



Positive Guidance:

A Guide for Parents



At **Bright Horizons®**, we believe young children are innately valuable, deserving of our kindness and respect. We understand that they are still developing emotionally and socially. They have limited life experience and language skills, and they need our guidance. Just as we teach children academic concepts, such as pre-reading, math, and science, we guide children's social and emotional development through mentoring, example, and direct teaching.

Our *Caring Matters* curriculum provides teachers with a wealth of information on positive guidance and social-emotional development. In this short guide, you'll learn more about positive guidance at Bright Horizons. You'll also learn new ideas to use at home.

In the Classroom

We believe that the foundations for all healthy social-emotional development in the classroom include:

- Nurturing, trusting relationships
- A safe, peaceful environment
- Effective positive guidance teaching and practices

We encourage teachers to:

- Spend quality time every day talking and listening to each child.
- Give children the same respect given to adults.
- Set realistic expectations for children. Unrealistic expectations set children up for failure and often lead to frustration and behavioral issues.
- Create classroom environments that promote independence and engagement. Materials should be organized so children can easily access and use them. The classroom should have both noisy and quiet areas, and plenty of soft spaces.
- Observe children to understand the causes of behavioral challenges, such as fatigue, confusion, or frustration. Help children solve problems and find solutions.
- Model positive communication and social interactions. Teach social skills directly when needed.

At Home

Parenting can be profoundly rewarding, but it can also be challenging. Every child and every family is different. Parenting styles and attitudes vary, and there is no one "right" way to parent. However, many parents have found that children respond well to a combination of:

- Nurturing, loving relationships
- Clear expectations and structure while allowing for adaptations and change
- Opportunities to make choices
- Natural and logical consequences
- Parental modeling of appropriate behaviors

Positive Guidance Toolbox for Parents

Below is our positive guidance toolbox for parents. This toolbox offers simple solutions to common parenting challenges.

Ready for Success

- **Plan ahead and maintain a predictable schedule.** Children feel safer and happier when they know what to expect. Give your child notice before making transitions. For example, "It's almost time to go to school. We'll clean up the trains in five minutes."
- **Get up before your child.** Even just a few minutes to yourself can make a big difference in how the day feels. Prep backpacks, lunches, and coffee the night before.

Relationship Building and Self-Care

- **Spend time together.** Children may not understand the intricacies of adult life, but they are acutely sensitive to parents' emotional states. When parents are stressed or anxious, children may feel fearful. Try to slow life down as much as possible, especially in the evenings. Eat dinner together, read stories at bedtime, and take time to talk about the day. These little moments cement your relationship and give children the security they need.
- **Keep perspective.** It's easy to become frustrated or worn down by the daily challenges of parenting young children. Try to remember that most of these challenges probably won't matter a year or five years from now.
- **Tell a joke.** Sometimes just saying something silly or absurd is enough to reduce tensions. Use humor that's at the child's developmental level. Humor should never be mean-spirited or at a child's expense.
- **Change it up.** If you're having a rough day, go for a walk, put on some music, or get out of the house. Sometimes a change of scenery is all that's needed.
- **Take care of yourself.** Go to bed early and make time for exercise. Connect with friends, participate in a hobby, or read a book. Parenting is an endurance sport and you need to care for yourself so you can care for your child.

Positive Guidance

- **Look for the reasons behind behavior.** Remember, behavior is communication. Children's challenging behavior is usually caused by:
 1. A lack of knowledge or experience.
 2. A need for attention.
 3. Physical triggers, such as fatigue or hunger.
 4. Emotional triggers like boredom or fear. If you can find and alleviate the cause, the behavior typically stops.

Positive Guidance (cont.)

- **Tell your child specifically what to do, rather than what not to do.** The words, “Put your crayons in the box and put the paper in the drawer,” are much more helpful than, “Don’t make a mess with the art supplies.”
- **Point out positive behavior.** Let your child know when he gets it right. “You put your shoes in the closet and hung up your backpack. You’re a hard worker.” Clear, descriptive encouragement helps your child understand your expectations and builds confidence.
- **Try the “when/then” strategy.** “When we put away the books, then we can go outside.”
- **Divert a behavioral issue by offering two choices that are both okay with you.** For example, perhaps your child runs away from you in the store. You could say, “You can walk next to me or I can hold your hand. Which would you like to do?” If your child refuses to comply, you gently but firmly make the choice. “Okay, I will help you. I am going to hold your hand.”
- **Encourage your child to use words to solve problems. Give verbal prompts.** “You don’t like it when Sophie takes your toys. Can you tell her how you feel?”
- **Use natural and logical consequences when appropriate to guide learning.** For example, a child who spills his milk cleans it up.
- **Learn nonverbal techniques.** Make sustained eye contact; use gestures, such as shaking your head; stand close to your child or gently touch your child on the shoulder or head.

If you find yourself unable to manage a situation even with the use of these ideas or feel angry, frustrated, or overwhelmed, let your partner or a friend know. Sometimes it takes more than one person to guide a child’s behavior and that’s okay.

Resources

Cline, F. and Fay, J. (2006). *Parenting With Love and Logic*. NavPress Publishing: Carol Stream, IL.

Faber, A. and Mazlish, E. (2012). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Scribner: New York, NY.

Tsabary, S. (2013). *Out of Control: Why Disciplining Your Child Doesn’t Work and What Will*. Namaste Publishing: British Columbia, Canada

University of Illinois Extension. *Resources for Positive Parenting*. Retrieved at http://web.extension.illinois.edu/character/resources_parents.cfm

