



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

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. 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

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Positive Reinforcement: Praise and Encouragement

Good job, Ben! Way to go, Laura! Do you find yourself frequently using phrases like these with children? They are great positive reinforcing phrases; however, adults who work with children need to be aware of the difference between words of praise and words of encouragement.

Praise may be defined as verbal reinforcement that focuses on evaluation or approval. Praise tends to place emphasis on the outcome over the effort. In the extreme, it may lead children to equate their worth with the praise that they receive.

Praising a child can build a positive self-concept when children are praised for appropriate behavior or for excellence; however, unrestrained use of praise may result

in children believing that they are OK only if someone tells them that they are OK.

Inappropriate use of praise can have negative consequences for children. Children may begin to doubt the sincerity of the speaker when praise is overused. Children will realize that not everything they do is deserving of praise.

- Sometimes, a child will deny or contradict a compliment, placing the speaker in a difficult situation: that is, having to come up with a reason why the praise is valid.
- Another child may interpret praise as threatening; that is, there is anxiety that this one time was a fluke and he could not possibly repeat the accomplishment in the future.
- A child might feel manipulated by the speaker; that is, the child is being complimented because the adult wants to control the child’s behavior.

Encouragement focuses on action rather than the person. It demonstrates understanding and appreciation of one’s individuality rather than establishing an expectation of conformity.

There are three steps in giving a child encouragement.

- First, describe what you see or feel. This is called “descriptive praise.” For example, “Tell me about this interesting drawing” or, “How did you get everyone involved in the game?”
- Next, allow time for a response. Watch and listen for verbalizations and/or body gestures. This gives a child an opportunity to identify his/her skills and may cause the child to praise himself in the process.
- Finally, reinforce the child’s perceptions. If the child is particularly pleased with his use of color, you can reinforce that by saying that the colors are a striking aspect of the picture. Or, if a child says that she did a good job of explaining the game, you can compliment her enthusiasm or powers of persuasion.

Positive reinforcement helps children develop a positive self-concept. Adults should use both praise and encouragement appropriately to help children realize their potential.

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.

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



Keeping Sports Fun

Sports can be competitive, but it is important to keep the sporting activity fun for your child.

Being part of sports is great for your child. It can teach responsible social behaviors, foster new friendships, provide an appreciation of health and fitness, and push your child to a higher level of athletic ability. Participating on a team also gives a sense of belonging.

Even though participating in sports is great for a child, the pressure to win can be harmful to your child's development. If your child is in a "win-at-all cost" atmosphere, the benefits that sports offer can be lost. Negative experiences during sporting events can lead to lower self-esteem and a fear of failure.

As a parent there are a few things you can do to try to keep the sports season fun and exciting for your child.

- Take the time to learn about your child's development and what is typical for a child of that age.

BUILDING CHARACTER:

Self-Discipline

When you see a child yelling, crying, hitting, or kicking, do you say to yourself, that child is out of control? Of course, all children have outbursts because they are frustrated, disappointed, or tired; nevertheless, children can learn self-control and self-discipline with proper parental guidance. Children by nature are excitable, curious, and impulsive — all good qualities, up to a point. Society expects self-discipline in our interactions with others. Help your child develop this important life skill.

Many of our personal and business relationships rely on our ability to exercise self-control, especially in a stressful situation. Exploding with anger toward your spouse or your boss can have negative consequences. And if we do not have control over our eating, making ourselves exercise, paying our bills on time, etc. we will ultimately suffer physical or financial harm.

Self-discipline can be defined as training to control oneself and one's conduct, usually for personal improvement. It is the ability to control our behaviors and actions and even our thoughts. Self-control or self-discipline is a learned behavior and a societal expectation.

Parents can help instill the trait of self-discipline in their children by applying these practices as they raise their children:

- Set reasonable limits or boundaries. Limit setting provides a model for your child as he strives to develop his own self-discipline. Consider your child's age and developmental stage in setting limits. Are these limits reasonable and realistic? Limits actually help children feel secure but they also teach what acceptable behavior looks like.
- Be clear about expectations. Give positive and complete instructions so that your child can be successful at doing what you ask.

- Involve your child. If children are to learn to take responsibility for their behavior, they must be involved in establishing rules for behavior and consequences for breaking them. This involvement gives children a greater sense of control in their lives.
- Work with your child to determine ahead of time what the consequence will be for breaking the limit. If your child can understand the need for this limit (physical safety, family circumstance, etc.) he will be more willing to comply.
- Follow through on consequences. One of the problems with making consequences too severe is that many parents do not feel that they can follow through with the punishment.
- Give your child a chance to problem-solve on his own. When he encounters a new situation or problem, give him some room to try to figure it out on his own. You may need to help him brainstorm some alternatives.
- Praise and encourage your child's self-control when he encounters a difficult situation and controls his response without overreacting.

Other practices can be used to help develop self-discipline and control:

- Encourage your child to be involved in sports, music lessons, a paper route, caring for a neighbor's pet or garden.
- Discuss with your child his feelings of accomplishment. For example, you might tell him that he was very responsible about his paper route. "You got up every morning and got it done before school. The money you earned is nice but you learned other things from having a paper route."

Help your child realize that there can be benefits for his self-discipline. You might reward him for being on time, completing a task, or picking up his room. Perhaps he can have an extra privilege, such as staying up an extra half-hour at night. There are rewards in life for being responsible and having self-discipline.

- Make sure that you set realistic expectations that are neither too high nor too low for your child.
- Do not force your child to do something he/she is not developmentally ready for.
- Do not put too much pressure on your child.
- Do not push your thoughts, ideas, or dreams onto your child.
- Listen to what your child is saying and try to meet his needs.
- Remember that sports are primarily an opportunity for children to learn and have fun. Keep in mind that being part of sports can be a big opportunity to allow your child to make new friends, learn to follow new rules, and get exercise all at the same time.

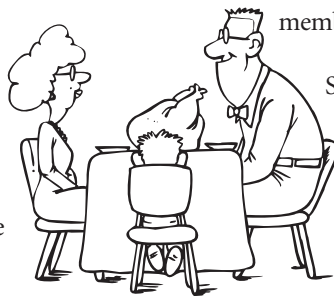
Sporting events are a great opportunity for parents to role-model good sportsmanship skills. When you are watching your child's game, keep your emotions in check. It is not good sportsmanship to yell at the coaches, officials, or another player. Remember the opponents are also children. Showing negative spectator behavior can put added pressure on your child and can cause her to perform poorly because of stress.

Keeping these tips in mind can create a fun and exciting sports season for the whole family!

Making Time for Family Time

Does it seem like your family never has time to do family activities together? Is it hard to get to everyone together at one place and at one time? Parents need to look for creative ways to find time for family togetherness. One place to start is by expanding an existing event, for example, family mealtime or family chores.

Make family meal time a priority. Challenge your family to eat at least one additional meal together each week.



Show your child that family meals are important by turning off the TV and not answering the phone while you are eating. Eat your meals around the table. It is easier to talk and listen when you are facing each other. Allow each family member a chance to participate in the conversation. Family mealtime has other benefits as well. Research shows that when children eat family meals they will consume more fruits and vegetables, eat less fried food, and drink significantly fewer sodas than their peers.

Doing household chores, such as cleaning the house or yard, together as a family provides for development of teamwork and helps teach responsibility. Doing chores with the children also fosters good communication skills.

Plan a family meeting to help the family come to a decision as to what they would like to do together. Family meetings involve all members of the family and encourage effective communication. A family meeting is planned ahead; it is not spontaneous. Each person is listened to with respect, no matter age or verbal ability. Each member of the family has a chance to discuss and have a voice in coming to a decision as to what the family will do together.

Create a family calendar with activities the family would like to do for family time. Post a calendar on the refrigerator and have each member of the family add and plan an event for the family time. The event may be as simple as making snow angels in the snow or going for a walk. Being in charge of planning for family time helps children develop responsibility for each family member.

Spending quality family time is important not only when children are young but also as they get older. There are endless activities to share with children. It is important to take advantage of quality time with your children. Take time to enjoy your family.

TODAY'S ISSUE

Helping Children Cope with Disaster

Children are exposed to many negative images and disturbing stories through the media. Natural disasters and man-made tragedies contribute to feelings of fear, confusion, and insecurity in children of all ages. In a disaster, your child will look to you and other adults for help in understanding what happened.

The way your child sees and understands your response to disturbing information is very important. A child is often

aware of his parents' worries, but he may be particularly sensitive during a crisis. Explain the event in words he can understand while acknowledging the frightening parts. In spite of the crisis, assure your child you will do everything you can to keep him safe.

Children respond to trauma in many different ways. Some may have reactions very soon after the event; others may seem to be doing fine for weeks or months and then begin to show worrisome behavior. As a parent, you know

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your child better than most people, so keep a careful watch on him and look for patterns of new behavior that do not normally occur with your child.

Parents should be alert to changes in their child's behavior:

- Refusal to return to school and "clinging" behavior, including shadowing mother or father around the house.
- Persistent fears related to the catastrophe (such as fear of being permanently separated from parents).
- Sleep disturbances, such as nightmares, screaming during sleep and bedwetting, persisting more than several days after the event.
- Irritability and loss of concentration.
- Startled easily, jumpy or fidgety.

- Behavior problems, such as misbehaving in school or at home in ways that are not typical of your child.
- Physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches, dizziness) for which a physical cause cannot be found.
- Withdrawal from family and friends, sadness, listlessness, decreased activity, and preoccupation with the events of the disaster.

Reassurance and a predictable routine to promote security are the keys to helping your child through a traumatic time. However, if you are worried about your child during this time or feel your child is overly anxious or depressed, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

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For information on children's mental health services in South Dakota, 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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