

Top 9 Ways to be an Even Better Parent

Every child is unique, with unique DNA, unique fingerprints, a unique personality, and a unique path to adulthood. Although you can't smooth all the bumps, anticipate all the challenges, or defuse all the bombs your children will encounter along the way, you can make their journeys and their lives as adults a little bit easier and much healthier!

1. Get Stuck in a Rut

Children thrive on routines. Rituals and routines provide them with a sense of identity, stability, and consistency as they strive to figure out their roles, relationships, responsibilities, and even their own personalities. Routines also help them understand the importance of setting limits. Involve your children in organizing your family's daily schedule, such as setting regular times for meals, homework, cleanup, leisure time, and bedtime.

2. Gross Them Out

How the human body functions is often a mystery to kids. Take time to explain how the body works when it's healthy and what happens when it breaks down. For example, explain the short-term and long-term effects of taking care of their health and of overindulging or neglecting it. By providing kids with this information, they'll be more aware of the specific benefits and consequences their actions have on their bodies.

RealAge Projection: Learning to be proactive about health issues will benefit kids indefinitely. If they keep it up in adulthood, at 50 they could look and feel closer to 38.

3. Question Them

Parents play an essential role in building their children's communication skills. That's why it's important to ask plenty of questions and listen with interest, attention, and patience. It often takes kids longer than adults to express themselves. Skip the yes or no questions. Ask questions that require explanation or description. Listen for details that may be missing and ask for clarification. This allows you to keep tabs on what your kids are thinking, feeling, and doing, which is crucial in keeping them safe, healthy, and out of trouble.

4. Show Off

Children learn by observing and imitating behavior, especially yours. Be a day-to-day example of how you want your child to behave. Studies show that parents with the healthiest lifestyles raise the healthiest children who in turn grow up to be healthier adults.

5. Crack Them Up

Life can get crazy and stressful for kids; laughing can help them cope. Encourage generous amounts of giggling and silliness in your home, and help kids see the humor in everyday events and mishaps. This will help them learn to put things in perspective and better handle the constant stresses of daily life. Laughter will be medicine that kids can carry with them for years to come.

6. Bond with Them

Almost all interactions in a child's life are influenced by family relationships. Kids who have close connections with parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives are more likely to initiate social interaction with other kids and with other adults, and are likely to be more confident in all relationships. Also, kids with positive family relationships generally struggle less with depression and peer pressure and have higher self-esteem.

RealAge Projection: Kids who have close connections with family and friends generally struggle less with emotional issues. And as adults, these social ties can help them look and feel almost 4 years younger. Imagine that . . . your child, 40 years old but feeling 36.

7. Chase Them

Regular physical activity develops and strengthens children's bodies and brains. Plus, it's the best way to prevent weight gain and potentially fatal diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Encourage your kids to be active by regularly engaging them in games and activities that get the blood pumping. Chase them -- and let them chase you -- around the yard in a game of tag. Play toss, kickball, or hide-and-seek. Take hikes together in the woods or around the neighborhood.

RealAge Projection: Kids who learn to love being active when they're young are likely to stick with this healthy habit when they're adults. And if they do keep it up -- getting a good mix of aerobic, strength, and flexibility exercise -- at 35 their RealAge will actually be 27.

8. Remind Them

Although no parent wants to be a nag, kids need guidance and gentle reminders about rules, limits, and appropriate behaviors. Steering kids toward healthy habits, and reinforcing those habits along the way, will teach them the principles of moderation, discretion, consistency, and self-discipline. Over time, and with your help, kids will develop their own sense of self-control and self-regulation, which will allow them to set healthy limits for themselves.

9. Put Them to Work

Research shows that involving kids in chores and projects around the house is one of the best ways to build self-esteem and help kids feel competent. Doing so lets them know that you believe they're capable of handling important tasks, which is an incredibly powerful message for kids. Children who grow up perceiving chores as a normal part of life are more likely to complete their education, get a good start on a career, develop successful relationships, and avoid risky behaviors.

These 9 ways to be a better parent may sound simple, but research shows that, when combined, they can help your sons and daughters grow in body, mind, and spirit. With RealAge Parenting, you'll find that the child you are raising is even stronger, healthier, and happier than you could have imagined.

August, 2009

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