





The NSPCC knows that there's so much information for parents out there these days, it's hard to know who to trust. It's like everyone has their own formula for how to bring up children.

The truth is there's no set way to do it. Your child is unique. But it is possible to use a few simple techniques that allow you to feel part of the same team. You'll find out about some of them in this booklet.

**Nicky is shaking.** She takes a deep breath and looks at her son, Connor. Connor is four. His face is red and blotchy from crying and Nicky can clearly see the red mark her hand has left on his face. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," she cries.

Connor clings to his mother's leg – he is upset and frightened.

**How could she lose control like that?** She feels exhausted. Why couldn't he just do as he was told? Nicky tries to calm herself down – she feels hopeless. She doesn't know what to do. She feels so alone.

## Staying in control

Nicky is not alone. Many parents feel helpless and lose control sometimes. Parenting is one of the most challenging jobs we face, however there are things we can do to help us stay calm and in control. Smacking and violence doesn't work – it just makes the adult feel more powerless and makes the child feel bad, worthless and insecure.

Children have the right to be treated in a positive way, with respect and without violence. Respect does work – if we treat our children with respect they are far more likely to respect us.



Children do need rules and boundaries – they help your child feel secure and stop situations from escalating out of control. Try to understand things from a child's point of view and be one step ahead so we can intervene before things get out of hand.

**positive**

**set the  
boundaries**

**Parents**

**Mum and Dad** are talking in the sitting room when Mum is suddenly aware that the kitchen tap is gushing. **Something is wrong!**

They rush to the kitchen to find the chair at the sink. Kyle, three, and Nathan, four, are having a fantastic time! They are both drenched and so are the kitchen cupboards and floor. Water is pouring and spraying everywhere.

“Just look at the mess you’ve made,” roars Dad. “You two are so stupid!”

**“We can’t take our eyes off you for one minute? How could you?”** screams Mum as she drags them both from the chair so forcefully that Kyle slips on the wet floor. She grabs a tea towel and starts to frantically mop at the floor. “Are you actually trying to annoy me? You just never think, never!”

In her frenzy she looks and sees Kyle and Nathan standing lost beside the chair with such frightened expressions on their faces. She stops and understands.

Yes, of course, water is the best thing for budding captains and pirates. Kyle and Nathan had been having so much fun that they didn’t realise how upset Mum and Dad would be. **Children need this kind of explorative and messy play to learn and develop.** Their mum feels sympathy for them and is sorry.

## How children learn

Kyle and Nathan do need their Mum and Dad’s guidance so that they can learn what is right and wrong. Children need these boundaries. It is good to say “no” and show disapproval when a child has done something wrong. Their mum could say:

“I will be very, very cross if you do that in the kitchen because I have to clean up all the mess. The water can drip through the floor to our neighbours. I can understand that you like playing with water but you are only to splash about in the bathtub.”

This is how children learn. If we just shout, scream, smack and verbally abuse our children they feel worthless and powerless but will have learned nothing.

Children learn most things from their parents. If you’re rude to them they will be rude to you, and others. If you hit your daughter just because she’s just whacked her brother, then she will follow your example and hit again.

Kyle and Nathan could learn by helping mum clear up the water in the kitchen. This gives them the opportunity to make amends and earn praise. This strengthens their self-respect and gives them courage for the future. And mum too!



**Positive**

**work as  
a team**

**Parents**

Children understand sentences that begin with “I”. Say clearly what will happen if they carry on with their behaviour and how it makes you feel – then give them the chance to change their behaviour. Gain your child’s readiness to work with you. Have some confidence in them. You are a team, not enemies.

## Smacks don't work

If we smack, or are rude to our children, they feel afraid. Fear makes us stupid and clumsy.

Smacks don't work – if we want our children to grow and to develop a sense of right and wrong they need our calm and encouraging guidance.

Not only this but if a child is brought up with violence they eventually become dulled to the smacks to avoid feeling so hurt. In the end even smacking your child as a last resort will not work!

If you smack your child, he or she will become humiliated and lose their self-esteem. Often children that are treated in this way will feel the need to punish other people to feel big again. Children want to feel valued and praised by their parents. They will go to some lengths to achieve this.

Try to see the positives in your child's behaviour instead of focusing on their mistakes.



## How to avoid those "red" situations

Our children are very close to us and they know how to press our buttons, so arguments can be quite normal. How can we keep some perspective in these situations?

Try to have a plan in place to deal with any potential conflicts. Prevention pays: Everyone should know what the boundaries are. Try to pre-empt difficult situations and suggest ways our children can deal with them.



A photograph of a child's play area, which is cluttered with various toys and items. On a wooden shelf, there are several books, including one titled 'ATLAS OF THE WORLD GEOGRAPHY' and another 'EARLY GARDEN TABLE'. A purple and green toy vacuum cleaner sits on the shelf. Below the shelf, a blue storage bin is visible. In the foreground, there are more toys, including a yellow hard hat, a blue ball, and a pink hula hoop. A box labeled 'Dino Dig' is also visible. The overall scene is busy and filled with children's possessions.

Praise good behaviour and your child will want to repeat it as often as they can. It is OK to tell your child when they have done wrong, but give them the opportunity to correct their mistakes. They will want to win back your appreciation.

**Positive**

**give  
praise**

**Parents**

Without Floppy her cuddly dog, there is no way Lottie will leave the house. Mornings are always a rush. Lottie's brother Jo is desperate to leave for school – he has been ready by the door for ages – he's getting restless and wants to go – and that means now! **“You and your stupid dog!”**

“Leave her alone Jo,” Dad shouts from the kitchen.

Lottie finds Floppy under the bed, heads to the door, and carefully packs the toy into her satchel. Lottie is painfully slow – is she enjoying holding everyone up? **Dad feels his temper rising** – they are going to be late.

“I need the toilet,” whines Lottie.

**Jo is about to explode.** He pushes his sister in frustration. Lottie falls against the bathroom door and starts to scream. **Dad rushes to Jo and slaps him.** “Don't you dare push your sister!” he shouts.

With five bright red marks on his cheek Jo goes quiet. He doesn't say a single word all the way to school.

## Rules help

The morning rush can be a difficult time – but preparation helps things to run more smoothly. Getting up half an hour earlier, setting the breakfast table and collecting school bags, clothing, and indeed, Floppy, can help.

The rules should be clear. The children should know that everyone has to get to school on time. Lottie can take Floppy with her but she has to be ready – if not, Floppy will be left at home!

Rules offer children a sense of direction. They act as signposts that say, “things will be fine this way”. They also help you to stay consistent.

Make simple rules that children can accept and follow like: wellies off in the hallway. We need to put the toys away before we can play another game. Make sure the adults stick to the rules too – children learn by example!

## Which rules?

Decide what rules are really important to you and then make a list – it will help you all to remember what the expectations are. Just be aware of what you can ask of her. A baby does not know she shouldn't pull the lovely chain round mummy's neck, but a four-year-old is quite capable of saying thank you when someone gives her pudding.

Children learn by seeing the consequences of their behaviour: if you annoy your brother he won't play with you anymore. If you won't walk sensibly holding mummy's hand then you will have to be carried or go in the pushchair.



Positive

A blue and yellow backpack is shown from the back, resting on a wooden floor. The backpack has a yellow interior and blue straps. In the background, there is a doorway leading to a brick wall and a grey trash can.

# Positive are consistent Parents

If you are consistent about the little things you will be more able to win the bigger battles. Reasonable consequences help your children to stick to the rules.

**Lewis** has been asked three times to come and sit at the table for dinner. He carries on playing peacefully. “For the last time!” Mum says. It’s really so exhausting!

Eventually he comes. A whine goes up: “I don’t like broccoli”. “Oh come on Lewis, give it a try,” says Mum. **Mum has had a stressful day** – she really doesn’t feel like another battle this evening.

“Ketchup please,” he demands.

“Do you have to? You know that it’s not good for you!”

Lewis pushes his plate away and refuses to eat. **Mum can feel her anger and exhaustion growing inside her.** Lewis asks for chips and gets them. Before he can eat anything and before Mum can stop herself, she screams at him with desperation.

## Positive attention

When children play up it is often because they are seeking attention. Since Lewis’ mum has started a new job she often comes home feeling stressed and exhausted.

Lewis has learned that he can get mum’s attention by ignoring what she says and by whining and grumbling. Although the attention he receives is not good it is certainly better than not being noticed at all.

If a child gets attention by complaining, whining and crying they will continue to behave in this way. Children are always aware when our attentions are elsewhere.

But by giving a child your full attention at regular intervals they will be happier to amuse themselves when you do need to get on with the washing. It doesn’t have to be for very long, but “now I’m all yours” is what counts.

Parents often forget to give their children attention when they are behaving well. You will be able to catch your child doing something right many times every day. Praise them for this. This encourages them to try even harder.

## Look after yourself

More often than we would like to admit the reasons for our bad temper don’t lie with our children but within ourselves. When other things are proving difficult, the smallest thing is enough to make us crack.

You can only care for others if you can look after yourself. You matter too! This can be especially hard if you’re worried about something at work, if you’re having to cope with separation, in financial difficulties, living in poor accommodation, struggling with accidents, ill health or other problems.

If that’s the case, asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a responsible step towards changing a difficult situation.

Recognise when you need advice, help and practical support. Undivided, positive attention is the biggest gift that you can give to your child.



## Helpful hints

The respect and care that we show to our children are the only guarantees that they will also show us respect and care. Here are some tips to help keep your positive parenting on track.

## Start small, but start today

The climate in a family can be changed and usually it's easier than it seems.

Take it gradually – week by week – one new point at time.

Give praise and focus on the good aspects of your life together.

Make time every day when you are there for each other and you can give positive attention.

## Small steps bring big results

Make sure your child has understood what is being asked of them.

Ask his opinion about things and treat their suggestions seriously. Work as a team.

Try not to shout at your child from another room. Go to where your child is. Get down to your child's level: keep eye contact and put your hand on their shoulder to get their attention.

Find the important words: a message must be short, clear and simple for a child to make sense of it. "Please do" works better than "please stop doing".

## React promptly and positively

Overlook mildly annoying behaviour with humour and tact.

Support your child's self-esteem, don't put them down.

Trust them. Encourage them and keep the really strict "no-no's" for the most important situations.

In conflict, maintain contact with your child. Try not to fight. Give guidance.

## Keep on reflecting

Allow your child to learn from their mistakes as you can learn from yours.

Good parents make mistakes: it's a good thing that parents aren't perfect. Just think how difficult it would be for our children if parents never made a mistake.

It is how we deal with them that is important. We say sorry, we reflect why it happened and we are ready to change. This gives you and your children strength and courage.



start small,  
but start  
today  
**Parents**

**Positive**

react  
promptly and  
positively

**Parents**

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**Positive**

small steps  
bring big  
results

## Help is always at hand

Remember if you need to talk about your child, or any other, there are people who can help you.

## Local sources of support

If times are tough, you can always talk to your GP or health visitor. They are trained to help, and know about other local services available to you.

## The NSPCC

### NSPCC parenting pack

*Our leaflets can help your parenting and keep your child safe.*

### NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

0808 800 5000

**Textphone** 0800 056 0566

**Email** [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

*Provides free, 24-hour confidential help and advice, seven days a week.*

### NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline

*Provides a culturally sensitive service in five Asian languages and English.*

**Bengali/Sylehti** 0800 096 7714

**Gujarati** 0800 096 7715

**Hindi** 0800 096 7716

**Punjabi** 0800 096 7717

**Urdu** 0800 096 7718

**English** 0800 096 7719

**Email** [helpline.asian@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:helpline.asian@nspcc.org.uk)

### NSPCC Cymru/Wales Child Protection

**Helpline** 0808 100 2524

**Textphone** 0808 100 1033

**Email** [helplinecymru@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:helplinecymru@nspcc.org.uk)

*Provides bilingual support from Monday to Friday, between 10am-6pm. Calls at other times transfer to the English-speaking Child Protection Helpline.*

### Your Family

*The free magazine for positive parents everywhere, available from the Early Learning Centre.*

### Visit our website

Find the advice you need at:  
[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

## Other helplines

### Parentline Plus (England and Wales)

0808 800 2222

### Parentline Northern Ireland

1890 927 277

### ParentLine Scotland 0808 800 2222

*Parentline provides free, confidential advice for any parent at any time.*

### Parents Advice Centre (Northern Ireland) 0808 808 3555

### Contact a Family 0808 808 3555

*A free helpline for parents of disabled children, open from 10am-4pm Monday to Friday, and 5.30-7.30pm on Monday evenings.*

# Dear parents

We hope that you found the attached letter on positive parenting useful. We are interested in your feedback and would appreciate it if you could take 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire below.

By returning this questionnaire you automatically enter a raffle and could win a £100 voucher/ Early Learning Centre vouchers.

Please fill out and return the questionnaire to **Kerstin Goodall, NSPCC, 21 The Avenue, Southampton SO17 1XL by 31 July 2008.** Alternatively you can fill out the questionnaire online through the following link: **(insert here)**

You do not have to give your name and address. Any information you give in this questionnaire will be treated confidentially.

Questionnaire

## 1. Did the letter highlight the advantages of positive parenting for you?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

*Please feel free to tell us what in particular convinced you of the advantages of positive parenting:*

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## 2. Did the letter contain useful advice on how to handle real life conflict situations?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

*Have you tried to apply any of the tips in the letter? If so, what was your experience?*

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## 3. Did the letter help you to better understand why children sometimes display challenging behaviours?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

## 4. Did the letter offer you guidance on where to get further help and information on positive parenting?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

## 5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It's not possible to raise children without smacking"?

- I agree
- I agree in some cases
- I don't agree

*Please feel free to tell us why you agree, disagree or partially agree:*

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## 6. Has the letter changed your attitude towards smacking?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

*Please feel free to tell us why the letter has or has not changed your opinion on smacking:*

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## 7. Has the letter changed your relationship with your child?

- Yes
- To some extent
- No

*Please feel free to tell us why the letter has or has not changed your opinion on smacking:*

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## 8. Which information in the letter did you find most useful? Please rate (5 being "very important" and 1 "not important at all"):

Impact of smacking on children

- 1     2     3     4     5

What to do when a situation escalates

- 1     2     3     4     5

Importance of communication within the family

- 1     2     3     4     5

Examples of real life situations?

- 1     2     3     4     5

Addresses of counselling centres and support services

- 1     2     3     4     5

Information on the rights of the child to non-violence

- 1     2     3     4     5

## 9. Please feel free to submit your feedback on the letter, i.e. particular issues which you feel were not sufficiently addressed.

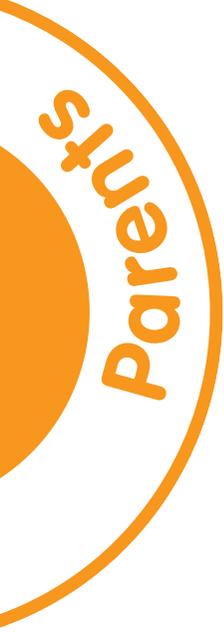
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## 10. Into which age group does your child/ children fall?

- Up to 3 years
- 4 – 8 years
- 9 years or older
- Not applicable

**Thank you for your time!**



Please return this form to:

**Positive parents**

Make for positive families

Kerstin Goodall

NSPCC

21 The Avenue

Southampton

SO17 1XL

