



# Points for Parents

## A Guide for Families on Promoting Social and Emotional Development

*From the "For Now and Forever" DECA Program, The Devereux Foundation, Villanova, PA*

- Read with your child every day.
- Help your child recognize and learn acceptable ways to express a range of feelings
  - Teach you child about your family and culture.
  - Enjoy your child's company.
  - Use positive strategies to guide your child's behavior.
    - Accept your child as a unique person.
  - Encourage your child to be both independent and cooperative.

### 1. **Read with your child every day so she will . . .**

- learn to understand herself and others
- think of reading as a pleasant activity
- become a life-long learner.
- **Read at a special time every day.** Make this a promise to yourself and to your child. Sharing a daily story time is as important as making sure she brushes her teeth. Research shows that reading aloud to young children is one of the best ways to help them get ready to become life-long readers and writers.
- **Provide a variety of books.** Look for books that match your child's age and interests. Store books in places where he can reach them. He will be able to choose books for you to read and look at books on his own.
- **Read at different times and places.** Read after breakfast, while waiting for the bus, at the park, at bath time, and at bedtime. Your child will learn that you think reading is an important and enjoyable part of her life and yours.
- **Read about the familiar and the new.** Your child will be comforted by familiar stories. He will be stimulated by books that introduce new people, places, ideas, and worlds he doesn't yet know about.
- **Look for books about a child like yours.** When your child sees herself in the pictures, she can identify with the character's experiences. Ask questions to help her think about what might happen next and what she might do in a similar situation. "Where do you think Max is sailing?" "What would you do if you met those monsters?"

2. **Help your child recognize and learn acceptable ways to express a range of feelings so he will . . .**

- learn it's okay to have positive and negative feelings
- recognize and understand other people's feelings
- gain self-control.
- **Talk about your own positive and negative feelings.** When you're in a good mood, say, "I am happy because it is a sunny day and we are going to the zoo. "When you are upset, say, "I am disappointed because it's raining and we can't go to the zoo." Over time, your child will come to understand his own feelings.
- **Teach your child the words used to name feelings.** Introduce words such as happy, sad, frustrated, angry, excited, and so on. Say, "I think you feel sad because your toy broke." Children need to recognize their feelings before they can learn to express them in appropriate ways.
- **Listen when your child shares his strong feelings.** When your child fusses at bedtime, say, "You seem to feel angry because it's time to go to bed. You want to stay up and play some more." This tells her that you understand her feelings – even though she must still go to bed. When a child knows she has been heard, she is more likely to cooperate and do as you ask.
- **Help your child learn how to relax and calm himself.** When he is overly excited about something, say, "Your face is red. You must be very excited. Take some deep breaths. That will help you relax." When children know how to calm themselves, they are less likely to be impulsive and more likely to think before acting.

3. **Teach you child about your family and culture so she will . . .**

- learn what values are important to your family
- build a sense of self
- begin to understand and appreciate other cultures.
- **Help your child feel like a valued, important member of the family.** Tell family stories about yourself and about her. "On the day you were born . . ." Tell her what she has in common with other family members. "Uncle Rodney loves camping, just like you do." When children feel like they belong, they can build a sense of self – which is the foundation for self-esteem.
- **Establish family rituals.** Use them every day and for special occasions. One family might set the stage for a wonderful day by having breakfast together every morning. Another family might march together in the annual Fourth of July parade. Children feel secure when life is ordered and predictable. Security lets them feel sage enough to explore and learn new things.

- **Teach your family values as they came up in daily life.** When you pick up groceries for an older neighbor, talk about why it's important to help other. When your child wants to watch a television show that you think is too violent, say, "I don't want you to be scared" or "I don't want you to think it's okay to hurt others." She may not understand exactly what you mean, but she will learn what you think is important.
- **Do things with other families.** Attend family events at the center, participate in a community garden, have a neighborhood cookout, and invite families to your celebrations. Your child will get to know and value all kinds of people – those just like him and those with different values and practices.

#### 4. **Enjoy your child's company so he will . . . .**

- learn to feel good about himself
- learn to express love, affection, and the joy of life
- see you as a role model.
- **Give your child real, important jobs as you work together.** For example, while cooking dinner she could make hamburger patties; when tidying the house she could put away her toys; or while feeding the dog she could put clean water in his bowl. Your child will feel good about herself when she sees how many things she can do.
- **Have fun when you go places together.** Take turns pushing each other on the swings at the park; talk about favorite foods at the grocery store; or look for special books at the library. You and your child will create pleasant memories and he will learn that you are a source of guidance and love.
- **Spend time with your child every day.** Try these tips:
  - 1) Read a book.
  - 2) Hug and be hugged.
  - 3) Talk about anything and everything.
  - 4) Listen to and share ideas and feelings.
  - 5) Model positive behaviors.
  - 6) Accept your child as is.
  - 7) Appreciate your child's special traits.
  - 8) Play and have fun together.
  - 9) Learn something new.
  - 10) Love, unconditionally.
- **Ask for your child's help.** She can pass you tools while you repair a leaky faucet; look through seed catalogues for your garden; or hold the door so you can push her baby sister's stroller. She will learn that people can work together to get things done. She will feel good about herself because you needed her help and she provided it.

5. Use positive strategies to guide your child's behavior so she will . . .
- learn what is and is not appropriate behavior
  - develop self-discipline
  - blossom and be successful.
  - **Learn about child development.** It's important to know what most young children of a certain age can do and what skills they are still developing. For example, young children find it hard to sit still for long because the large muscles in their arms and legs are growing quickly. If you know your child needs to move her body, you can let her leave the table if the grownups' after-dinner conversations go on too long. When your expectations are reasonable and appropriate, she can meet them and feel successful.
  - **Prevent behavior problems.** Think about how your child usually responds in different situations. For example, if he is afraid of the dark, pack a flashlight to use when he spends the night at his cousin's house. This strategy allows him to behave well and feel good about his abilities.
  - **Use a variety of positive guidance strategies.** Choose strategies that fit your child and the situation. For example:
    - 1) **Offer an acceptable alternative:** Let your active child jump on an old sofa cushion instead of on her bed. This recognizes and meets her need to move, while keeping her safe and teaching her to take care of her belongings.
    - 2) **Prevent potential problems:** Help your child put away his favorite toys before a friend comes to play if he isn't developmentally ready to share them. This tells him that you respect his feelings and want him to have fun with his friend.
  - **Explain what to do:** Use positive statements to tell your child how to behave. "Draw on your paper." "Touch the baby gently." At times, children misbehave because they don't know what they are supposed to do. When you tell them what **to do** rather than what not to do, they learn what behaviors are appropriate.
  - **Gain control of your own anger:** Sometimes children's behavior makes us angry. Calm down before responding to your child. When you regain control, talk with your child about what he did and/or said, why you can't allow him to behave in this way, and how he might behave in the future.
  - **Teach problem solving skills:** Talk out loud as you describe a problem and possible solutions. Note the pros and cons of each one. Explain why you chose one solution over another. When your child has a problem, teach him how to use a similar process. He will gain independence, self-control, and confidence by solving a problem on his own.

6. Accept your child as a unique person so he will . . .
- grow and develop at his own role without being compared to other
  - explore his special interests and talents
  - appreciate himself and others.
  - **Use effective praise.** This kind of praise describes your child’s words and actions and tells her what happened as a result. “You put your dirty clothes in the hamper. Now you have room to play.” This helps her appreciate her efforts and successes and encourages her to continue using positive behaviors.
  - **Give just enough help to let your child progress at his own pace.**
    - 1) **Let her know you are available.** Amber says, “I can tie my shoes,” Grandma responds, “I didn’t now that.” “Well almost,” says Amber. “I can loop them, but then I might need help.” “Okay,” says Grandma, “I’ll be here if you need me.”
    - 2) **Ask questions that help him think.** Jack says, “This puzzle piece won’t fit.” His father responds, “What does it look like?” Jack says, “It’s mostly red.” “What colors are the pieces around it?” his dad asks. “They’re blue. I get it, it won’t fit ‘cause it’s the wrong piece.”
    - 3) **Comment and ask questions to help her evaluate potential solutions.** Jan says, “I’ll tell Luke I’ll be mad if he won’t play.” Her mom replies, “What do you think he will do?” Jan says, “He’ll say, ‘Okay, let’s play.’” Her mom says, “Luke has a lot of homework.” Jan thinks some more, “I’ll say, ‘Please play with me when you’re done.’”
  - **Support special interests and talents.** Get books from the library, provide space where she can be messy, and give her your time and interest. Encourage her efforts by displaying paintings, listening and talking, and asking questions.
  - **Let your child take the lead during frequent conversations.** Listen to his ideas, share your reactions, then listen to his response. Add new information to keep the conversation going and expand your child’s thinking.
 

Mickey: “We made bread today. I squooshed it in my hands.”  
 Dad: “That sounds like fun.”  
 Mickey: “It was great. Can we make bread at home?”  
 Dad: “I’d like that. What kind could we make?”  
 Mickey: “The kind that looks like Stacey’s hair.”  
 Dad: “That’s called braided bread.”  
 Mickey: “Yeah, my teacher said that – braided.”  
 Dad: “After dinner we can look for a recipe.”

7. Encourage your child to be both independent and cooperative so he will . . .
- balance his own needs with those of others
  - set goals and work towards them
  - play, learn, and live with others.
  - **Set up your home so things your child needs are within reach.** Here are some examples:
    - 1) Store unbreakable cups in a low cupboard and a small pitcher of juice in the refrigerator so she can get a drink when she's thirsty.
    - 2) Hang low hooks on a door or wall so he can hang up his coat and the tote bag he takes to the center.
    - 3) Keep a stool in the bathroom so she can wash her hands and brush her teeth.
  - **Model cooperation with other family members.** Have a family chore day when everyone helps to get the house and/or yard in order. Divide task into steps so your child can make a meaningful contribution to the group effort.
  - **Set and communicate clear limits while supporting your child's needs.** Limits give your child security, but he also needs to explore, experiment, and be creative. Here are some examples:
    - 1) Jessie loves listening to music. His father made some tapes of Jessie's favorites. He said, "You can play these tapes as much as you like on your tape player. Please leave my tapes and CDs alone."
    - 2) Katy likes all kinds of physical play. Her mother takes her to the playground as often as she can. She says, "At the playground, you can run, jump, and climb. At home we both get our "wiggles" out by watching my exercise tapes."
  - **Help your child set and achieve goals.** When he wants to take on a new challenge, be supportive and encouraging. Help him divide the task into steps he can accomplish one by one. "You filled the pot with dirt. The next step is to plant the seeds." Let him decide when something is too difficult or no longer of interest. "Would you like to plant the marigolds outdoors when the sun and rain will take care of them?"
  - **Take turns during activities with your child.** Play lotto and simple card games that involve taking turns. Take turns during conversations. Take turns being the person to choose where to go on a family outing or when doing chores. "I vacuumed last time. It's your turn to vacuum today."