

Top Tips

Loads of great ideas from our parents on all sorts of subjects.

Tips to help families get along

Work together on routine household tasks - for example the parents do the cooking and the children clear up. Schedule ahead for the following week. Hold a weekly family meeting and discuss what you are all doing and plan around each other. Try to have at least an evening where you are all together - perhaps playing a board game with no telly (video on for favourite programmes) Establish a routine - i.e. parents go out on every Saturday etc.

Jayne's Tip

As parents we all need time off and try and get out at least once a month if you can get baby-sitters otherwise you find that you have nothing to talk about except the children!

Useful Books for Parents

- The Sixty Minute Father Rob Parsons Hodder & Stoughton
- Crying baby Pat Gray Wisebuy
- Toddler Taming Christopher Green Vermillion
- Parents on Parenting Sarah Johnson Vermilion
- Food Fights Davis Haslam Vermilion
- Coping with Stress Tom Trauer Salamander
- One parent families Diana Davenport Sheldon Press
- Becoming a Family Anna McGrail National Childbirth Trust
- 501 ways to be a good Parent Michele Elliott
- Zip your lips Dale & Renee Jacobs
- 150 Things to Make & Do with your child Juliet Moxley

Tom's Socks

I was trying to get my son to put on his own shoes and socks which he always seemed to have terrible trouble with. One day, to fill the gap between dinner and bedtime, I asked him if he would help me to sort out our sock drawers. In putting them all into pairs he had to stretch the socks to put one in the other. This definitely helped.

Cranial Osteopathy

My little girl was very unsettled after being born after quite a quick (and painful birth). She spent a few days in hospital about a week after her birth after becoming quite dehydrated because she was not breastfeeding properly. Someone suggested that we go to the Dolphin Clinic and have a cranial osteopathy session. This seemed painless but really seemed to relax her. I only went back once more but I am sure that

it made a huge amount of difference. Two years on she is still a really good sleeper (fingers crossed).

Cars and danger

My friend Ruth had a good idea to teach the value of being careful in the road and that was to take a Barbie car (or Action Man car of course) and to stand up two Barbies and to test and talk about what would happen if the Barbie car went into them. This was an excellent idea for getting across the value of being careful in the road.

Whining

Try saying 'I'm sorry I can't understand you when you are talking in that voice' and pretend that it isn't bothering you - it might help.

Making mealtimes positive

Involve your child in decisions about what to eat. Maybe look through recipe books if you have the time and let them choose ingredients and help with the cooking. Serve less and your child will eat more Don't rush or nag Keep a food diary - it may surprise you just how much they eat Try to keep to a routine Don't worry about dinner then pudding - they may eat more dinner off the old plate if you leave of there and it doesn't really matter Serve food that they like (sounds obvious but we do try them on new things which don't work) Avoid too much juice - it fills them up

Make meals fun

Get them involved in choosing meals (and cooking later on) If all else fails this is my own tip - get a little Telly in the kitchen - you can have your dinner in piece while they have no problem taking ages over theirs. Above all don't let mealtimes bother you - if they are not ill they will not starve themselves. A good idea is to say 'well if you aren't hungry then you won't want pudding' - it might get them to at least eat a portion of the food for the main meal. Try to get them to sit still while eating and not too much getting up and down from the table

How to encourage writing skills in everyday life

You could write a list such as a shopping list. Explain why you write it and why it is useful. See if you can get your child to write a list of their toys, things that they like to eat etc.Keep this short and stop if they get bored.

Leah's tips (from How not to be a perfect mother)

A brand new baby does stare a lot and you can point out that it is watching it's older sister or brother - a little flattery goes a long way. Refer to the baby as Susie's sister etc. as much as possible - keeping the older one centre stage. Maybe get the older one a small pet and cuddle the younger one for a little time - even if you grit your teeth. Tell the older child how fantastic the younger child thinks the older one is - even if it seems daft. If the younger one does something that the older one would be considered naughty doing say 'Oh look haven't they made a mess' - with a bit of luck they should elevate them in their eyes to a little person. Point out that when the baby is older they will have to obey the same rules - sometimes the sibling may need to be reminded. Make sure visitors make a huge fuss of the older one before the baby. Praise hugely any efforts on the older ones part to entertain or play with the baby. Try misunderstanding your child's actions. - 'Oh have you bought that hammer to show the baby' - children will play up to the best you'd expect of them (sometimes). Let the older one know that you understand how they feel. Take away any toy used as a weapon and do not tolerate any violence

If your child wee's in strange things at night

Is your child fully awake when these accidents happen? Are they so disorientated that they don't know where they are? Do they feel too embarrassed to use a potty upstairs? Are they too scared of the dark to go down to the toilet? Are they scared that you are not there? Are they stressed or seeking attention?

Julie's tip's

Put bits of bread in each of a babies hands to make feeding easier, and always feed from above so that they look up and the food is easier to shovel in! Overtired babies sleep even worse than very energetic one's. More sleep often seems to mean more sleep surprisingly enough. Don't get rid of the daytime nap too quickly. They may snooze for three hours after having refused for days to sleep. Playing in the cot can sometimes get a bit of light relief into an otherwise hectic day for you. A baby alarm allows you to filter out cries from babies and children just talking to themselves. Never, ever ever have a child or baby downstairs after bedtime. Deal with them in their own rooms with the door shut. They may be convinced that you go to bed too and bringing them downstairs tempts a whole new world of play.

Potty Training

Don't push or put pressure on to early - 2 1/2-3 is good unless they show an interest earlier. If it's not working give up for a month or two. Buy a pair of favourite trousers and they may not like to wet them. Don't get cross. Don't forget that while they are wearing nappies you always know where the wee and poo is so don't knock nappy wearing. Start in the summer when they wear fewer clothes and spend more time outside. Trainer pants can be uncomfortable and expensive and confuse the issue. Use a weeing doll to give girls an idea of what is happening if they can't see it themselves. Use bribes and incentives. Babies will often poo into a potty much later on. Never get cross. Use a travel potty or I have heard of using a disposable as a 'special cushion'.

Mary's Tips

Do the same thing every night at bedtime at the same time if you can. This suggests that bedtime is firmly bedtime and could save you a lot of grief with disrupted bedtimes later on. Start as you mean to go on with everything and only change if necessary not because somebody is telling you that you should be doing something different. If your evenings are important to your sanity establish a routine early - i.e. three weeks old as a baby - it'll work eventually. If you have a baby-sitter tell them to ring the doctor first if they are worried - and you second! By the way - an old tractor tyre makes a brilliant sandpit with the middle cut out. - but always cover it from cats.

Aggression at school

Spend lots of time playing at home. Suggest playing school. It could take a while for them to open up but they may do with a little prompting. Get your child's hearing tested - children can be excellent lipreaders but with even a small amount of hearing loss they may find it frustrating if they can't hear the teacher. You could use puppets - when children play other characters they may tell you what's bothering them. If they are frightened punishments may make it worse. Invite a child from school home. Making a friend (friends) may help them gain confidence to either tell you the problem or deal with it themselves. Try the good old star chart as a reward. A certain number of stars earns a special reward i.e. shopping for a new video. Remember that a minor problem in your eyes may be huge in theirs. Keep in touch with the teacher and if possible work together to resolve the problem.

Discipline at school

They need to understand that; school is not like home and that there are special rules that make children safe and happy and teachers may worry if they lose the children.

Sometimes we need to sit and listen otherwise we may miss something that could be really good fun. If they can do it at home give them lots of praise and tell them how pleased their teacher will be if they do the same there. If they are asked to do something they must do it to keep safe and to not worry the teachers. Make up a game that they have to follow instructions carefully. Give them lots of praise when they succeed. Explain that they sometimes have to sit quietly and listen otherwise they will not be heard when it is their turn to speak. Demonstrate everyone talking at once when they want to say something to make them understand. Before your child goes to school Try and visit local schools at least two years before they are due to start Enquire about league tables and OFSTED reports Make sure your child is registered and collect a prospectus Take your child to look at the school if you can always on a positive level - maybe they have really good toys and games at school! Start preparations at least twelve months before they are due to start Try to deal with your child's (and your own) separation anxieties before they are due to start Talk to other parents to find ideas and coping strategies Talk to the Headteacher and teachers about any minor problems - they are there to help To get started Try to bring school into your conversations If you go shopping maybe point out school uniform clothes that they will need when they start school Choose books from your library or bookshops that mention school Always make it sound fun and never mention that you hated school Visit the local playgroup or nursery so that your child gets used to being in a group of children Try to encourage your child to spend some time away from you - maybe up to six hours especially if they are starting school full-time straight away Take full advantage of meetings and visits that the school may have before they start

Hygiene

Provide a spare pair of underclothes/skirt/trousers in the schoolbag in case of accidents. It is always more comfortable and less threatening if they have their own things to wear after an accident Try to make your child aware of the different sounds that toilets make and to use different toilets if you are out. Small children can be especially frightened of hand dryers. Wiping his/her bottom needs to be practiced Make sure that your child understands why washing and drying hands is important after going to the toilet. Remind them to flush the toilet after using it. Try to encourage them to leave toilets as they found them - i.e. no wee on the toilet seat. Try to leave your child with a hankie or tissue that they can remember to use.

Eating Packed Lunches

Try to involve your child in what they would like to eat for lunch (my dad gave me sandwich spread for years which I hated). Go out and choose a lunchbox and drink flask that they like and can handle easily and put their name on it clearly. Try not to overfill the lunchbox - your child might not then eat anything Not too many chocolate drinks or fizzy drinks that fill up quick but they'll be hungry later. Don't worry if it comes home uneaten.

Encouraging clothes and dressing

Give them strategies to deal with each garment and take it gradually - you could make this week pant week and give gold stars etc. if necessary Allow lots of time and don't get cross Make sure clothes are clearly named and try and get them to recognize their own clothes Can they turn their clothes inside out - especially coat sleeves? Do they know the order in which to put clothes on? Can they fasten zips etc.? Use velcro on shoes etc. wherever possible Elasticated waists are good at least for the first year at school.

Messy Play

Provide protective clothes otherwise your disappointment with paint on a best shirt will spoil their enjoyment. Involve them in cooking activities and they will really like the results. Encourage interest in the garden with simple tools (beware digging up your best bulbs). Always have pencils etc. on hand to use. Keep lots of spare newspaper!!

Tips for Dads

Put dates in your diary that are important to your children - birthdays, school events etc. Get involved with your newborn as much as possible. Change lots of nappies and give lots of cuddles and talk to them as though they can understand you. Children love getting letters so if you have to be away from home then write them a letter Read aloud to your children - try and do it for even a little while every day Tell your children every day that you love them and show them lots of physical affection No-one ever said on their death bed that they wished that they had spent more time at the office! Childhood goes quickly so make the most of it As your children grow you can tell them what is really important to you and they can tell you what's important to them If we listen to our children when they are small they may listen to us when they are older Talk to toddlers and listen with your eyes As children get older we can respect privacy and knock on their door before entering Try to get involved with your children's interests - even if you privately think they are terrible As the children get older try to have a TV free evening and do something together Try not to take phone calls when you are with your children - or make them short Develop family traditions that your children will remember when they are older Make a height chart that you can share with your children Remember to praise for hard work - even if it is without success Let them win occasionally Pass on important lessons to your children that you learned as a youngster and also remember what you didn't like from your father Teach your children how to deal with money and budget for things Could your child see your place of work? Don't wait for the children's mum to take them out - be the one who also takes them to do fun things - on your own if possible Praise, praise, praise Don't be afraid to admit you are wrong to your children - it can earn a lot of respect

The first few days at school

Arrive in good time so your child doesn't already feel anxious and rushed Make sure you have got the right day - some schools stagger admission Get your child used to getting up earlier a few weeks before school if they regularly wake later Always say good-bye and tell them you'll be back later Try not to let your child see that you are upset even if you are Keep to a routine every morning as much as possible Have plenty of early nights - school can be very tiring at first Don't bombard with questions but try and make sure you have a little time to talk about school every day They may be hungry when they get home so may need a snack before tea Consider dropping any extra activities if they are a strain on you or your child even for just a term

Jane's Tip

Be honest about your child's behaviour and talk about whatever is bothering you. You may find some useful hints on biting etc. which could go a long way and for other parents it may be a relief to know that they are not the only ones suffering in silence.

How to teach your children to care

Remind your children that you care for them - they will be more likely to care for others Talk about feelings and awareness of their own (sometimes surprising feelings for example anger instead of sadness etc.) When you do good things for other people try to tell your children why you are doing them and what you are doing. Give your children a chance to help look after a sibling or pet. Reward with pleasure and pride

when your child is caring Tell your children that helping other people is a way to not only make other people feel better but themselves feel better too Find out if they are local groups that need help locally and talk about it. Maybe they can do helpful things through their school, pre-school or nursery. They should be able to increase their own sense of self worth and esteem by learning to care for others.

Nikki's Tip

I didn't want to send my children to their bedroom if they had been naughty as I thought that would make them think twice before playing in their rooms. My sister-in-law used the bottom of the stairs for a minute or two. I found this really helpful.

Sue's Tip

In my experience, if you have a child who is worse behaved than others around them, to avoid 'tutting' from other mums always deal with situations calmly and reasonably. The worst thing is to come up against parents who don't keep an eye on their children and don't seem to believe that their children are sometimes quite naughty which can end up with other children being constantly blamed. Parents who were on alert all of the time seemed to be more readily accepted and their children invited round for tea etc. more often than parents of children who could do no wrong.

Children and stress

Stress makes extra demands on our coping abilities. The degree to which stress interferes in children's lives varies from one to another. For one it may be a challenge, another a loss Sources of stress Some can be age related, others span all ages but they include divorce or starting school (fear of acceptance and rejection). Big changes in routine, disorganised routines, changes in childcare and any number of minor issues can affect the stress levels of children. Affecting factors The first factor is personality and able to ask for support and explain why they feel they need This is a very positive, helpful aspect in coping with stress. However the second factor includes skills learned from parents, teachers and all adults around them What parents can do Be aware of stressful situations and changes in your child's behaviour. Your child will be unlikely to open up unless you ask if there is anything wrong. Be aware of the powers of relaxation techniques and physical exercise as a form of relaxation. Avoid pressure and competition. Try and create reasonable expectations and manageable goals. Quell your own overenthusiasm for things that they may not like. 'Be aware that 'fun' activities can create hassle. Try and organise stress into manageable portions to be overcome - 'if we do this then we can sort out that etc. Encourage relationships with other trusted adults so they are able to open up to their choice of people. Try and have some time in the week that there is no pressure to do anything and to take a breather. Do not feel that you have to fill all the time with 'exciting' activities. Talk, talk talk and make your child feel that they can express even the smallest fears without ridicule.

Tips to avoid smacking

Find out what is appropriate behaviour for your child's age and try not to expect too much (i.e. two year olds cannot sit still). Plan ahead and tell your child exactly what you want. Choose your battles - save the really heavy arguments for issues of real importance. Be consistent- especially between both parents and other family members if possible. If your child is misbehaving try and think why. They may not actually want to be at this friends house! Give lots of praise and encouragement for good behaviour. Give your child two choices - as long as either one is OK with you. Avoid threats and ultimatums such as 'do it or else!' Try not to nag (they'll ignore you) Or beg (gives the child too much power) Do not bribe or make promises that you can't keep. Children need to learn to be good off their own back. Do try to explain why you

are telling them to do what you want. Consider revising your boundaries - they may be too strict. Treat children with respect and they will (eventually) give you the same courtesy. If you have to tell them that they will go home if they carry on behaving as they are once in a while do it quickly and firmly - preferably from something that doesn't bother you too much. They will remember it for a while. Say no and mean no. Set a good example - if you get angry your child will too. Don't be afraid to apologise. Give your children positive alternatives to misbehaviour. Try to prevent problems before they happen. Parents should discuss and agree on rules beforehand.

Discipline for different ages

Crawling babies and toddlers Prevent discipline problems by childproofing. Distract, redirect or remove a child from the situation. Don't call out across a room, instead go to the child and talk to them directly. **Young children** Prepare the child for change ('in 10 minutes we'll be going'). Be clear and concrete (be a good boy' is unclear). Avoid unrealistic demands (pick up every toy now otherwise I'll throw them all out'). **Older children** Enlist the children's opinions in rule-making. Give choices not orders - i.e. jobs to do before or after dinner? This gives them power. Help children learn from their mistakes - talk to them about what happened calmly. and; Be open to change. Find solutions that you are all happy with. Be firm if you are truly convinced. Don't try to argue. Remember that discipline is learning not punishment and explain this to your child. Be consistent and FAIR be generous with praise and encouragement. Respect your child's bodies and feelings - don't use words that hurt. Explain the reasons for rules and saying no wherever possible - even the sound of your reasonable voice can help. How to avoid a 'spoilt' child. Try not to make gifts a substitute for time. Try not to feel guilty for giving basic discipline. Say no to manipulation, tantrums and demands to buy excessive amounts of material things. Whether you say yes or no expect courtesy from your child. Let your child sometimes wait a little for things to teach impulse control. Give them choices instead of everything they ask for so they have to learn to prioritise. Let them work for things and know the value of achievement. Stress the importance of perseverance in completing tasks. Praise your child for effort and hard work. De-emphasise the importance of possessions. Teach your child to value friends for things like loyalty and kindness rather than material or appearance factors. Help your child to learn that a good relationship requires give and take. Give your child small jobs to do and explain that this is what makes them part of the family. Teach your child to give as well as receive.

Overcoming Fear

Try to get your child to take control of the situation and to talk about what exactly is making them frightened. Being frightened of the doctor could mean playing with a doctor kit, or looking spiders up in a book etc. Take on board even the most minor worries which will seem huge obstacles to them. Don't force them to get over it - they may in time but it may be with them for life - there are few adults who aren't frightened of something. Talk about it in private if they feel embarrassed. Don't poke fun. What about a magic wand to magic monsters away or an official ceremony to warn the monsters under the bed away? Get a torch that they can keep in bed so they can see in the dark if they need to - turning a pillow to the cool side might help. Do they really need to have their door shut?

Doing Jobs

Far from using your children as unpaid labour this can give them a real feeling of responsibility towards the family and home that they live in. Give them easy tasks at first, then progress to more difficult ones. Lots of praise helps. A family meeting could be held - say once a month - where you could talk about jobs and maybe change them if necessary. Once person may not mind washing the car but another may hate it.

It may also be a good idea to give your children some sort of idea about how much it takes to keep a home running. You could use bribery - if you want those trainers how about a few extra jobs to pay for half - this does reflect the real world where rewards in work and relationships come from a little effort. In theory at least, this should raise thoughtful; children who have greater self-worth and feeling of responsibility which countless flatmates and future partners should thank you profusely for! You could try doing 10 jobs - all very little ones - i.e. putting shoes in the hall

Telling Children Bad News

Don't underestimate what they may know already but don't be surprised if it comes as a shock Tell them all together with preferably both parents there to support one another and present a unified front Tell the children as soon as you can (before they find out from elsewhere) Try to give as much of an explanation in as grown up a way as possible. Make it very clear that they are in no way responsible for what has happened Tell them of your sorrow at causing them pain and reassure them Encourage them to express their feelings, especially unexpected feelings such as anger at a death Expect their first reactions to be about how it affects themselves. Don't underestimate the impact on any major change Keep talking and talking and don't hide things under the carpet Helping a disorganised child Break tasks down into small steps that are manageable and write them down for the future. Use clocks and timers so your child can work through tasks successfully. You could take some toys away from the bedroom for a month and then swap them the next month.

Maggie's tips

Don't worry too much about food - they won't starve. Don't be perfect and forget guilt. Don't be a martyr or be exclusive to your baby - keep a life going for yourself. Never fight unless you have to - if you are not going out and they want to wear pyjamas all day then who will really care? Encourage your partner to participate and try not to criticise when they put strange clothes on the children!

How to stop holidays driving you nuts

Slow down and don't try to do something every day - the children will probably appreciate a breather too. Get messy - dirt sand or water play Plant something and talk about how things grow Play outside and avoid the mess indoors Make a salad together - uses up lots of sensory experiences which will be good for young children Take a walk somewhere nice (preferably with a tea shop at the end). You can always take your car and make a round trip back to it. Go on a bus or a train - children love this and it will fill up some time Paint pictures in the garden - less mess Sing different songs - what if Old MacDonald had a zoo? Make a book - about what you are doing every day using cut out pictures etc. Meet up with friends (who are probably as run ragged as you are) Love for more ideas Tips to increase a child's confidence Give your child 'jobs' that you know that they can do and do well. If they feel that they are doing well in one job they may feel able to tackle others. Give lots of affection and recognition for jobs well done If they lose, give as much love as if they had won, and praise the act of trying. You could say; Keep up the good work That's the best you've ever done Good for you You are learning a lot I'm very proud of you You are getting really good at that I knew you could do it I love to watch you do that One more time and you will have it You must have been practising I'm proud of the way that you tried doing that Remember that a little flattery (for adults too) goes a really long way.

Sibling rivalry

Be scrupulously fair when you can, explain why you are not when you can't Respect child's age differences and provide explanations Teach children to respect each others possessions Expect relationships to change over time As children get older give them

jobs that they can do together When choosing family activities let each one, and yourselves sometimes have the first choice Don't encourage competition with each other - even who can clean up their toys fastest can lead to resentment. Don't expect children to see another's point of view Assigning privileges for ages can install jealousy and more rivalry!! Listen to the children's both points of view and reflect their feelings- 'I know it is hard when she/he does that' etc. Try and spend proper time with each child alone at least a portion of every week and do something special even if it is just reading a book. Even from an early age don't play favourites - the older child should never get their own way because they are older - it can lead to years of resentment and be a hard habit to break for the older child. Recognise that each child is individual and unique. Try not to love them equally but love one because they are and another because Also try not to box your children into categories. If one is really good at reading also tell the other one they are good at reading too otherwise one child may grow up to think that they are especially good at making people laugh while the other one wonders why they aren't considered funny sometimes. Teach your children to take turns, negotiate and compromise Help children to make-up, apologise and not to hold grudges When it gets serious separate them - they will probably realise how much they enjoy being together Accentuate the fact that they have played nicely together for half an hour before fighting for five minutes Don't ever compare - even in jest Don't complain that they fight all the time in front of them Step into physical fighting quickly and try to make a lot of fuss over the hurt one before telling off the hurting one (difficult if you have a child who complains easily) Don't always blame one child (often the older) Find the good in each child and recognise it and tell them what they can do Can they write a list of what upsets them or they like about the other one and then talk about it to one another civilly (I really like it when reads to me', 'It makes me cross when she calls me a,'

Going out and about with your baby

What to take Even short journeys are made easier if you keep everything you need to hand in your baby bag. You can buy special baby bags that help you by sectioning and storing all your bits and pieces but any large bag will do - though it's useful if there's at least one or two partitions in it. What to put in your bag Spare nappy (two for a short trip, more for longer) Baby wipes - great for faces and hands as well as bottoms Something clean and foldable such as a small towel to use as a changing mat (most baby bags incorporate a mat of their own) Two plastic bags for used nappies and/or clothing Feeding equipment. If your baby is bottle-fed you'll find ready-to-feed formula easier than making up bottles away from home. Transporting a made-up bottle is okay for an hour or so, if you can keep it cool. Older babies need a cup with a sealable lid, plus a snack Rattles and small toys Books and activities for older babies and toddlers Spare outfit (nappies have a habit of leaking at the most inconvenient times) Keeping your baby happy and comfortable on the move Unless you're lucky and find your child sleeps most of the journey, be prepared to make occasional stops in the car, or take walks up and down the aisle in a train, plane or coach. All babies over a few months old can get very bored on any journey - and toddlers can be desperately irritable if they're not entertained most of the time they're awake. However you travel, take a supply of suitable (preferably non-sticky) snacks and, most importantly, drinks with you. If your journey's a long one it's worth investing in one or two small surprise toys for older babies and toddlers as they will hold their interest for longer. If you're planning a holiday, contact your travel agent, tour operator or the company providing your transport well in advance and ask what special arrangements they offer. Remember - babies and children going abroad for the first time now need their own passport, with photograph. Jessica's mum's tip If you're not sure if you will do as your child wants say 'maybe' or we'll see'. Teddy's mum's

tip She says that if a child won't eat don't force them. As long as they get plenty of fluids they won't starve. They will eat when they are hungry and never worry. How to have a good holiday Have a family meeting and give each child a chance to decide what they want to do while on holiday Develop some rules before you go about issues that are difficult at home Plan stops along the way to go to the toilet etc. Bring along favourite music etc. that everyone likes - or get them to choose a tape/CD each. Keep a family travel diary that you can all do together. Teach older children to look at road maps to find out where you are going Make up a group story -you each take it in turns to tell a bit Try and leave as much space as possible in the car itself and it will feel less cramped (easier said than done)

Jane's car tip

When they are really young try not to let them argue in the car as this will drive you bats as they get older. You are the driver therefore you can make up the rules.

Tips for buying children's clothes ·

Choose fabrics and colours that will survive the washing machine and tumble drier, dry quickly and require little or no ironing. (You'll need to wash your baby's clothing in non-biological products and use hypo-allergenic fabric conditioners.) · Choose ultra soft fabrics; nothing itchy or scratchy · Examine seams for rough edges that might rub on the skin · Remember to take all the packaging labels out, including the hard plastic security tag-ends that get stuck in the folds. You might need to cut out the manufacturer and care labels, if they are hard or scratchy · You're likely to need to change your baby's clothes frequently and you'll also need quick and easy access for nappy changing. Look for necklines with plenty of give; poppers are essential around the legs for easy nappy changing · Always buy big, your baby will catch up in no time. Also, if someone gives you an exquisite outfit as a gift, use it. If you put it away 'for best', when you finally get it out, your baby is bound to have outgrown it · There is no standard way of sizing baby's clothing; you'll find it sold by age, weight and length. Make a note of your baby's measurements in centimetres and keep them handy when you go shopping · If your newborn baby is premature or low birth weight, look out for clothing specially made for the size - some of the high street stores sell them starting as small as 1.4kg (3lb). There are also specialist mail order companies selling tiny sizes Caring for your children's clothes Make sure clothes can be machine-washed. Choose fabrics and colours that will survive the washing machine and tumble drier and which require little or no ironing. All-in-one stretch suits and cotton vests can simply be popped in the washing machine and don't need ironing. A special outfit that needs hand washing or ironing is great for going out, but it's worth making sure that the basics are easy to care for. Soaking Baby clothes get dirty, nappies leak and the baby may be sick down them. Put anything really dirty in a bucket filled with warm water and detergent and leave for a couple of hours before washing. If your baby is very sick it may be worth making up a bucket of water and detergent each day, and leaving it somewhere safe like the bath. Then you can just throw things in the bucket. Stains A pre-wash spray can help remove dirt and lift out stains. The extra treatment helps loosen the dirt, and it means you can treat just the dirty area. White cotton cot sheets and terry nappies stay whiter if occasionally washed on the longest hottest wash your machine can offer. Washing powder Measure the washing powder or liquid carefully so that there is enough to get the clothes clean but not too much, which may make the clothes itchy; check the instructions on the packet. It is also important to rinse clothes well. Drying Clothes dried indoors can feel hard and stiff. On a line they dry more quickly and will be much softer. The best way to soften clothes is to use a tumble dryer, but as it's expensive to run you may prefer to part-dry the clothes and tumble-dry to finish. Check snow suits and jackets are dry inside as well as out. Tips! Don't forget to do up

zips and fastenings on clothes before machine washing them, as they can catch and pull delicate fabrics. Tiny baby items like socks hats and gloves can get lost in the machine. Wash them inside an old pillowcase. They will still come clean and you won't lose any!

Tips for reluctant readers

Try comics, magazines, joke books, recipe books or newspapers Ask them to read directions for making projects Get your child a magazine subscription or a comic delivered one day a week Let your child watch a movie based on a book but read the book first Let your child see you reading and talk about it Let your child find information about something you really need to know - i.e. buying a car Get dad to read too so reading is not a solely woman based thing! How to support your school-age child Take the time to talk about school every day and don't take reluctance to talk as an answer Read together. Set TV limits (easier said than done) Give your child a quiet place to study and read Show that you are interested and you would like to help them study. Work with your child's teachers and know what's expected of your child. Check homework etc. Get involved in the school activities if you can.

Top Tips

Take a wet flannel out in a bag instead of tissues to clear up mess - good for hot faces too! Wash small baby items or socks in a washing tablet bag to save them getting lost. To make Barbie jelly for parties use half water half milk with red jelly to make it pink.

Hints for developing social skills.

Try and get your child to play with a variety of other children. Give your child opportunities to sort out arguments etc. but obviously intervene if they are not getting sorted. Encourage and praise sharing and taking turns. If they have special toys put them away before other children come and play.

Sharon's two tips

Two things that I found really useful were; 1. 'Well it's (child's name) mummy's and daddy's job to tell them off. This is what I expect from you' This was a great response to that time when children start saying 'but they are doing it why can't I'. Granted this is difficult if the parents are around (and even worse if they are friends of yours) but a good alternative to your child picking up behaviour that you would rather they didn't and then thinking that they can get away with it. 2. The other one was when my children were small (my son was three and my daughter had just started crawling at nearly one) I found it very useful to 'fake' tell off my daughter if she did something that I didn't want my son to do. My daughter was unfazed by a relatively calm 'don't do that' and although she couldn't understand and wasn't really being naughty my son seemed to think that was OK. Worked for a while anyway!

What our parents say.....

Ruth says praise all positive behaviour and don't make too much of negative behaviour. Show approval if your child behaves in a way that you would like even if it just sitting eating a meal quietly. Sharon says use diversionary tactics. If your child is playing up or has hurt themselves, then maybe 'Look, look there's a bird....' - whether there is or not doesn't matter, you simply divert their attention and get them interested in something that they can learn from and that they may find educational. Nikki says both stick to your guns but admit to your child if you are wrong if you are. Try and get your child to talk to you - they may be being really naughty because they are upset over something. Also try and stick to a routine if you can. Susan says have plenty of paper and crayons available at all times. Sharon has found that even on

white clothes grass stains can be removed with golden syrup. Juliet's mum says that she always dresses her daughter in bright colours when they go to crowded places - brightly coloured hats are best. Shelley says don't try to potty train too early as you will only have loads of accidents. Keep it brief - don't ask children to do more than one thing at once and then only explain why a couple of times as it only prolongs action. She says that sticker charts can work but be strong and only give treats if they have been earned. And finally she says don't label your child (slow, shy etc.) Be Positive! Parenting and Stress Parenting can be considered as a low-grade profession by society at large - 'I blame the parents'!! There are also lots of high-profile successful celebrity mothers (no doubt with nannies and cooks) that can make us ordinary mums feel inadequate. This can make us feel that if we are under stress when have no real right to express it. However, being a parent can place huge demands on us physically and emotionally. Along with that we have often romantic ideas about parenthood before children, we are given no training, we do not know what a 'good parent' is and we are expected to solve problems that the professionals can't. We also expect high standards of ourselves under difficult circumstances.

Tips for dealing with stress;

Try to decide what is a problem for you and ignore unhelpful advice about what your child should be doing - you know your child better than anyone. Be realistic in your expectations. If you feel burned out don't feel guilty for expecting some time off. If you have a willing partner who can give you an hour a day quiet time it can make all the difference (important note - don't do housework during this time!) All workers should get some time off occasionally. Recognise the importance of dads in bringing up children and give them equal responsibility for the children. Don't feel guilty for occasionally feeling depressed and disenchanted with being a parent. Talk to other parents about how you feel and you will probably find that most of them at some time wish for peace and quiet as well . Try to get them to sort out problems themselves but give them a helping hand to do this. Or you could try and distract. You could give each child the opportunity to play on their own. it might be helpful to say 'well you've played really well for the last (five minutes)... it seems a shame to stop playing together over this. This positive approach may encourage them to sort it out.

Recognise symptoms of biological depression which include an inability to sleep, loss of interest, lacking in energy and poor concentration. If in doubt seek help. In the meantime do contact the Parents Helpline or the Samaritans if you need to talk. They will both provide a sympathetic listening ear which may be just what you need. Don't feel that you have to be really low before you phone them either. Another idea would be a stress diary which involves taking each day and writing down when you feel that your mood may change from day to day. There may be a simple explanation as low blood sugar level or the fact that mealtimes in your house are a real pain. It may help highlight a problem. Recognise if something is a vicious circle that you want to get off. If you nag the kids more are they worse behaved? If you are arguing with your partner do the kids misbehave? Sometimes a real crunch point can come which enables us to look again and see if we can do things differently. Learn Relaxation. Just 10 minutes a day can help or do a little exercise. Energy levels can rise after exercise believe it or not. No-one thanks you for working too hard. Try not to do any housework after seven o'clock say and relax. An Olympic athlete exhausted himself trying to keep up with a toddler which is what we do every day. Above all don't feel guilty about how you feel - and talk talk talk and be honest with other parents and adults and seek help if you need it.

Making Mealtimes Easier

Decide what you are really worried about - you may see it the problems disappear.

Leaving children who are upset

Don't show you are upset Be positive - tell them what a good time they'll have Try to tell them what time you'll be back (i.e. straight after lunch) Decide when you are going to leave, give a positive wave and then LEAVE. Hanging on can make the situation worse Check there is nothing actually wrong but remember that children have fertile imaginations about their friends Remain calm if there is a problem - getting angry won't help your child Don't forget that you can always ring the playgroup/nursery/pre-school an hour later to check that they are OK. They probably will be Don't feel guilty - they will learn to socialize, gain friends and play with great toys that you haven't got (or couldn't fit i.e. indoor climbing frames) in your home. Try to talk about what they do at nursery/playgroup/school and underline the positive Talk to the staff if you are worried

Dealing with tantrums

Don't recognise that they are going on Mimic them and make them laugh Put them somewhere else away from an audience Get down to their level eye to eye Change the venue quick Be calm and sympathetic but don't ever, ever, ever give in - they'll be having tantrums at six Do something strange like squeak like a mouse! Walk firmly away

Sarah's Tips

If you are leaving your child for the first time ask the playleader what songs they do and learn them at home, send in a special chosen lunchbox and flask and never be a minute late to pick your child up at first. Teach plain and universal words for potties and toilets and tell the playleader if they use any strange words.

Focusing on a behaviour problem

Deal with specific things What is the biggest problem What is the next biggest problem What would I change Describe a day Take an average day not a worst one Try to see where the problem ends - at school or at home Are there any triggers what are the patterns of behaviour What doesn't work Sorting it out What usually works? What makes things worse? What makes things better? Dealing with swearing State clearly that you won't accept using that word Use I wherever possible - 'I feel upset when you use that word' In young children point to parts of the body and explain the silliness of words Try and ignore if you are being baited Try to remain laid back and tell them it isn't very clever Teach your child to release tension by hitting a pillow for example Allow the use of almost rude words like 'shoot' or 'smurf' Put limits on it - if you use them with your friends you don't use them here Give a warning and then remove privileges If they are showing off in front of a friend then tell them that their friend will have to go home if they continue Watch your own language!! Different reward ideas Soft rewards tone of voice, appropriate words, eye contact, touch, enthusiasm, noticing genuine interest, be specific with praise Hard rewards time working together, playing together, going out somewhere, Privileges, telephone, computer, friends stay over, Food - treat, dessert, choose, take away or meal out, Money - in a jar, for jobs Cumulative rewards star charts, token system to add up for a treat, points and money.

Bedtime Rituals

Most children love these. They ease the transition between work and sleep and provide a reassuring pattern. A warm bath and a story will help. Make them a habit even if you are tired. You could use your own child's name in the text to make it come alive.

How to get rid of ink stains

For ballpoint pen and ink stains on fabric act quickly. Press a cotton wool pad underneath then dab the mark with with a cotton wool bud dabbed in methylated spirits before washing it. As a last resort use chlorine bleach if the fabric is washable.

What to do if you lose your child.

Teach them a standard routine such 'If you get lost in the street then stand right where we are until we find you. Teach the child that if they get lost in a shop to approach someone with a shop uniform on standing behind a counter. Always warn a child against going off with anyone other than mummy & daddy. Ensure your child's knows their name and address or put it on a bit of paper and put it in a jacket pocket. Practice using a phone box so that your child could phone home. When going to a busy place such as a zoo, agree on a rendezvous in case you child gets lost.

Finding the right day care

Contact your local social services department. By law it has to license all nurseries, day centres and childminders so it will have a list in your area. Visit as many childminders and nurseries as possible. Check the following points: If you are employing a childminder check for two references If you are sending your child to a nursery talk to other parents for feedback. What is the child/staff ratio. It should be one adult to three children up to two years, one adult per four children up to three years and one adult to eight children up to five years. Do they communicate well with the children. Can they control them? Does everyone seem happy? Does the building seem clean & safe? Is it big enough? Is there enough equipment? Is it clean and in good condition? What happens if your child is naughty? What is the children's daily routine? Is there children's work on the walls? What arrangements are there if your child is ill? What are the fees and do they include food and insurance? Is there a registration fee? How much withdrawal notice must you give.

From five to eight - typical behaviour

Total dependence on parents and accepted parents belief without question A magic mind that believes in monsters and ghost where truth and pretence gets blurred Very cuddly with little worry about nudity Open and enjoying helping parents. Cannot keep a secret Too honest - reporting things as they see them Likes rules and tells tales Property is a fuzzy notion - have no idea about the value of money, property and the consequences of petty theft Lives for the present - their world is happening today and cannot really understand the concept of death Have unspoken worries. Can get the wrong end of the stick and worry greatly over non-worries.

From eight to twelve - typical behaviour

Parents have no power. They are fallible and children question their opinions and values They start to be influenced outside the home and follow the herd They start to have a long term view of life and can see themselves as a an adult Competes and compares with other children and worries if they don't match up Loss of innocence of nudity and cuddling Verbally clever and argumentative Start to motivate themselves to do school work Start segregation of sexes.

Why do children behave badly?

Temperament They are volatile They are demanding They are oppositional & argumentative They are introvert They are obsessive They are disorganised They are fearful They are fearless Parenting style Nurturing, encouraging, positive hostile, critical, negative Reaction to stress and uncertainty Little children don't understand what is going on Older children understand & feel common reasons for stress - marriage conflict & separation Employment, moving, money illness, parent depression school stress, bullying learning & social difficulties worries about the

world Attention & Power Withholding attention encourages a behaviour Power play sets limit testing

Babysitters Checklist

What time you will be home Children's bedtimes What TV and snacks are allowed
Whether to answer the door How to answer the telephone Any special instructions
Where things are - nappies, toys, drinks, first aid box How to lock & unlock windows
Telephone numbers Where you can be reached Neighbour Doctor Provisions for the
sitter Soft drinks, snacks Magazines, Cushions TV & radio