



# WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

ESS406.KS | Kindergarten

Series II

*This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately.*

*An online directory of mental health services in South Dakota, searchable by town, is available at [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org). Other mental health resources are at this site as well. Information can also be obtained by calling 211 in Rapid City or Sioux Falls or calling toll-free 1-877-377-0941 from other areas of South Dakota.*

*We would appreciate your feedback on this “Wing For Life” newsletter. Please take three minutes to complete the on-line survey: [www.seuw.org/wings.aspx](http://www.seuw.org/wings.aspx)*

## IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

- Teaching Self-Control
- Building Character: Teaching Children to be Honest
- Competition
- Talking to Your Child about Disasters and News

## Teaching Self-Control

As parents, we want the best for our kids. We expect they will behave in public, mind their manners, and make wise decisions. These expectations are appropriate but it is important for children to be guided in the right direction to develop self-control and self-discipline.

Self-control is the ability to control one’s thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Parents can help teach this skill through modeling. Likewise, parents can also model self-discipline or the ability to set realistic goals by making a plan, sticking to it, and following through on that promise.

Parents teach their children self-control and self-discipline by creating an environment that supports their growth and development. Parents help children learn to be more responsible when they help children learn to control their

own behavior. The following discipline techniques can help children develop self responsibility and control.

- **Set fair and reasonable limits.** Setting reasonable limits based on a child’s developmental level offers realistic guidelines for children and helps them feel secure. It also teaches them what acceptable expectations for their behavior are. Limits also need to be consistently enforced. Children become confused when limits are not consistent or rules are never stated to begin with. As a result, they may misbehave more because they don’t know what appropriate expectations are in certain situations.
- **Give clear and positive instructions.** As with adults, children want to feel successful in what they do. How we ask children to do things changes as they grow older, but one thing that doesn’t change is how we state what we want done. Giving clear instructions or directives and making sure the request is heard is key for children of all ages to follow through with the task and to be successful. Instead of yelling the request from the kitchen, go into the den to tell your children what you want done. Another thing to keep in mind is to accept how the job is done. For example, many parents have trouble with how their children “make their bed.” The tendency is to remake the bed so it looks the way an adult wants it to look. If parents continually remake the bed instead of teaching their children how to do it, they may eventually not even try for fear of not meeting parental expectations. Very specific instructions let our children know exactly what we want done, won’t set them up to fail, and help them learn.
- **Use consequences.** Letting children learn from experiences can be quite effective if done properly. Parents should tell children what the consequences will be for breaking a limit ahead of time. Consequences give children a choice, and parents must be willing to accept the child’s decision to experience the consequence. Consequences are used to teach responsibility and decision-making. The situation provides the learning opportunity and helps develop a sense of accountability for one’s actions.
- **Say what you mean and mean what you say.** An example of this is when parents ask their children if they are ready for bed versus telling them bedtime is in ten minutes and helping them transition to bedtime. Asking a question can and will often lead to an answer of no when that may not

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children.

For additional resources on children’s mental health, visit [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org).

This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.



be the desired response. Do not give options if there are none available. Another example of this may be telling a child you will throw her bike into the trash if she doesn't put it away in the garage or wear a helmet. Saying this is far easier than following through on it. Unless you fully intend to throw the bike, and your money, into the trash — do not say it. Perhaps the bike is off limits for a week and is locked in the shed for the time being.

- **Help children to problem-solve.** Children will and do get into disagreements with each other or face situations where they may have to make difficult choices. In the case of disagreements, have each child tell the other her side without being interrupted. You may write down information and read it back to your children, including a reflection of each child's feelings. Let each child respond by naming the problem. Ask for solutions and write them down without making comments. Discuss all the solutions and decide which one you can all live with. Try out the solution. Ask if the solution is working. Don't forget to let children problem-solve on their own as they get older. It doesn't help for parents to always come to

their child's rescue. You may still need to guide decision-making from time to time, but children will be more confident in their decision-making ability if they are allowed to make, follow, and experience the positive or negative consequence of their decisions.

- **Model appropriate behavior.** Children are quick to imitate or act like adults. It's important for parents to model actions such as sharing, helping, cooperating, taking care of their belongings, and following through on plans and promises. Children will copy these behaviors and learn what acceptable behavior is, now and in the future. Likewise, parents who respond to frustration with aggression and profanity or treat others with disrespect are likely to see these behaviors in their children.

Take the time to make discipline a learning experience for the child. Appropriate discipline should include four parts. The child needs to understand: which behavior is not acceptable, why the behavior is not acceptable, and what behavior is appropriate, and why. By helping a child understand why what s/he did was unacceptable, the child can learn what

## BUILDING CHARACTER:

### Teaching Children to be Honest

Just as children must be taught to tie their shoes, read, write, and solve math problems, they must be guided in developing the qualities of character that are valued by their families and communities. It is only through such guidance and modeling by caring adults that children learn important values, such as honesty.

Honesty means being truthful with ourselves and with others. Telling the truth means letting everyone know what really happened. Friends and family will trust and respect the person who tells the truth. It is easier to tell the truth than getting caught in a lie and trying to keep the story straight. A person telling the truth will feel calm, confident, and peaceful. A person who is honest is genuine. A genuine person does not live by lies and is what he says he is. Being a genuine person means being the "real" you and not someone else. People who care about you want to know they can trust you to be what you say you are.

Being honest and trustworthy means that a person will keep his word and being trustworthy means he will carry out what he says he will do. People like to count on a person who will keep his word. People who keep their word are respected by their friends.

What can you do as a parent do to teach your child to be an honest individual? Be a role model for your child. Show

him how he can be a trustworthy individual who is genuine and truthful in his relationships. Research shows that a child builds self-confidence by trying to meet high standards, even when he has to struggle to do so. Setting high standards and having clear expectations helps your child be honest in his dealings with others.

Reading stories or books to your child about children who strive to be honest is another good way to help your child learn to be an honest person. There are many good books that help children develop the values of strong character and good citizenship. By visiting the local library you may find the following books which will help your child learn about being an honest individual:

- Pedro and the Padre, by Verna Aardema
- Angel in Charge by Judy Dalton
- A Day's Work by Eve Bunting
- Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine by Evaline Ness
- 213 Valentines by Barbara Cohen
- The fable, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf"
- "The Honest Woodman"

As you and your child read these books, take time to discuss how each character acted as an honest person or discuss what deeds they performed to help them to become a responsible citizen.

acceptable behavior is. There is no one right way to discipline a child. Each child is unique and may need different approaches of parental discipline to respond effectively. A variety of discipline techniques exist. What is important is a warm and loving relationship between the parent and the child.

## Competition

“Wanna race?” “Who can count farther?” Whether it is for attention, grades, or a game, competition seems to be a common occurrence. Competition refers to an activity where skills, qualities, or other traits are compared. While moderate competition can be a healthy part of life, it is important to understand when competition is right for your child and why cooperation may be a better alternative.

With children between the ages of 3 and 5, avoid strict competition. Children between the ages of 6 and 9 should have minimal emphasis on competition. At these ages your child is still developing basic skills and does not fully understand winning and losing. Competition at these younger ages can produce undesirable effects such as low self-esteem because the child may tie negative feelings of losing to his own self-worth. Competitive settings are also usually associated with winning a prize or approval, which motivates kids to win because they will receive an external award. So the focus is more on winning instead of on enjoyment of the experience.

Yet, downplaying competition does not have to mean eliminating experiences that usually involve competition. Real life will eventually involve competition whether it is school or work. Changing your mindset about competition is just a matter of refocusing attention. Instead of emphasizing competition, emphasize cooperation to create a more positive experience for your child. With cooperation, people

encourage one another's achievements and play and work together instead of against one another. In a cooperative setting your child has the opportunity to reach personal goals and work toward learning new skills without the pressure of winning and the negative feelings associated with losing. In a cooperative setting your child naturally rewards himself through his own personal accomplishments and the satisfaction that comes with completing a task and trying his best. This internal reward better represents how the real world works, teaching internal rather than external motivation. It will also teach him to rely on positive messages that come from within rather than rely on others. When he learns to cooperate, your child will have benefits that can last him a lifetime.

### ENCOURAGE COOPERATION:

**Suggest team activities** where each member has a part to play that helps the whole team.

**Highlight self-improvement** which allows your child to experience a sense of achievement, no matter if he “won” or not. Teach your child to set realistic goals. Self-improvement and working to learn a new skill give him something to strive for. Give your child support and feedback as he progresses, but avoid comparing him with other children.

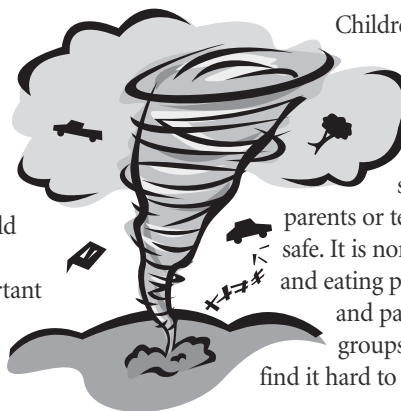
**Build up internal motivation** by asking your child about not only the end result but also about the process. For example, “How did you feel when you completed the job and saw your finished work?” or “How do you feel now that you learned to...?”

**Reinforce cooperative behavior** through praise and encouragement. Notice your child working and playing together with other children and commend him for his cooperation.

## TODAY'S ISSUE

### Talking to Your Child about Disasters and News

Children react to a disaster in different ways. Some may show reactions right away while others may seem fine for weeks or months. A child may be affected by the disaster even if the family was not directly impacted. Your child could be affected simply by hearing about the event and seeing the images on TV. It is important for parents to know how their child might respond to a disaster and how to talk to him/her about it.



Children in early elementary grades may have a hard time adjusting to the changes that a disaster may cause. They may go back to an earlier behavior, such as thumb sucking or being afraid of strangers. They may cling to their parents or teachers and want to stay where they feel safe. It is normal to see changes in their sleeping and eating patterns, along with unexplainable aches and pains. They may withdraw from their play groups or friends, fear going to school, and find it hard to concentrate.

## WINGS FOR LIFE

When talking to your child after a disaster here are some tips to follow:

- Provide your child with the opportunity to talk about what he is seeing in the media and to ask questions.
- Tell your child your feelings and fears about the situation.
- Tell your child the truth about what occurred but do not create a sense of panic.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all of his questions.
- Answer the questions at a level your child can understand. Don't use big words that will confuse your child.
- Provide opportunities for your child to talk about the event more than once because there probably will be more questions as time goes on.
- Use this as an opportunity to create a family emergency plan. This may be very comforting to you and your child.
- Allow your child to discuss other fears and questions since

the communication lines are open.

- If your child does not want to talk about what happened, suggest he express himself in other ways such as drawing pictures or playing with toys.
- Monitor your child's exposure to the media. Some parents may wish to limit how many graphic and troubling scenes their child views. If possible, watch the news reports with your child as this is when he might develop questions.
- Talk with your child about the difference between the news and real life.
- In addition to the tragic views, help your child see the heroic actions and assistance offered by people to the disaster victims.
- You may want to help your child find a way to help others to make him feel like he is doing something to help those affected by the disaster. Younger children can send drawings and cards to the victims.

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For information on children's mental health services in South Dakota, [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org).

*The term "parent" is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.*

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