Helping to Teach Your Child How to Behave

Learning how to handle emotions is a very important skill – and one that is often difficult for children and adults! While it may seem obvious to YOU what behavior is and is not OK, it is NOT obvious to your child and has to be taught. Below are some important strategies to begin to teach your children about emotion regulation.

Plan

Your child's job is to explore and experiment, touch and taste. As the parent, it's your job to organize your child's environment and activities in a way that avoids problems. Allow your child to be as free to learn as possible, in surroundings that are safe.

Listen

When your child is upset, agitated, or unsettled, it's important that you take a minute to figure out what may be causing it. Remember, your child has strong feelings, but doesn't yet have a good way of communicating them to you

Model

You are your child's teachers. It is up to you to model the type of behaviors you want by using appropriate words, tone of voice, and actions. They are learning from your example.

Guide

Teach your child the behaviors you want him or her to do (positive opposites, for example, "don't run" is "walking feet please"). Ignore the behaviors you don't want them to do, unless they are aggressive or dangerous.

Structure

Your child will do best when they have dependable routines and structure to their day (for example, feeding, napping, reading, and play routines).

Limit

Establish clear and simple rules (for example, "we don't hit,") and expectations ("please keep your food on the table."), and stay calm during frustrating moments.

Respond

When you see your child getting upset, frustrated or angry, help them to understand and define their feelings (for example, "I see you're feeling frustrated because you can't get the puzzle piece to fit, here let me help you." Respond quickly, firmly and calmly.

Repair

Always acknowledge the feelings your child is having and then work to distract and/or comfort them to resolve the issue.