



# HANDOUTS FOR PARENTS

Parents and schools working together to build students' social, emotional, and academic skills can accomplish far more than either group working alone. Both schools and parents can contribute in unique ways to make the partnership fruitful.

The handouts included with this packet offer “small things” that all parents can consider doing. When done on a regular basis with children, these actions can make a big difference in children's well-being and social and emotional learning.

The suggestions in the handouts are not an exhaustive list. Nor are they meant to be implemented all at once. In some cases, they may sound simple but take some advance thought and planning to put into action. You may want to suggest that parents begin with a single item and add others as they gain comfort and confidence with using these strategies.

# Ten Things You Can Do at Home

1. *Focus on strengths.* When your child brings home a test, talk first about what he or she did well. Then talk about what can be improved. Praise specific strengths. Don't just criticize things that were done wrong.
2. *Follow up with consequences for misbehavior.* Sometimes parents say things in anger that don't curb the behavior in the long run. You might say, "Because of what you did, no television for a month." Both you and your child know that after one or two days the TV will go back on. Decide on consequences that are fair, and then carry them out.
3. *Ask children how they feel.* When you ask your child about his or her feelings, the message is that feelings matter and you care.
4. *Find ways to stay calm when angry.* It's normal to get angry or irritated sometimes. Learn to recognize "trigger situations" and do something about them before you lose control. Try taking deep breaths for a few moments. Consider having a "quiet area" where people can go when they are upset. Or you can just stop talking and leave the room for a while. Sit down as a family and talk about what everyone can do to stay calm.
5. *Avoid humiliating or mocking your child.* This can make children feel bad about themselves. It can lead to a lack of self-confidence and, in turn, problems with schoolwork, illness, and trouble getting along with friends. Unfair criticism and sarcasm also hurts the bond of trust between children and parents. Be mindful of how you speak to your children. Give them the room to make mistakes as they learn new skills.
6. *Be willing to apologize.* Parents need to be able to apologize to their children if what they said was not what they meant. Calmly explain what you really wanted to say. By doing this you're being a good role model. You're showing how important it is to apologize after hurting someone. You're teaching that it's possible to work through problems with respect for the other person.
7. *Give children choices and respect their wishes.* When children have a chance to make choices, they learn how to solve problems. If you make all their choices for them, they'll never learn this key skill. Giving children ways to express preferences and make decisions shows that their ideas and feelings matter.
8. *Ask questions that help children solve problems on their own.* When parents hear their child has a problem, it's tempting to step in and take over. But this can harm a child's ability to find solutions on his or her own. A helpful approach is to ask good questions. Examples include, "What do you think you can do in this situation?" and "If you choose a particular solution, what will be the consequences of that choice?"
9. *Read books and stories together.* Reading stories aloud is a way to share something enjoyable and learn together about other people. For example, stories can be a way to explore how people deal with common issues like making or losing friends or handling conflicts. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian to recommend stories on themes that interest you and your children.
10. *Encourage sharing and helping.* There are many ways to do this. Together you and your child can prepare food in a homeless shelter or go on a fund-raising walk-a-thon. You can help out elderly neighbors or needy families. This teaches children that what they do can make a difference in the lives of others.

# Ten Things You Can Do with Your School

1. *Focus on the value of learning.* Take some time each day to ask what your child learned in school. Don't focus just on math, English, and social studies. Ask how your child gets along with other students and how he or she feels about school. Learning is for life, not just school. Talk about what you yourself may have learned in the course of a day.
2. *Focus on creating a positive learning environment at home.* Make regular times and provide a quiet, well-lit place for homework. Limit the amount of TV. Decide with your child about rules for dealing with interruptions such as phone calls or visitors. Make sure your home has plenty of books, magazines, and newspapers.
3. *Set up a school bulletin board at home.* Display the school calendar and other flyers from the school. Decide as a family which school events you will attend. Help your child get involved in interesting and worthwhile school activities.
4. *Listen when your child talks about school.* Pay attention to what your child says about school. If your child is happy with his or her classroom and school activities, write or call the teacher to say thank you. If your child seems frustrated, bored, or lonely at school, call a teacher or counselor to see what can be done.
5. *Help your child with homework.* Don't ever do homework for your child. But do help. Assist your child in setting priorities for schoolwork. For example, you can encourage your child to tackle the difficult assignments first while he or she has the most energy.
6. *Take advantage of school meetings.* Finding the time to attend school meetings can be a challenge. Many schools offer alternative times and places for parents to ask questions and discuss solutions to common problems. Often these meetings provide child care. Make these kinds of meetings a priority.
7. *Volunteer at school.* By volunteering in the classroom, you can better understand how to support your child's learning at home. Try being a room parent, a chaperone at school functions, or a tutor. Even parents who work full-time can visit their child's school at night or on weekends. Create opportunities if they do not exist.
8. *Attend school activities.* Whenever possible, attend your child's plays, sports events, or science fairs. Your presence shows that your child's interests and work are important to you. It can also give you a chance to meet other parents and school staff.
9. *Join or create a "Social and Emotional Learning Book Club."* In some communities parents have created book clubs to learn how they can encourage their children's social and emotional development. This could be part of the PTA or PTO. It could also be something you do informally with friends or parents of your child's classmates. (See the brief reading list included with this packet.)
10. *Encourage good communication with the school.* Good communication is basic to supporting your child's education. Ask your child's teacher to provide suggested home activities to support skills the children are learning at school. Ask for homework assignments that directly involve parents. An example might be students asking parents about their cultural background or work experiences.

# Tips for Parents

By working together schools and parents can promote children's social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL includes some key skills:

- ◆ Self-awareness—recognizing feelings and managing anger.
- ◆ Understanding others—developing empathy and taking the perspective of others.
- ◆ Making responsible decisions and following through. This includes considering long-term consequences of your actions for yourself and others.
- ◆ Understanding yourself—handling emotions, setting goals, and dealing with obstacles.
- ◆ Building healthy relationships—saying no to negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts constructively.

When young people master these skills, they are more likely to succeed in school and life. They become happier and more confident. They are better students, family members, friends, and workers. They are less prone to drug and alcohol use, depression, or violence. Social and emotional learning is like an insurance policy for a healthy, positive, successful life.

### The Role of Parents

Long before children can say their first word or take their first step, they respond to the touch, tone of voice, and moods of their parents. This is the beginning of learning about emotions and relationships. It happens as naturally as their bodies grow and develop.

“Family life is our first school for emotional learning,” states author Daniel Goleman. In the family, he says, “we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings.” This learning happens both through what parents say and do to their children and how they treat each other.

### Some Key Points to Consider

- ◆ Children learn important lessons about emotions from their parents. When parents threaten or punish children for a display of emotion, children learn emotions are dangerous, to be held inside. This can lead in later life to depression or unchecked rage. When parents do not teach their children acceptable ways to express anger, the children may think it's okay to strike out at others or have tantrums.
- ◆ Parents should think of themselves as “emotion coaches.” They can encourage their children to use feeling words, such as “I feel sad” or “That made me really angry” to express emotions.
- ◆ When children learn to express feelings and respect others, they become happier and healthier. Such children are less likely to have problems with depression, violence, or other mental health issues as they grow older.
- ◆ Many SEL programs for schools include activities for parents. When parents and students practice SEL skills at home, the effects are even greater. Children also come to see learning as a lifelong process, not something that stops when they leave school.
- ◆ Children want their parents to guide and teach them. A recent poll found that 86% of young people 10-17 years old said their parents were very important influences on their lives. Only 22% said television, movies, and popular music were so important. No one can take the place of parents in raising caring, confident, capable children.

## Books for Parents

*All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do To Raise Caring And Responsible Children and Adolescents*, by Peter L. Benson. (Jossey-Bass, 1997). The author focuses on how to build developmental assets in young people based on support, empowerment, boundaries, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

*Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, by Daniel Goleman. (Bantam, 1994) This best-seller raised public awareness about the importance of emotions in healthy human development.

*Emotionally Intelligent Parenting: How to Raise a Self-Disciplined, Responsible, Socially Skilled Child*, by Maurice Elias, Steven Tobias, and Brian Friedlander. (Harmony Books, 1999) Parents can learn how to communicate with children on a deeper, more gratifying level and help them support their child's development in relating to others.

*The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, by John Gottman. (Simon & Schuster, 1997) The author describes how parents can use an effective five-step process to become "Emotion Coaches" and teach their children how to express and manage emotions throughout their lives.

*Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers*, by Maurice Elias, Stephen Tobias, and Brian Friedlander. (Random House, 2000) The authors explain creative, caring, and constructive ways to parent adolescents during these crucial years.

*Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child To Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along With Others: The "I Can Problem Solve" Program*, by Myrna Shure. (Pocket Books, 1996) This book provides a step-by-step guide for teaching young children how to solve problems and resolve daily conflicts constructively.

*Raising a Thinking Preteen*, by Myrna Shure. (Henry Holt, 2000) In a follow-up to her best-selling book *Raising a Thinking Child*, Dr. Shure explains a program for resolving conflicts and developing critical thinking skills that can be used with 8-12-year-olds.