

## Your Child's Feelings

Even before they understand any language at all, children feel the emotions and feelings expressed around them. They know if their parent is relaxed and contented or tense and upset. They are very aware of the emotional environment in which they live and experience their own feelings in reaction to it. Children have the same feelings as adults. They may not know the words 'angry', 'sad', 'happy', or 'scared', but they will experience these feelings.



### Value Children

You are your child's mirror. They will value themselves in direct relationship to how you value them. It is very important to show your child that you love them all the time - even when you are angry with them. Valuing your child is very important. Research into why teens are suicidal tells us that these teens report not feeling valued by their parents. They do not believe that their parents are glad they are in the family. Valuing your child needs to start right at the beginning of your lives together.

Let your child know you love them by smiling, touching, talking, watching, listening - by being there and taking care. Tell them stories about themselves. We all love that. And never ever say, "I won't love you if you..." or, "I'll love you if you...!"

If you are feeling angry or sad, tell your child, and tell them why. They may feel your emotion and may think they are the cause of it. If they are the cause of it, they need to know and need to know that it is temporary. Own your own feelings.

### Children Face Frustration

Children face challenges mastering all the skills they need to grow up and some days things just aren't going to go well for them.

Children who are trying to master a new skill, like walking or holding a crayon, often experience such high levels of frustration that their short-temperedness and frequent tears make parents wonder where their little angel has gone. Have patience. As soon as the new skill is mastered, they will usually become more contented and easygoing again.

Try to anticipate how your child is going to feel in particular situations and what you can realistically expect from them. If they have been shopping in the mall with you all day, by dinner they will be exhausted and overexcited, a combination that leads to tears and tantrums. Stay calm.

### Help Them Express Their Feelings

Give your child words for their feelings. For example - angry, hurt, scared, frustrated, furious, annoyed, disappointed, resentful, fuming, frightened, enraged, sad, offended, upset, etc. Help them learn to tell you how they feel.

By giving your child the language they need to express themselves, you are showing your concern for them (Daddy knows I'm hungry) and gives them a tool they need both to understand themselves and express themselves to others.

Assure your child that there is nothing wrong with crying. Tears are an emotional release and sometimes we just need to cry. Teach them as well, that it is okay to be mad or angry or hurt or frustrated, but it's not okay to be destructive or to hurt anyone, including themselves.

## Encouraging Self-Esteem

The definition of self-esteem is ‘belief in one’s self’. We know that children’s ability to handle themselves and their world hinges on their sense of self-esteem. It is very important that parents create an environment in which their child’s self-esteem can grow. How do we do this?

### Set the Stage for Success

The list of things they cannot do is so much longer than what they can do. Create an environment that makes success more possible. For example, place a sturdy stool in front of the sink so he can wash his own hands, choose slippers that are easy for a two year old to put on, and so on.

### Let Them Do It Themselves

They may not do it as well or as quickly as you would, but they will get a sense of accomplishment by putting on their own shoes. Plan your activities with enough lead time for your child to do some things for themselves. If they ask for help, cheerfully give it, but avoid taking over.

### Choice is Power

Everyone needs to feel that they have some power over their own life. Children need to make age-appropriate decisions. For example:

- If a six month old is refusing strained beans, he doesn’t want them.
- A two year old can decide which shirt to wear today.
- A three year old will know which cereal she wants for breakfast.

Whenever possible, allow your child to exercise some control over their own life. They will make some mistakes, but this is how most of us learn. Making good decisions is a skill and children can only get good at it if they practice it.

### Show Respect

Encourage your child to speak up and give their point of view, then carefully consider it. They can be amazingly creative problem solvers! Treat them with the same kind of courtesy you expect them to show. By modeling good manners towards them, you make them feel respected and set a standard for behaviour in your home that applies to every member of the family.

## Children Like Routine

Children are most comfortable with routine and with knowing what to expect next. When you know that a new experience, like the first visit to a dentist, is coming up, talk about it and familiarize your child with what is going to happen. Using dolls to play act the experience or reading stories where the characters visit the dentist will be very helpful.

Forewarn your child about changes in routine. For example - “Instead of going to playschool tomorrow, you will be going to play with Jessie.” Bring it up several times and be sure to mention any ‘perks’ that might be involved.

It’s helpful, even within the routine of your daily life, to get into the habit of telling your child what to expect next so they can get used to the idea. Children, even from a very young age, need to know what to expect.

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**This BC HealthFile has presented some ideas to help you with the challenge of parenting. There are other topics in the child development series that you may also find helpful. The BC HealthFiles link and this series can be found on the BC HealthGuide Web site at:**  
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