

# BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN KIDS

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Have regular home meetings with your child. Show interest in what he or she is doing. Ask questions and be a good listener. Who are your child's friends? What are your child's likes and dislikes? How does your child spend his or her time at school, and away from school when he or she isn't with the family? *Tip:* Some of the best family discussions happen around the dinner table.
2. Make a real effort to spend more positive time with your child than you already do. Try to do things together that your child enjoys. Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings. Ask how the day went. Praise your child as often as possible. Give your child opportunities to do well—by helping you with a chore, taking on new responsibilities, or showing off a talent or skill.
3. Monitor the television shows your child watches and websites he or she frequents, and reduce the amount of screen violence he or she is exposed to. Experts have found that watching violence has a negative effect on children. Also limit the amount of violence your child encounters in video and computer games and on devices such as iPods and smart phones.
4. Set and discuss rules around electronic communications (computers, smart phones, etc.) with friends and peers. Be clear about what is okay and what is not, and what are the consequences of cyberbullying.
5. Supervise your child's whereabouts and activities even more closely than you already do. Set reasonable rules and limits for activities and curfews. Make it a point to always know where your child is and whom he or she is with.
6. Consider enrolling your child in a class on conflict resolution, stress management, anger management, friendship skills, or self-defense. Check with your child's teacher or community resources—your local public library, YMCA or YWCA, or community education.



**IMPORTANT:** Self-defense classes aren't about being aggressive. They're about avoiding conflict through self-discipline, self-control, and improved self-confidence. Most martial arts teach that the first line of defense is nonviolence.

7. If your child's teacher has told you that your child is bullying others, take it seriously. Kids who bully often have serious problems later in life.
  - Talk with your child. Be aware that your child might deny or minimize his or her behavior; this is normal. Don't blame; don't ask "why" something happened or "why" your child acted in a certain way, because this may lead to lies and excuses. Stay calm and make it clear that bullying is *not* okay with you.



## BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN KIDS (CONTINUED)

- Reassure your child that you still love him or her. It's the bullying *behavior* you don't like. Tell your child that you'll work together to help change the behavior—and you won't give up on him or her.
  - Talk with your child's teacher(s) and other adults at the school—in private, when no other students are around. Get the facts on your child's behavior. Ask them to keep you informed.
  - Work with the school to modify your child's behavior. Stay in touch with teachers, administrators, and playground supervisors so you know how your child is progressing. Let them know about your efforts at home.
  - Apply reasonable, age-appropriate, and developmentally appropriate consequences (withdrawing privileges, giving time-outs, assigning extra chores around the house) for bullying behavior. Avoid corporal punishment, which sends your child the message that "might is right."
  - Talk with your child about how bullying affects the targeted student. If you remember times from your own childhood when you were bullied, you know how much it hurts.
  - Help your child learn and practice positive ways to handle anger, frustration, and disappointment. (How do you handle those feelings at home? Remember: You're an important role model for your child.) Try role-playing new behaviors with your child.
  - Praise your child's efforts to change. Praise your child for following home and school rules. The more positives you can give your child, the better. *Tip:* Try giving your child five positive comments for every negative comment.
- 8.** If you think you might need a refresher course on parenting skills, you're not alone. Many parents today seek advice and insights from other parents and trained professionals. Check your local bookstore or library for parenting books or do an online search for websites devoted to parenting, such as KidsHealth ([www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)). See if your child's school sponsors parenting discussions, programs, or workshops; find out what's available in your community. The more you learn, the more you know!
- 9.** If you think you might need more help than you can get from a book, website, program, or workshop on parenting, and especially if you feel that your child is developing problem behaviors, get professional help. Ask the school counselor, psychologist, or social worker for recommendations. Check with the children's mental health center in your community. There's no shame in this; it takes wisdom and courage to acknowledge that you can't do it all. (If money is an issue, many resources offer free services or sliding fee scales.)