wins', even though they laugh or can tell it is fantasy. Older children are more likely to absorb the same message from violent heroes in action movies and series. Older children may also feel anxious by news or dramas they see as real and which could occur in their own neighbourhood.

While there are different views about how much violence on TV is harmful to children, evidence does show that repeatedly seeing violence has an impact.

- ★ Children are more likely to use aggression to solve problems.
- ★ Children are made anxious about the 'mean and scary' world in which they appear to live.
- ★ Children become less sensitive to violence in real life.

Heavy viewers (over 3 hours daily), younger children, boys, children from violent homes and insecure children are most affected.

## Understanding others

Children need to understand and enjoy the mixture of differences in lifestyles and traditions that make up our country and world. Children are not born with prejudices. They learn it from the world around them. The messages they get from TV will affect how they think of others, such as messages that women are weaker.

As early as 6 months of age, infants notice skin differences. By their second year they start to question how people are alike and different. Between two and a half and three and a half years, children begin to absorb the messages from parents, neighbours, friends, books and TV about people from other races.











Television can introduce children to stories, traditions, songs within their own culture as well as helping them learn about others.

## How to manage TV at home

TV can interfere with your routines, such as getting ready for school, bedtimes and mealtimes, visitors and homework.

- ★ Use TV classifications which tell what is suitable for age groups.
- ★ Teach your child some responsibility for deciding what they watch at an early age. Help them to make their own ratings and become choosy, such as 'C' = can't be missed, 'S' = so,so, 'W' = waste of time. Encourage them to stop watching W, and later W and S.
- ★ Make a rule that TV is not switched on until all jobs have been done. Have a list of things to do before school and help your child manage their time.
- ★ If programs are important to your child, plan to tape them so they can be watched at a more suitable time.
- ★ Decide on a bedtime for your child's age, rather than around the TV program. Children need to wind down between TV and sleep, so turn the volume down or off before bedtime.
- ★ Try to keep a mealtime TV free to make time for talking to each other.

# REMINDERS

-  Lead by example. Your child's viewing habits may be copied from yours.
-  Control the TV, don't let it control you.
-  TV viewing with a very young child should be in your company.
-  Have the TV on only when you have chosen to watch a particular show.
-  Use the VCR to take programs for control and flexibility.
-  Encourage your child to describe how TV affects them. Talk about how family members feel.
-  Play 'spot the gimmicks and trickery' in TV commercials.
-  Have a list on the fridge for other things to do. Take time to kick a ball, see friends, catch a train somewhere, do something completely different.
-  Choose a comfortable and friendly TV free family area and use it.
-  Children need to learn skills which help them get on with others in the world. These are best learnt and practised by doing things as a family, without the TV on. Practice using the 'off' button on the TV set.

## When watching TV

- ★ Know what programs your child watches and know the characters.
- ★ Give your child a chance to ask questions, describe their feelings, and make sense of what is taking place. Let them know what you think.
- ★ Talk about programs. Discuss characters, stories and themes. Describe likes and dislikes. Ask questions such as 'What would happen if you did what that person did?'.  
★ Talk about moods after watching programs and get your child to come up with words that describe how they feel, such as 'bored', 'happy', 'scared', 'sad', 'excited' or 'grumpy'.
- ★ If your child becomes quite distressed after a program, allow them to talk about what they saw, what they are feeling and why. Maybe there are links with something that is happening in their life, or they are fearful that what they saw could happen to them. Talk calmly, show affection and follow up with some pleasant activity.
- ★ Make your views known to the authorities when you are concerned about a program, soon after the event. You need to be exact about the time, date, place, program and the channel on which you saw it.

# bedwetting



Bedwetting is sometimes called enuresis. While a lot of children grow out of wetting the bed by the time they start school, many children of primary school age still wet the bed. Until the age of ten, about one in every 10 children wet the bed. That means that if your child wets the bed, they are probably not the only one doing so in their class at school or amongst their friends.

## Why does bedwetting happen?

*Bedwetting is nobody's fault. It is something which children have no control over.*

- Bedwetting is sometimes to do with delayed control of the bladder muscle. Just as some children do their growing later than others, some get control over their bladder later than others.
- Some children produce more urine at night than others due to hormones.
- It may be that children who wet the bed have bladders which have less ability to hold a large amount of urine.
- Occasionally it can be due to a medical problem. It is wise to have a check-up with the doctor to make sure that it is not.
- Children who wet the bed sometimes seem to sleep more heavily and be harder to wake than other children.
- Often it runs in the family and you may find that dad, mum, or an uncle or aunt used to wet the bed.
- Sometimes children who wet the bed are dry when sleeping in a strange place. This may be because they sleep more lightly when they are worried about sleeping in a strange place. When they are at home again and relaxed they often wet the bed again.

Some children who have been dry might start wetting the bed again if something happens to make them very stressed, such as a family break-up, starting school, or if they are not well. In this case the bedwetting will usually stop when they begin to feel more secure. If children who have been dry start to wet the bed again it is important to have a medical check-up in case it is caused by an infection which could be harmful.

## What can parents do?

- Reassure your child that bedwetting is normal, there is nothing to be ashamed about, and they will grow out of it in time.
- Explain to your child in simple terms some of the reasons for bedwetting. For example you might say 'While you are asleep your brain isn't getting the message that you need to go to the toilet, so you don't wake up'. Or you could say 'Your bladder, where your wee is stored, hasn't grown big enough yet to hold all the wee until morning, but this will change as your body grows'.
- If the bedwetting seems to be because of stress or worries, do what you can to make your child feel better. Let them know that the bedwetting will stop in time so that this doesn't become an added worry.
- To help save washing:
  - cover the mattress with a plastic sheet
  - put plastic over the bottom sheet
  - on top of the plastic put a piece of towelling
  - put thick underpants on your child.
- Try leaving a potty in your child's room.
- Leave a soft light on or give your child a torch to go to the toilet.
- Encourage your child to call you if they are afraid of the dark.
- Some parents find it helpful to take their child to the toilet two or three hours after the child goes to sleep.
- Make sure your child has a shower in the morning.

*It is not a good idea to make young children clean up after themselves. They can easily see it as a punishment for something they cannot help. Children are often sad when they wake up in a wet bed. Making young children change their own bed cannot make them stop wetting. It will only make them sadder to have upset you.*

Older children are able to help you by changing their beds or taking their wet clothes to the laundry.

## School camps

Children often worry about wetting the bed at school camp. They should be encouraged not to miss school camps. Teachers are used to dealing with these situations at camp without embarrassing the child. Discuss with the teacher in private how this can be managed. Then talk with your child about what they can do if it happens at camp.

## What not to do

Don't punish, criticise or tease your child. This can make them tense and anxious and make the problem worse. Remember, children cannot control their bedwetting.

## If the child is over seven

If the bedwetting is not too worrying for your child or you, you might be happy to just wait until they grow out of it. If your child is over seven and is worried by the bedwetting, they may be helped by a bell or alarm program. These programs are often very successful and you can find out more about them from your local community health centre, doctor or chemist.

There are other treatments such as medicines and behaviour training. Hypnosis may help. Most treatments work for some children but not others. The important thing to remember is not to use a treatment that adds to your child's discomfort.

# REMINDERS

- Reassure your child that bedwetting is common and nothing to be ashamed of.
- Bedwetting is something that children cannot help and they grow out of it.
- Don't punish, criticise or tease your child.
- Get a medical check-up to be sure there is no physical cause.
- Consider using an alarm program if your child is over seven or eight and really worried.
- Help your child to feel as comfortable as possible about going to school camps.

There are lots of good things for children about living on a farm or being able to visit a farm. There are also some special dangers. For all children the most dangerous place is home and this is especially the case when the family home is a farm. Children are much more likely to get hurt if they live on a farm than if they live in the city. Sometimes they get hurt outside on the farm and sometimes inside the house.

# farm safety

## Injuries that happen on farms

Some of the things that can cause injuries to children on farms include:

- falls from farm machinery, especially tractors and ag-bikes
- loud noises
- unsafe use of guns
- exposure to agricultural chemicals
- being able to get to water, such as dams and tanks.

**Education about how to use equipment safely is very important, but education is not enough, especially for young children. Parents need to keep their child safe.**

## What parents can do

Most injuries can be prevented by adults. Children need to be protected from injury because they are too young to understand risks and because they want to have a go and take risks. As they get older they have to learn how to do things safely, but to start with it is your responsibility.

**These are some steps you can take to keep your child safe. Always try to do what is at the top of the list, and only move down to the next step if the one above it cannot be done.**



## Important steps

### 1. Get rid of the risk

- ✗ Whenever you can, try to get rid of the risk. For example, when chemicals have been used do not store the small amount left. Get rid of it.
- ✗ Do not keep guns on the farm if at all possible.

### 2. Prevent children from getting to the risk

- ✗ Always leave farm machinery turned off.
- ✗ Leave safety equipment (such as brakes) in place.
- ✗ Remove keys and put them away.
- ✗ Store all chemicals in locked cupboards. Remove the keys and put them away.
- ✗ If guns must be kept, lock them away. Lock ammunition in a separate place.
- ✗ Fence off water areas such as dams.
- ✗ Securely cover wells and tanks.
- ✗ Keep ladders lying on the ground, where they are great to play on.

### 3. Change the risk (reduce the risk)

Make the machinery or place as safe as possible. For example, use roll cages on tractors and seatbelts in cars and trucks.

### 4. Change what your child does

Help your child learn to obey safety rules. Older children love riding ag-bikes and horses, but they can be dangerous. Your child should wear a helmet every time they are riding. They should wear ear protection when they are around loud machines (adults need them too!).

Being in the sun is another danger on farms. Dress your child to protect them from the sun (hats, long sleeved shirts and trousers). Use sunscreens on parts of the body that cannot be covered by clothes.

### 5. Supervise

It is not possible to remove all risks. The responsibility for keeping your child safe belongs to the adult who is caring for them. Always check where your child is before starting machinery. Always watch young children when they are playing in or near water.

## Other things to do to keep children safe

### Model safe behaviour

Farms are one of the very few places where children see their parents at work. If you want your child to act safely they must see you acting safely. *They do what you do, not what you say.* If your child sees you driving safely when they are young they are more likely to drive safely themselves.

## Maintain equipment, buildings and fences

Regularly check everything to make sure it is safe. Take older children with you and ask them to tell you if something is not safe. Get them to help you make it safe. Ask for their ideas.

### Have rules and stick to them

Make the rules clear. Don't assume your child knows them. Ask them to repeat the rules to you. For example, swimming in dams by themselves or riding on moving tractors is 'not on'.

### Help children to become skillful

Children need to be able to practise skills to become safe. They need to learn how to use a knife safely and how to climb a tree or a ladder. Even when they know how to do these things they still need parents to set rules and to supervise them.

### Teach them

All the time you are keeping them safe, tell them what you are doing and why. As they grow they need to learn how to keep themselves safe. They need you to tell them and show them how to do this. Teach them about animals and snakes and what to do if they are bitten.

### Work out some things to do in emergencies and practise them

Teach your child what to do if there is a fire, if someone has a fall, if they find something dangerous, if you get injured, or if they get injured when they are by themselves.

- + Do they know how to call for help?
- + Can they use the telephone?
- + Are the numbers they may need to call by the phone?
- + Do they know where the First Aid kit is and could they carry it to you?

### Do a First Aid Course. All of you!

# REMINDERS

- Parents are responsible for their child's safety.
- Check around your house and farm for risks to children and do something about them.
- Children who are visitors may be more likely to be hurt because they don't know about the dangers on farms.
- Involve your child in helping to make things safe so they are learning what to do for themselves.
- Show how to act safely by doing it yourself.

**For further information, contact:**

**Farmsafe 02 6752 8210.**

Copyright® Parenting SA,  
Government of South Australia 1996-1999

## What is the issue?

Almost all children will be difficult or demanding at times, especially toddlers. Challenging or disruptive behaviours are those which persist or become so severe that they cause major problems for families or communities.

Excessive disruptive or aggressive behaviour at any age should be taken seriously. It should not be dismissed as a 'phase' or something they will 'grow out of'. Such behaviour in children and adolescents may begin with frequent loss of temper, irritability, impulsive behaviour, or becoming easily frustrated.

When a parent or other adult in frequent contact with the child is concerned, a comprehensive assessment from a child and adolescent mental health professional should be arranged. They can assist parents to manage their child's behaviour in positive ways.

# challenging behaviours

## Aggressive behaviour may include:

- ✗ explosive temper tantrums
- ✗ physical aggression
- ✗ fighting, threats or attempts to hurt others
- ✗ use of weapons
- ✗ cruelty towards family pets or other animals
- ✗ intentional destruction of property or vandalism.

**Health professionals can help parents identify problems and ways to help their child cope with difficulties.**

Discipline should be about learning and should not be harsh or unfair. Physical punishment will often make children's behaviour even more difficult. Seeing or hearing domestic violence can affect children and adolescents as much as being assaulted. Violent television or video games may also affect vulnerable young children.



## Violence often leads to violence

### Tantrums

Tantrums happen when children feel frustrated or stressed. Occasional tantrums are a normal stage of development in young children. Parents should be concerned if tantrums become extreme or constant.

### Some things parents can do to help children get over tantrums are:

- spend regular and relaxed time with them
- let them know you notice the good things they do; and
- see if there are other stresses affecting the child such as starting child care, new baby, parents arguing.

Behavioural problems may affect children's and adolescents' ability to solve problems, cope with life stresses and enjoy normal activities with their family and friends. Their schooling may also be disrupted. Disruptive behaviour can make it difficult for children to form friendships and can interfere with family relationships. Without treatment, children and young people may go on to have problems at school, with the law, in employment and in bringing up families of their own.

*A number of programs are available across NSW. Some developments involve schools.*

*Schools know the danger of bullying and harassment. They have many resources to help them develop prevention programs.*

## Coping with challenging behaviours

### What is ADHD?

Very young children have short attention spans and act impulsively but this usually improves with age. If these are severe or persistent, it may be due to ADHD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Children affected by ADHD often have problems paying attention to instructions, finishing tasks, relating to others and staying settled.

### If the following signs are present for more than 6 months, professional advice should be sought.

- Easily distracted by their surroundings or other thoughts. Inability to focus on any activity for long.
- Over-activity, unable to keep still, or stop talking.
- Impulsively, acting without thought to the consequences.

Such children may have difficulty making friends, have problems at school and be wrongly labelled as a 'bad person'. If you think your child needs help, don't hesitate to seek professional advice.

No matter how your child may behave, they need to know that you will not harm or leave them. Children need to know that their parent(s) can help them to manage their feelings.

Try and work out what the major stresses are and do something about them. Teach your child that feelings can be managed and expressed in helpful ways.

Your child may need help to cope with day to day problems with family, friends and school. Early treatment for behaviour problems can help a child to:

- learn how to control their behaviour
- learn how to express anger and frustration in non-harmful ways
- be responsible for their actions; and
- accept the consequences of their actions.

## Positive Parenting Programs

NSW is developing a statewide approach to implementing parenting programs. These can reduce disruptive behaviours in pre-school and primary school age children. Programmes such as the Triple P (the Positive Parenting Program) provide information and counselling to increase parenting skills and satisfaction and promote family harmony. These programs show parents how to manage their children's behaviour in constructive ways. Parents are encouraged to take care of their own needs and develop ways to make time for themselves and their parents.

## Mental Health Promoting Schools

Schools can be an important source of support for children or young people with difficulties. The structure of school life and the ongoing professional support of a teacher or school counsellor may help them cope. Developing communication and personal skills and strengths are now included in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education in school. All students from Kindergarten to Year 10 now have an opportunity to develop these skills.

## Where to get help:

- + Your general practitioner
- + Your local Area Health Service (during business hours) including community health centres or specialist child and adolescent mental health services
- + Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians and child psychologists.

### If you would like more information about mental health and services contact:

**NSW Association for Mental Health, Mental Health Information Service**

**Monday to Friday, 12.30pm - 4.30pm**

**02 9816 5688 or 1800 674 200 (freecall outside Sydney)**

Reproduced from the **NSW HEALTH** Family Help Kit

Bullying is the deliberate desire to hurt, threaten or frighten someone with words or actions by one or more people. It can vary in the degree of severity. Bullying can include threatening, teasing, name calling, preventing others from going where they want to or doing what they want to, pushing or hitting and all forms of physical abuse.

Being bullied is very distressing for the victim and needs to be dealt with. If children are allowed to go on bullying, they are more likely to grow up to bully or hit their partners and their own children.

Bullying is not just a problem for the victim. It is also a problem for people who know it is happening such as the school. A very competitive school environment can contribute to bullying. Schools have a responsibility to make children feel safe.

# bullying



## Children who are bullied

Children who bully sometimes pick on just anyone, and sometimes choose other children who seem to be easy to hurt.

They may pick on children who:

- ▲ look or are different in some way
- ▲ are stressed, either at home or at school
- ▲ have a disability
- ▲ struggle with school work
- ▲ are not good at sport
- ▲ lack social confidence
- ▲ are anxious
- ▲ are unable to hold their own because they are smaller or weaker or younger.

Occasionally children provoke other children to bully them by teasing first.

## Signs of being bullied

Children who are being bullied may not always tell adults. They may be afraid or ashamed. Some signs of being bullied may be:

- ▲ not wanting to go to school
- ▲ finding excuses for not going to school, such as feeling sick
- ▲ wanting to go to school a different way to avoid the children who are bullying them
- ▲ being very tense, tearful and unhappy after school
- ▲ talking about hating school
- ▲ bruises or scratches
- ▲ talking about not having any friends
- ▲ refusing to tell you about what happens at school.

Your child may show other signs of unhappiness as well. For example, they may have problems sleeping. These signs may not necessarily mean they are being bullied but you need to check out what is worrying them.

## What parents can do

- ▲ Listen to your child and take their feelings and fears seriously.
- ▲ Try not to take everything into your own hands, unless it is absolutely necessary, because this is likely to make your child feel less in control.

# REMINDERS

- Let your child know that bullying is wrong.
- Take your child's fears and feelings seriously.
- Reassure your child that being bullied is not their fault and that something can be done about it.
- Let your child know that they are not the only one who is bullied. It happens to lots of children.
- Help your child as far as possible to work out their own ways of dealing with the problem.
- Don't allow the bullying to continue.
- Protect your child - involve the school or club or wherever it is happening.
- Help your child to feel good about other things in their life.

- ▲ Help your child to work out what ideas they have about coping with the problem. Write them down. Include a few of your own if needed to get started. Then talk with them about which ones might help or not help and why. Choose an idea they would like to try and then check out how it works.
- ▲ Don't call your child names such as 'sook' or tell them they are weak. And don't let anyone else do so either.
- ▲ If the bullying is verbal teasing you may be able to help your child to learn to ignore it, so the child who is doing it does not get any satisfaction out of it. You could practise at home ways to help your child gain confidence, such as how to walk past with their head up.
- ▲ Help your child think of ways to avoid the situation. For example, they may go home a different way or stay with a group.
- ▲ Some children are helped by imagining a special wall around them which protects them so that the hard words bounce off.
- ▲ Work on building your child's confidence in things they do well.

**NOTE:** Be very careful that your child does not feel that being bullied is their fault.

## Talking to the school

When bullying happens it is often at school and you will need to talk to the school about it. Schools in New South Wales have policies which deal with bullying.

- ▲ Make a list of the things that have happened to your child. Be clear and firm about their suffering. Be prepared to name the children who bully. If bullying persists, write down WHO, WHAT, WHERE and WHEN.
- ▲ Talk to the school principal about the school's way of dealing with bullying and what steps they take to prevent it and protect children from it.
- ▲ Talk to the teacher about what can be done to help your child. Keep in contact until the problem is sorted out.
- ▲ If you find it difficult to go to the school and ask about this, it might help to take a friend with you.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** It is important to get professional support, for example the school counsellor, if:

- ▲ this is an ongoing problem rather than an occasional one for your child
- ▲ it happens to your child a lot, in different situations and with different children.

# disciplining your child:

## guidelines for a more positive approach to parenting

*By Liz Kennedy*

### Encourage your child to feel good about themselves

- Perhaps the most important principle behind all discipline is to find ways to build your child's self esteem.
- Give them positive messages about their strengths and assets. Help them to build on skills and set goals for improving their behaviour.
- A successful child that feels worthwhile is less likely to misbehave and will enjoy better relationships with others.

### Praise behaviour you'd like to see more often

- As a first step to discipline find ways of encouraging your child to follow the rules you've set for your family.
- Acknowledge any attempt your child makes, for example, to follow your instructions the first time, cooperate with their brothers or sisters, resist the urge to have a temper outburst or do their homework on time.
- By giving more attention to this kind of positive behaviour your child will learn to co-operate more often.



## Decide on a discipline plan ahead of time and set out logical consequences for breaking the rules

- Try to have a discipline code that all members of the family agree on to reduce the likelihood of arguments when problems arise.
- Negotiate fair and reasonable consequences of behaviour problems with your children as well as rewards for good behaviour.
- Don't go overboard with punishment by threatening consequences you'd never carry out. Simple, immediate consequences that relate to the misbehaviour are most effective.
- Once your child understands your house rules they can choose whether to follow them or not.
- It's normal for most children to test the system at some stage. They might refuse to do what's expected of them or argue with you about the rules. Refuse to enter into an argument. Let the consequences of their actions be the deterrent for breaking rules in the future.
- Be clever in also granting them privileges for their good behaviour. For example, most children of this age love the idea of earning extra time up after bedtime.

*Parenting can be a frustrating and stressful job at times. But with patience, persistence and lots of positive thinking you'll enjoy nurturing your child through these years - giving you just enough breathing space to cope with the next stage...adolescence!*



Liz Kennedy is a Clinical Psychologist in private practice at Miranda in Sydney. She is co-author of *Every Kid: Parenting your five to twelve year old*, published by Double Bay 1993.

Helping children build inner strength to cope with the ups and downs of growing up is one of the best things parents can do for them. Often we cannot prevent things going wrong for children but we can try to help them build the strengths that will help them cope.

# coping skills for children

## What parents can do

### Belonging

One of the most important things your child needs is a sense of belonging. Children need to know that someone or some people really care and will always be there for them. These people can be a mother and/or father, a grandparent or another reliable person who cares for them a lot. When your child learns to belong in this way, it gives them the ability to make attachments to other important people in their life. If you are sick or not there for some reason, having someone else is very important for your child's healthy development.

### Self esteem

In childhood, children need to know that they are loved because of the special people they are. You need to tell them this often and show them by spending time with them and supporting their interests.

*They need to feel they have a place in the family - that they are missed if they are away and have a part in what needs to be done, such as family chores.*

### Self control

Children need to develop a sense of being able to manage things for themselves as they grow up. There are lots of ways that you can teach them this kind of confidence:

- ◆ Show delight in what your child is learning.
- ◆ Help them to learn to do things for themselves instead of always having the answers given.
- ◆ Give your child choices. Be prepared to let them have their choice.
- ◆ Ask your child's opinion about things that are to do with them (you do not always have to do what they say but help them to feel that they have some say).
- ◆ Start to teach them to solve their own problems. For example, if two children are quarrelling you can get them

to listen to each other's feelings. Then ask them to think about what they could do to try and fix the problem. They might need a lot of help at first but it is worth the effort in the long run.

- ◆ Give approval and encouragement for trying new things and for getting something right, even if your child doesn't get it all right at first.
- ◆ Give your child lots of time to do what they are good at. It is tempting to keep them practising what they aren't so good at. Although this may be necessary, they also need time to succeed.
- ◆ Give them opportunities to learn a craft and new skills.
- ◆ As your child gets older give them responsibility for doing things for themselves, such as working out how to spend pocket money, get a meal, shop for themselves (within reason).

## REMINDERS

- Children need to feel loved and lovable just for themselves, not only when they do things well.
- Children need to feel they have some control in their lives.
- Children need to feel that they can be successful at something.
- Children need a sense of belonging.
- Children are helped by having people apart from their parents who care about them and support them.
- Grandparents can be a special support for children and teenagers.

## Protect children from adult problems

If you are having trouble with your child's other parent make an effort to keep your child out of what is adults' business. Help your child to see it is not their fault (children often believe it is). They also need to know that whatever happens somebody will be there for them. You might want to find another caring adult such as a grandparent to support your child while you are feeling very stressed.

## Find outside support

Children often do better when life gets difficult if they have some support people apart from parents. This could be a grandparent, relative, family friend or teacher. As your child gets older their own close friends can provide some of this support.

## Family rituals

The special little things you do every day and on special occasions help build a sense of inner security. When families are in trouble sometimes these rituals get forgotten. Special rituals are about how you celebrate birthdays, name days, Christmas and other special days. These can include the day your child was adopted, or started school, or started her periods, or your family became a stepfamily. Examples of daily rituals include:

- ◆ something special that you do when your child gets home from school
- ◆ what you do at mealtimes.

Extracts from *Coping Skills (for children)*, Parent Easy Guide, Parenting SA.

Copyright® Parenting SA,  
Government of South Australia 1996-1999

# Helping children

## to manage stress

By Dr Nick Kowalenko

Children and young people, like us, experience stress every day. They can benefit from learning how to handle stress better. When they succeed they feel more in charge of their lives and more able to succeed at school, in relationships with their friends and family and in other parts of their lives.

Some sources of stress for young people come from:

- school demands and frustrations
- negative thoughts about themselves
- growth changes
- problems with friends or parents
- unsafe living environments and neighbourhoods
- being ill, or their parents being ill
- death, injury or illness of someone important to them
- too many changes (school, teachers, where they live etc).

Some young people can become overloaded with stress. When this happens they need help. Sometimes a break from the stressful situation can help - like listening to music, talking to friends or exercising.

Parents can help their children monitor stress, show them how to manage it and watch for signs of overloading.

Sometimes overloading with stress goes on for too long and young people really lose their confidence. They can become quiet and withdrawn, anxious and 'wobbly', or irritable, angry and miserable.

When this happens parents can help children learn to bounce back and recover their confidence by:

- finding time to talk and listen
- asking how you can be of support
- reminding them of their good points
- helping them build friendships and handle conflict with friends
- encouraging them to exercise and do things they enjoy
- talking openly about your concerns.

To do any job well you need to take time off too. Just a chance to recharge your batteries through sharing parenting or being with friends will help keep your energy up.



Dr Nick Kowalenko is a clinical lecturer in the Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Sydney and Clinical Director, Department of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Royal North Shore Hospital

Parents at some stage are faced with the dilemma of having to leave their children on their own. **“At what age can my children be left at home by themselves?”** is a common question asked by many parents. Given that there is no clear direction in the law you need to use your own judgment taking into account your own family circumstances and the age and maturity of your children. Parents are expected to make ‘reasonable’ decisions about their children’s safety.

### What does the law say?

**There is no actual law that states at what age children can or cannot be left alone, but the law is clear about the responsibility of parents to look after their children.**

In many cultures it is usual for children to care for brothers and sisters. While different societies have different customs, in Australia there is a legal obligation for parents to make sure that children are properly looked after.

- > Parents are expected to provide food, clothing, a place to live, safety and supervision (Family Law Act).
- > The Police or the Department of Community Services can remove children from situations where their safety is in serious danger and there is no guardian present (Children (Care & Protection) Act 1987).
- > Parents can be charged with an offence if children are left in a dangerous situation, are not fed, clothed or provided with accommodation (Children (Care & Protection) Act 1987).



# home ALONE!

## Questions to ask yourself

(if you’re thinking of leaving your child at home)

### Can parents leave older children in charge?

When a child or person under the age of 18 years (for example, an older brother, sister or teenage friend) cares for children, the question of negligence or liability could arise. As a parent you may be held responsible for the carer as well as your own child if something goes wrong. For these reasons it is better that carers should be adults. A person who is still legally a child would not be judged against the standards of responsibility expected of adults.

If you do leave your child in the care of an older brother or sister or other young person, you must be sure that they are reliable and mature. Ask yourself: “Could this child cope with an emergency?” for example, a fire, an accident or a break-in.

If your child is left alone without a carer they must be old enough to take action in an emergency and know what to do and where to get help.

### How safe is our home?

Accidents happen so quickly and most parents know how easily a child can fall into a pool, pull saucepans off the stove, swallow objects or play with matches. Parents always have to be on the alert, especially with young children. **There is an even greater need to check that dangerous things are out of reach if you’re not going to be there.**

## Are the ground rules clear?

Every family has its own ground rules. It is important to be clear about what children can and cannot do and these rules may be different when you are not there or when someone else is minding your child. For example, making a hot drink, turning on the heater, running the bath, using the toaster may seem simple tasks when you are there but may not be allowed when you're away.

**Do not assume that your child knows the rules. Ask them to tell you what they are.**

## How long will I be away?

Will it be for a few minutes, an hour, a morning or a full day? How long you are going to be away will make a difference to what you decide to do. You need to think about the age of your child, how they feel about being left and most importantly how capable they are.

Babies and toddlers have a different sense of time from adults. An hour is not long for an adult but to your toddler it is endless and even this short absence could cause distress. What would happen if you left your sleeping baby at home while you picked up your toddler from kindergarten and you had an accident? **It is not advisable to leave babies or toddlers alone under any circumstances.**

## Who will be in charge?

It is not fair to expect an older child to take on the full weight or responsibility required to care for younger children. Their lack of experience may make it difficult for them to find ways of trying to control others. They may be harsh and might use very different methods from what you use. If you have no choice then it is important that the child left in charge is capable and responsible and that the other children feel safe. This child should be able to handle any disagreements or fights and know what to do if the other children 'play up', disobey the ground rules, or are ill. The oldest child is not necessarily the most capable to care.

A child with a disability requires additional care which may be too much for another child to handle.

## Am I sure that my child knows... ?

- > Where I'm going and when I'll be back.
- > How to get in contact with me.
- > How to use the telephone.
- > Where emergency numbers are listed (put next to the phone).
- > Their own telephone number and home address (police or fire will need to know where to go).
- > The telephone numbers of trusted friends, neighbours or relatives.
- > Where to find the first aid kit and how to use it.
- > How to use deadlocks.
- > What to do in case of fire.
- > What to do if someone knocks on the door.
- > Whether or not they should answer the phone if it rings.
- > How to judge if another child is unwell and help is needed.

- > How to contact the doctor, hospital, police or fire brigade in an emergency (eg how to use 000 number).
- > Family rules:
  - How many friends are allowed?
  - Can they play outside?
  - Can they use the swimming pool?
  - Can they go to the shop or visit a neighbour?
  - What are the rules about the family pets?
  - What is the special family password that they can say if I phone and they need help, or a code to use if I phone to check on them. For example, 3 rings, hang up and ring again before they pick up the phone.

## When the time is right

There comes a time when your teenager will start pleading with you to let them stay home alone without someone to look after them. This is a normal part of adolescence when young people are trying to feel more adult and independent. Once again, the age and maturity of your child will make a difference. For example, you may feel very confident with a 13 year old who is very responsible and quite worried about a 16 year old who may try to take risks. Letting go of the reins gradually might mean giving your child a chance to practise being by themselves and to make mistakes.

## What about leaving children in cars?

Leaving your child in a car unsupervised at any time is extremely dangerous and not recommended. It may also be an offence, depending on the circumstances.

- > In summer the temperature in a car is much hotter than outside and your child can quickly suffer heat exhaustion and become seriously ill.
- > Children get bored and will explore the car's knobs and buttons which can lead to dangers.
- > Children can become distressed or may try to struggle free from their seatbelts and become injured.
- > Children may be in danger of someone trying to steal the car or they may be taken away by someone.

# REMINDERS

- Be sure that you have no other choice but to leave your child alone.
- Be very careful who cares for your child.
- Place someone in charge who is able to handle any emergency and knows where to get help.
- Check the safety of your home.
- Test your child on the ground rules.
- Check that each child feels safe.
- Phone regularly to check on your child.
- Return home when you said you would.

# What is the issue?

Mental Health problems can affect all families. About one in five children and adolescents will experience a mental health problem or disorder. For adolescents, mental health problems are already as common as physical health problems, such as asthma. Mental health problems which affect children, adolescents and young people include depression and anxiety disorders, grief, challenging and disruptive behaviours such as conduct disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, post-traumatic stress, psychosis, eating disorders and suicide.

# child and adolescent mental health

Many factors can contribute to mental health problems. Some of these are related to external stresses such as unemployment, financial hardship or drought. Others are associated with family or relationship difficulties such as marital problems, transitions including starting school or a new baby in the family. Traumas such as abuse increase the risk of many mental health problems and disorders. Genetic factors may also contribute to vulnerability to many mental health problems as well as to personal strengths. A warm affectionate relationship with at least one parent and positive experience during development can protect children, adolescents and young people.

## How families can help

As a first step, there are a number of ways to show your children you care about them and to protect their mental health, such as:

- ★ Showing affection, interest and regard for their well-being.
- ★ Encouraging them to talk about their feelings and to work out problems even when it is difficult.
- ★ Comforting them when they are distressed or anxious.
- ★ Spending time with your children and helping them with sports and hobbies, or playing with and reading to younger children.
- ★ Consistent care, not harsh discipline.
- ★ Being aware of their needs and differences at different stages of development.

Take time to care for yourself and keep up contact with friends and family who support you. Constant arguing or fighting between parents is harmful for children. If you and your partner have difficulties, counselling may be helpful. Sorting out your relationship problems may also help your children.

## If in doubt, check it out

Families and friends are often the first to notice changes but they may be reluctant to talk about these. Families may also be embarrassed about seeking help or may decide to wait, hoping that problems will sort themselves out. For most mental health problems, early help gives the best results. Even if you are unsure about problems, it is best to seek professional advice. Along with general practitioners, paediatricians and Area Health Service staff, you can also talk to pre-school staff and school staff, such as class teachers, year coordinators, school counsellors or principals. Effective help for children and adolescents with mental health problems and their families generally involves short-term counselling or therapies. These are usually based in the local community with as little disruption to school and family life as possible.

## What to look out for

The following are some signs of mental health problems in children, adolescents and young people. If they last for more than a few weeks, it may be time to seek professional help.

- ★ Inability to get along with other children.
- ★ Marked fall in school work.
- ★ Changes in usual sleeping or eating patterns.
- ★ Marked weight gain or loss.
- ★ Reluctance to go to school or take part in normal activities.
- ★ Fearfulness.
- ★ Restlessness, fidgeting and trouble concentrating.
- ★ Excessive disobedience or aggression.
- ★ Lack of energy or motivation.
- ★ Irritability.
- ★ Social withdrawal.
- ★ Crying a lot.
- ★ Feeling hopeless or worthless.
- ★ Odd ideas or behaviours.

If children or young people have persistent thoughts about hurting themselves or wanting to die, they need urgent professional help.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

In an emergency contact your general practitioner or local hospital emergency department.

**For other help, the first point of contact can be:**

Your local Area Health Services (during business hours) including community health centres or specialist child and adolescent mental health services.

Other specialists who work with children and adolescents such as paediatricians and child psychologists may also be able to provide help.

### 24 hour telephone services are:

Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800
Lifeline	13 11 14

### Other telephone services are:

NSW Association for Mental Health, Mental Health Information Service Monday to Friday, 12.30pm - 4.30pm (freecall outside Sydney)	02 9816 5688 or 1800 674 200
Parent Line Monday to Saturday, 9.00am - 4.30pm	13 20 55

Information on Mental Health and other health services is available during business hours from your local health service administrative office.

Central Coast (Wyang, Gosford)	02 4320 2111
Central Sydney (Canterbury, Drummoyne)	02 9515 9600
Hunter (Newcastle, Maitland, Port Stephens)	02 4921 4960
Illawarra (Wollongong, Kiama)	02 4275 5111
Northern Sydney (North Sydney, Hornsby)	02 9926 8418
South Eastern Sydney (Hurstville, Randwick)	02 9382 9898
South Western Sydney (Bankstown, Liverpool)	02 9828 5700
Wentworth (Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury)	02 4724 2120
Western Sydney (Blacktown, Parramatta)	02 9845 7000
Far West (Broken Hill, Bourke, Walgett)	08 8080 1333
Greater Murray (Albury, Wagga Wagga)	02 6921 5588
Macquarie (Dubbo, Coonabarabran)	02 6881 2222
Mid North Coast (Coffs Harbour, Kempsey)	02 6551 5111
Mid Western (Bathurst, Forbes)	02 6339 5500
New England (Armidale, Narrabri, Inverell)	02 6768 3222
Northern Rivers (Casino, Tweed)	02 6620 2124
Southern (Goulburn, Snowy River, Bega)	02 6299 6199

Visit our  
**Parenting Website**  
at

[www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)

to get copies of all our parenting magazines:

**Parenting: the most important job in the world**

Tips on being a parent, building self esteem and managing grief

**Caring for babies & toddlers (0 to 5 years)**

Tips on tantrums, toilet training and mealtimes

**Caring for children (6 to 12 years)**

Tips on choosing the right child care, discipline and TV addictions

**The teenage years (13 to 18 years)**

Tips on discipline, drugs and peer group pressure



NSW Department of  
Community Services

## How we help

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) is one of the biggest and most important community service organisations in NSW.

**Our job is to:**

work with the community to help protect and care for children and young people and support their families

provide and monitor care and support for children who can't live with their families

help people with intellectual disabilities and high support needs achieve greater independence, community involvement and a better quality of life

provide and regulate adoption services

help people separated from their families trace their records

fund and regulate child care services

regulate children's employment

fund community agencies to ensure there are services for the care and support of children and their families as well as for people who are homeless

coordinate services to meet the basic needs of people affected by disasters.