



Parenting for Veterans Tip Sheet Booklet



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Communication Self-Check

Before you start focusing on increasing positive communications with your family, consider doing a communication self-check. Sometimes the quickest way to improve our relationships with others is to look to ourselves.

Check your communication style

Talking with your children and spouse is different than talking with your buddies or military members. Home-front communication, such as being patient, willing to listen, and finding appropriate compromises, will lead to many positive interactions with your family. You'll know you are on the right track when you have conversations with your children rather than only giving orders!

Check your stress level

If you're feeling overwhelmed and stressed out for any reason, staying positive with your children can be a challenge. Are you distressed about a deployment or worried about finances? Assess your stress level, and then find positive ways to manage your stress. As you take positive actions to deal with difficulties in your life, patience with your children will likely be easier to find.

Check your expectations for your children

If you expect your 5 year-old to agree that cookies before dinner are generally not a good idea, you will likely not have a positive conversation with her. The better you understand how your 5 year-old daughter or 15 year-old son thinks and communicates, the better your interactions will go. If you have been gone, or just a bit out of touch, check to be sure your expectations are realistic for your age child.



Essential Communication Strategies

Most parents already practice good communication skills with their children. Try out any of the following ideas to promote even *more* positive interactions with your family:

Practice active listening skills

- Put down your phone.
- Turn off the TV.
- Put aside your “to do” list.
- Take a few deep breaths.
- Turn off any worries or stressful thoughts.
- Turn your body toward him.
- Look her in the eye.
- Smile.
- Ask her to tell you more.
- Ask a few questions about what he just said.
- Practice.

Notice the positives

- Say “thank you” when he does as you ask.
- Compliment some small skill she demonstrates.
- Notice when he doesn’t do that thing you hate.
- Tell her exactly what you appreciate about a specific behavior.
- Notice when he is being quiet as you asked.
- Say positive words to her more often than criticism or negative words.

Find ways to express your love

- Ask if you can play a game with him.
- Listen to her.
- Ask her opinion about something that matters.
- Sit down and watch TV together.
- Text him.
- Ask about their day.
- Give her a hug.
- Notice something positive she did.
- Ask him to do something with you.
- Use your time and attention to show your love.
- Say “I love you.”

Support your child through setbacks

- Use mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Provide comfort and guidance.
- Reassure him that together you can get through this setback.
- Offer your help.
- Help him consider other perspectives.
- Try not to judge.
- Express your confidence that she can manage this difficulty.



Infant Development Stage

Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.

Please note: Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Birth – 1 Month	1 – 4 Months
Moves head from side to side	Grasps objects with fingers
Sees objects up to 10 – 12 inches away	Lifts head for short periods of time
	Smiles more in responding to you

4 – 6 Months	6 – 12 Months
Visually recognizes people from a distance	Moves objects from one hand to the other
Recognizes voices and sounds	Rolls over in both directions
Shows interest in — new things, such as new colors, shapes, and sounds	Sits on own
Sits with some support	Can stand and may do some walking
	Crawls

SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Before 6 Months	6 – 12 Months
Identified familiar adults	Recognizes him/herself in a mirror
Recognizes his/her parents	Responds to his/her name
Shows basic emotions like happiness, sadness, or anger	Prefers known caregivers
Explores objects with the mouth and hands	Uses hand to communicate
Calms down when comforted	Understands simple language (and may say first words)
	Imitates others and enjoys positive responses

Citation: Sherman, M.D., Bowling, U., & Anderson, J., & Wyche, K. (2011). Veteran Parenting Toolkit. South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Oklahoma City, OK. www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting



Toddler Development Stage

Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.

Please note: Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

Physical Development

Toddlers are going through unique physical changes, and you will see them acquire many new skills during this period, such as the ability to:

- Show curiosity about their body parts and ask questions about them (don’t be afraid to answer)
- Walk (forward and backward, run, and jump)
- Climb up and down stairs (one foot at a time for quite a while)
- Pedal a tricycle (by the end of the toddler years)
- Kick a ball and throw a toy (most likely not overhand)
- Feed themselves and drink from a cup (but expect accidental spills)
- Turn pages in a picture book
- Begin to develop hand and foot preference

Your child is not just growing bigger and stronger. Toddlers are learning about the world and the people in it. By interacting with your child and providing a healthy home environment, you are helping your child learn. Consider the many new skills your toddler develops during this time period:

Emotions

- Display new feelings: pride, love, jealousy, shame, and doubt
- Can get frustrated easily but prefer to do things without help
- May have rapid and frequent mood swings from happy to sad, and back to happy again, sometimes over seemingly minor triggers
- Tend to see things only from their own point of view

Speech

- Learn many new words
- Understand more words than they can actually speak
- Put two- to three-word sentences together by around age 2
- Imitate sounds or words and memorize short sayings, songs, rhymes, or sections from books



Play

- Enjoy playing near other children but not necessarily with other children (usually not too good at sharing)
- Use imagination during games (your child can become confused about what is real and not real)
- Engage in pretend play with simple themes
- Enjoy doing the same thing over and over again during play, such as singing the same song and reading the same book
- Start to understand basic rules and directions and respond to simple rewards and consequences

Interacting with Parents/Adults

- Show independence by saying — NO to parents, or doing the opposite of what the parent asks
- Want to help and imitate adults

Behaviors

- Physically identify what they want and enjoy having choices
- Desire predictable routines, such as bedtime routines
- Start being interested in toilet training (but this is often not accomplished until 3-4 years old)
- Throw tantrums (this is a normal part of development!)

A note about boys and girls: Although every child is unique, in general boys and girls develop at different rates. You may notice differences between your children, and understanding these gender differences can be useful. For example:

- Girls usually develop the skills and abilities described in this section slightly before/earlier than boys.
- Boys are generally more active and aggressive than girls. They are more willing to take risks and explore new things.
- Girls tend to use words and speak more than boys.

Citation: Sherman, M.D., Bowling, U., & Anderson, J., & Wyche, K. (2011). Veteran Parenting Toolkit. South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Oklahoma City, OK. www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting



Preschooler Development Stage

Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.

Please note: Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

Physical Development

Many physical changes take place during the preschool years. Preschoolers blossom physically and develop new physical skills, such as being able to:

- Run, skip, gallop, and jump on one foot
- Throw a ball overhand and with some control
- Ride a tricycle and later a bike with training wheels
- Do more daily tasks on their own, such as getting dressed, brushing their teeth, and picking up their rooms (but they still need help from adults)

Preschoolers are also learning about the world and people in it. By interacting with your child and providing a healthy environment, you are helping him/her learn and develop important social skills. During this time, preschoolers tend to:

Emotions

- Become more independent and like to make their own decisions
- Have rapid and frequent mood swings from happy to sad, and back to happy again, sometimes over seemingly minor events
- Display and communicate a wide range of emotions, including pride, love, jealousy, shame, and doubt
- Get frustrated easily, but prefer to do things without help
- Want recognition for success and accomplishments
- Develop fears (especially as their imaginations develop)
- Respond well to praise and encouragement from parents and teachers (such as stickers, treats, special time together)
- Develop a sense of humor

Speech

- Learn many new words; children enter the preschool years knowing 900-1000 words, and this can increase to 4,000 - 5,000 words before they enter kindergarten
- Talk a lot!
- Speak in 4 to 6-word sentences, up to 9-word sentences by kindergarten
- Imitate sounds or words, and memorize short sayings, songs, and rhymes
- Talk to themselves when playing



Play

- Love to play, play, play
- Can play for short periods of time alone, but really enjoy playing with adults and other children
- Play next to children and begin to play with other children; sharing is a developing skill that improves with age
- May enjoy physical play with adults and other kids, such as chasing, wrestling, and climbing, and can show some aggression (while this is to be expected, do not allow violent or hurtful behaviors towards others)
- Engage in pretend play with simple themes
- Imitate adult activities through play, such as mowing the grass, putting on make-up, and repeating words or phrases said by adults
- Enjoy doing the same thing over and over again in play, like singing the same song and reading the same book
- Start to understand basic rules and directions; respond to simple rewards and consequences

Interacting with Parents/Adults

- Enjoy having thoughtful conversations
- Understand rules but follow the rules mainly because of consistent rewards and consequences
- Have a lot of questions; will often ask how, what, why questions
- Show independence by saying “NO!” or doing the opposite of what the parent asks
- Want to help and imitate adults; want to be part of household activities and can be very helpful with small tasks

Learning

- Can identify colors and shapes
- Can say ABCs and begin to identify letters and sounds
- Understand numbers, can count to 10, and understand concepts of quantity (more, less, etc.)
- Begin to understand distance, location, and time as they grow older
- Begin to write letters and their name, and draw simple shapes



A note about boys and girls: Although every child is unique, in general boys and girls develop at different rates. You may notice differences between your children, and understanding these gender differences can be useful. For example:

- Girls usually develop the skills and abilities described in this section slightly before/earlier than boys.
- Girls tend to develop verbal skills slightly faster than boys.
- Boys are generally more active, physical, and willing to risks and explore new things.
- At this age, girls and boys begin to recognize gender differences and may show preferences for common gender-related activities.
- Girls' play often involves imitating nurturing skills (such as playing with dolls), while boys' play can be more physical and aggressive (such as playing with trucks or cars). Even at this young age, children are starting to conform to gender roles. However, it is completely normal for boys to play with dolls and girls to play with trucks.
- Children tend to prefer to play with other kids of the same gender.

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School-Aged Children Development Stage

Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.

Please note: Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

Physical Development

- Children love physical activity, such as climbing, jumping, and running.
- Around ages 6-7, baby teeth begin to fall out, and adult teeth replace them.
- Kids often enjoy hobbies that improve their fine motor skills (such as sewing, building models, or creating art) and gross motor skills (balancing, riding a bike on two wheels).
- Children grow more slowly compared with earlier years (but later school-age years may include the beginning of puberty, which brings many changes).

Emotional/Social

- School-age children typically develop skills for coping with strong emotions, but need help and comfort from parents or other caretakers when feeling very sad or upset.
- Kids start to play further away from parents (in a different room or at a friend’s house). Other kids become more important, but parents are still extremely important.
- In the school setting, children may start to face issues of teasing, bullying and even rejection by other kids. Parents can help their children learn social skills by supporting them in responding to these issues in an appropriate manner.
- Playtime is the backbone of childhood development, as kids learn social norms, develop self-esteem, and begin to understand the world around them. School-age children often enjoy competition (with adults and kids) in games and sports.
- During the school years, children tend to play with friends of the same gender. When they become teenagers, opposite-sex friendships become more common and important.

Cognitive (Mental Ability)

- School-age children’s understanding of the world becomes much more complex than before and they start to define a unique sense of “self” that is different from that of other kids.
- The attention span of young school-age kids is about 15 to 20 minutes. This grows as they approach adolescence, to being able to pay attention for about one hour per activity.
- Math and reading skills develop a great deal during school, and children improve their abilities to describe their thoughts and feelings through writing and speaking.



- As children grow, they shift from simply following the rules to thinking matters through with logic. You will notice that they may ask you challenging questions (such as “Why?” and “Why not?”). Be reassured that they are not always trying to challenge you, but are exploring and practicing their abstract thinking.
- Most school-age children can remember and follow three-part directions (such as “Come downstairs, wash your hands, and come to the dinner table.”) The complexity of directions can increase (slowly) as kids grow. Children who are slower to develop or who have attention difficulties may need shorter directions given to them step-by-step.

A note about boys and girls: Although every child is unique, in general boys and girls develop at different rates. You may notice differences between your children, and understanding these gender differences can be useful. For example:

Girls tend to show signs of puberty before boys. Be prepared to answer your child’s questions related to body differences, development, and sexuality during elementary school. You may find some of the books listed in the resource section in the back of this booklet helpful for discussing puberty and sex education with your child. It’s important for you to be open to talking about these issues throughout your child’s development, and to take your child’s questions seriously. Open communication now will lay the groundwork for continued discussions as your child grows and matures.

Citation: Sherman, M.D., Bowling, U., & Anderson, J., & Wyche, K. (2011). Veteran Parenting Toolkit. South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Oklahoma City, OK. www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting

Teenage Development

Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.

Please note: Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

Physical Development

- For girls, puberty spans ages 10-11 yrs to 16yrs. For boys, puberty spans ages 11-12 yrs to 17 yrs.
- Physical changes in girls include: an increase in body fat, development of breasts, and widening of the hips. The average age for girls to get their first menstrual period is 12 yrs.
- Common changes in boys include deepening of the voice and increased muscle mass.
- Hormonal changes in both girls and boys cause the development of body hair and more body oils (which may cause acne and body odor).
- All teens have noticeable changes in their genitals. It’s important for parents to discuss these changes in an appropriate manner.

Emotional/Social

- Teens start to develop meaningful relationships, such as close friendships and dating relationships. These relationships may be filled with ups and downs and a bit of drama.
- Teens spend much of their time with friends, and peer pressure can become a strong influence. The new found independence that comes with having a driver’s license gives teens even more ability to spend time with their friends. Although many parents report that their teens are never home, teenagers report that their parents are still very important to them.
- Teens are learning how to become adults, and they experiment with new behaviors which may include drinking alcohol, trying drugs, smoking, and/or being sexual. Maintaining open dialogue between teens and parents can help young people make healthy choices.
- In figuring out their sense of self, teens often push the limits and test boundaries, which can cause tension and conflict in their relationships with their parents.
- Shifting and strong hormones may result in mood swings.



Cognitive (Mental Ability)

- Teenagers start to understand the world in more complex ways than before. They often question why rules are made. Although it may feel like they are trying to challenge authority, they may actually be developing abstract ways of thinking. For example, they may ask, “Why it is ok to kill in war but not at other times?”
- Teens develop the mental ability to understand complicated information, such as chemistry, mathematics, and economics.
- Some teens develop a sense of being “invincible” the belief that bad things will never happen to them (which can help explain why they engage in some risky behaviors).
- Young teenagers often are quite self-centered, thinking the world revolves around them and that they are unique. You may frequently hear, “But, Mom/Dad, you just don’t understand!” As teens mature, they typically become better able to consider the feelings/needs/perspectives of others.
- The teen’s brain is still not fully developed, and some higher skills (such as complex reasoning) may not emerge until the mid 20’s.

A note about boys and girls: Although every child is unique, in general boys and girls develop at different rates. You may notice differences between your children, and understanding these gender differences can be useful. For example:

- Boys often engage in more risky behaviors than girls.
- Because girls begin puberty earlier than boys, they may feel insecure about their developing bodies.
- Girls are more likely to be influenced by media portrayals of what they should look like, and may develop eating disorders in an effort to maintain an “ideal” (often unrealistic) body weight.

Citation: Sherman, M.D., Bowling, U., & Anderson, J., & Wyche, K. (2011). Veteran Parenting Toolkit. South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Oklahoma City, OK. www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting



The Benefits of Managing Your Emotions

The daily frustrations of raising children test the patience of all parents. With the additional stress of military life or coping with deployments from the past, managing your emotions gets even tougher. Here are some reasons you might want to learn to manage stress and emotions as a parent:

Improved Relationship with Your Child

When you stay in control of your emotions around your child, your relationship stays more positive. Controlling your anger and frustration doesn't mean you let your child "get by" with misbehavior. Rather, you let your experience and judgment guide your parenting decisions when problems come along. Instead of being afraid of you, your child is comfortable coming to you with their problems or concerns – even when they have made a mistake.

Emotionally Healthy Children

Children are more secure and self-confident when their parents act in predictable, calm and healthy ways. They learn how to solve problems and take responsibility for their actions. They know they are valuable and loved when you focus on helping them learn from their mistakes rather than being threatening or insulting. Words matter, and demeaning, sarcastic words said in anger to a child can never be taken back.

Relaxed and Cooperative Family Atmosphere

When parents stay calm and in control families communicate better. No one is afraid of someone "blowing up" or worries about saying the wrong thing. Families enjoy their time together. Children want to spend time with you, even older kids, because they trust you to be even-tempered and supportive.



Communicating Your Feelings

Ignoring or stuffing your feelings is one sure way to create stress in your life! There are many benefits to being more aware of your feelings and finding appropriate times to express them. You gain support from others, everyone in the family understands each other better, your relationships improve, and more problem solving gets done when others know how you feel.

There are many great strategies to promote feeling awareness and communication – here are a few ideas you might consider!

Feeling Thermometer

The Feeling Thermometer is simply a thermometer you draw on a piece of paper that has 4 areas – green at the bottom, then yellow, orange and red at the top. As you might imagine based on the colors, green is a comfortable, happy kind of feeling and red is a very uncomfortable or difficult to control feeling. Yellow and orange are in-between feelings. Use the Feeling Thermometer to help you identify and express your feelings. Sometimes, just using code words for feelings, such as “I’m really feeling orange right now” can help us identify and think about our feelings in a new way.

Identify Your Hot Spots

Hot spots are situations throughout your day that upset you or make your emotions go up the feeling scale toward the orange or red. Just stepping back and thinking about these situations can often help us figure out a plan for “next time.” Sometimes we can change circumstances so that a Hot Spot never even happens, such as deciding to take the bus since driving the car makes you too anxious. Some Hot Spots we have to learn to manage, such as making the morning get-ready-for-school routine go better. The very act of identify your feelings can help you improve control over your emotions and the situation.

Identify Your Daily or Weekly Highs and Lows

Highs are the times during your day when things are going well and you’re in your “green” zone. “Lows” are the times when there are lots of Hot Spots and you are having trouble controlling your emotions. Take the time to keep track throughout the day of how you are feeling – just give yourself a color or number rating every hour or so. Everyone in your family could do this too. When you compare the charts you may discover the best times when everyone is ready to spend time together.



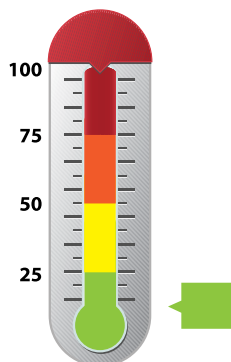
Feeling Thermometer Worksheet

Use this worksheet to identify the situations connected to your different feelings, and strategies to get “cooled down” to a calmer feeling.

For each of the four areas, identify your feeling words, at least one situation that is connected to this feeling, and some ways in which you can “cool down” when you are at this level.

Be realistic – certain strategies may work when you are at yellow, but would not work when you are at red. This worksheet can be completed by different family members and shared together as you use this common language to talk more directly about feelings.

GREEN: 0-25



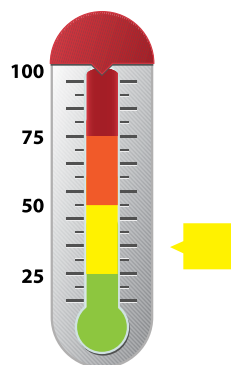
Identify your feeling words:

What is a situation that is connected to this feeling?

What are some ways you can “stay cool” when you are at this level?



YELLOW: 25-50

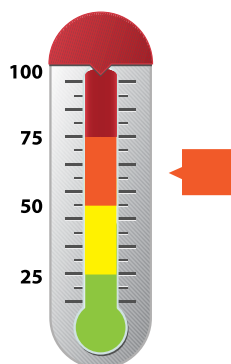


Identify your feeling words:

What is a situation that is connected to this feeling?

What are some ways you can “cool down” when you are at this level?

ORANGE: 50-75

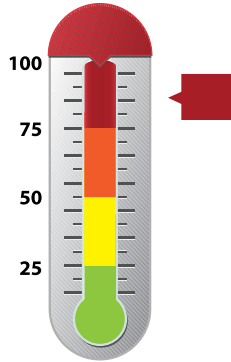


Identify your feeling words:

What is a situation that is connected to this feeling?

What are some ways you can “cool down” when you are at this level?

RED: 75-100



Identify your feeling words:

What is a situation that is connected to this feeling?

What are some ways you can “cool down” when you are at this level?



Getting Help for Your Child and Your Family

When do I need to get help for my child or my family?

Many parents hesitate to ask for help with their children. Remember – children don't come with a manual! Think about the following questions:

- Do any of my child's emotions or behaviors worry me?
- Has my child regressed, or gone "backwards," in any of their behaviors or skills?
- Have my child's behaviors suddenly changed from what is normal for them?
- Am I worried about losing my self-control with my child?
- Is my child in danger of hurting themselves or others?
- Is there much fighting and tension in our home?

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions, consider seeking help. It is never too early to reach out. Whomever you ask for help will be glad that you care so much for your family.

Where do I get help for my child or family?

The type of help you seek depends on the severity of the problem with your child. If you are in crisis and anyone is in danger of being hurt, try the following options:

- Call 911
- Go to the nearest Emergency room
- Contact the Veterans Crisis Line by calling (800-273-8255), texting (838255), or chat (<http://veteranscrisisline.net>). Active Duty personnel and Veterans can use this Crisis Line.

If you are concerned about either your child's behaviors or your own self-control, contact any of these resources:

- Pediatrician or family doctor
- Chaplain or clergy member
- Family support or behavioral healthcare services on your local installation
- Local behavioral healthcare professional
- Military OneSource (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>)
- Behavioral healthcare services at your local VA (use the Facility Locator to find a VA near you <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp>)



Helping Your Child Cope with Difficult Emotions

There are many ways of helping your child cope with their strong emotions. Here are a few ideas to consider and perhaps try out. You know your child the best, so be sure to match the strategy to your child's age and personality.

Control your own feelings

If you are angry with your child because of their behavior, don't respond immediately unless they are in danger. Get in control of your own feelings before you try to respond to your child's emotions or behaviors.

Consider the underlying reasons for your child's emotions and reactions

Ask yourself, "Why is my child acting this way?" For instance, toddlers will get cranky and have more tantrums when they are tired. Your teen may avoid you when they are worried about your reaction to something. Respond to your child's emotions, not just their behaviors.

Model effective ways of managing emotions

Consider how you model coping with strong emotions and problem situations around your child. What do they see you do? That old saying about "Do as I say and not as I do" doesn't work. Children will do whatever they see you do. You are their best teacher.

Talk with your child about their feelings

Start with less intense emotions and reactions. Acknowledge their feelings. Say, "I can see you're really mad about something." Ask questions about the problem. Listen. If appropriate, share a time that you had such feelings and your healthy way of coping.

Comfort your child

Everyone needs comfort when they are feeling down or upset. But each child is different. Find the comforting strategy that "fits" for you and your child. When you comfort your child, you are showing them that their feelings matter to you and you are there to help them through the difficult times.



How to Manage Your Own Emotions

Self-awareness is the first step

Being aware of your own emotions is the first step to staying in control. Try asking yourself, "How do I feel right now?" before you respond to your child's behavior.

Take a moment to calm yourself down

Probably one of the best strategies to manage strong emotions is to take a break from the upsetting situation. This calming moment can be as simple as going to the restroom or staring out the window for a few seconds.

Take a walk or do something physical

Another tried and true stress reliever is to do something physical. Go for a walk, dig in the garden, or throw the football – anything to burn off some energy. You'll notice this strategy also gives you a break from the upsetting situation.

Talk to someone you trust

Talking out problems really works for some people. If you're completely frustrated with your toddler's behavior, make sure they are safe and call a trusted friend. You can vent your frustration and maybe even discuss some new parenting ideas.

Ask yourself, "Why is my child behaving this way?"

In most situations, you can take the time to ponder the underlying reasons for your child's difficult behavior. If you can respond to the underlying cause rather than just reacting to the behavior, the misbehavior will often quickly stop. You will also strengthen your relationship with your child.

Consider seeking help

Sometimes, despite your very best intentions, managing your own strong emotions doesn't work. If you find yourself apologizing for or regretting your actions around your child, consider seeking help. You can call the Veteran's Crisis Help Line at 800-273-8255 for help with any situation in your life.



Support Resources

Crisis Support:

Call 911

Go to your nearest Emergency Room

Contact the Veterans Crisis Line by phone (1-800-273-8255), text (838255), or chat.

Behavioral Healthcare Services:

Military OneSource

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>

DOD resource for Service Members provides information and short-term, non-medical counseling by telephone, online or in the community.

VA Facility Locator

<https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp>

Locate a VA facility near you for behavioral healthcare services and support.

DoD Outreach Center for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury

<https://dvbic.dcoe.mil/family-and-caregivers>

Service Members and Veterans can connect via web, phone (1-866-966-1020) or email (resources@dcoeoutreach.org).

Behavioral Health Treatment Service Locator (SAMHSA)

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Find community mental health treatment facilities and programs in your area for adults, families and children.

Contact your base or installation's family support or behavioral health services.



The Impact of Your Emotions on Parenting

How you deal with your emotions will impact your children and your parenting choices. Read over the positive and negative examples of responses to a child's difficult behavior. Then complete the sentences to remind yourself of the reactions you want to show your children.

How I deal with emotions will cause my child to copy my style of coping with strong emotions and problems.

- If I talk about my feelings when I am sad, so will my child.
- If I yell and say mean things when I am upset, so will my child.
- If I _____, so will my child.

How I deal with emotions will cause my child to believe certain feelings are OK or not OK to express.

- If I react to their anger by acknowledging their feelings, they will believe it is OK to express and talk about their frustration or anger.
- If I react to their sadness by dismissing their feelings as unimportant, they will believe it is not OK to be sad sometimes.
- If I react to their _____ by _____, they will believe _____.

How I deal with emotions will affect my parenting decisions by leading to the way I respond to my child's difficult emotions and behaviors.

- When I stay in control of my own emotions after my child misbehaves, I will stay patient, try to figure out what the underlying feelings are, and set a limit calmly.
- When I let my emotions take over after my child misbehaves, I will immediately respond to their behavior and probably do or say something I will later regret.
- My most likely reaction to my child's misbehavior is _____ and my plan to control these emotions is _____.



A Positive Approach to Discipline

A positive approach to discipline focuses on teaching and building positive behaviors.

- Parents who effectively use a positive approach to discipline usually have respectful, well-behaved children.
- Effective discipline starts with attention and praise. You get more of what you notice. Children follow the rules because they are rewarded for the behaviors you WANT them to display.
- A positive approach does NOT mean children “get by” with misbehavior. Rather, as you set clear limits and use consistent, logical consequences, children learn from their mistakes.

POSITIVE APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE

- Shows support and empathy
- Shows respect for child
- Teaches life skill
- Focuses on positive behaviors
- Considers age differences
- Considers child's underlying emotions
- Avoids physical punishment

NEGATIVE APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE

- Uses criticism and humiliation
- Creates fear
- Includes yelling and screaming
- Focuses on negative behavior
- Uses vague commands
- Allows anger to determine discipline
- Uses spanking

Effective Discipline Strategies

Attention, Praise and Rewards.

Effective discipline starts with noticing the positives. The more attention, praise and rewards your child receives for positive behaviors, the more likely they will be to continue those behaviors.

Attention

- Showing interest in and talking with your children are critical parts of both a loving relationship and an effective discipline plan.
- When you spend time with your children, you have many opportunities to model the behaviors you want your child to display.
- Make a point of paying attention to your child when they are doing what you want and expect of them – you get more of what you pay attention to!

Praise

- Praise is a special type of attention, reserved for when your child does something “right” or makes an effort to do something better.
- To be effective, praise must be immediate and specific. Global praise (“you’re such a good boy”) does little to tell the child what they have done to deserve the praise. Likewise, praising a child for every little thing they do will not help them learn to realistically evaluate their own behavior or skills.
- When you praise specific behavior (“thank you for picking up your toys”), your child learns what they are supposed to do and can make better choices about future behavior.
- Try to make at least 5 positive or “positive attention” comments to your child for every 1 negative or corrective comment.

Rewards

- Rewards are anything that is meaningful to or valued by your child.
- Observe your child. How do they spend their time? What do they like to do? These are the things you can best use as rewards for positive behaviors and following the rules.
- Rewards send a clear message about the behaviors you value and want your child to exhibit.
- Your time and attention are the most powerful rewards you can use with your child.

Effective Discipline Strategies

Negative Consequences and Punishment: Time Out

A positive approach to parenting does not mean that parents never use negative consequences and punishment. Both are necessary to teach children what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. Some parents get discouraged when their child misbehaves. They think, “This attention, praise and rewards stuff isn’t working!” Children will still break the rules - because they are learning, exploring and testing the limits of their world. A positive discipline approach includes positive parenting strategies AND tools to use when children misbehave.

Time Out

Tell your child they are going to time out immediately after the misbehavior.

Tip: For some behaviors, you might give a single warning. Briefly state the rule that was broken. If you are just starting to use time outs, it is helpful to practice time out with your child first, when they are not misbehaving.

Direct your child to the time out area.

Tip: Take them to the location if needed. Make sure the time out area doesn’t provide opportunities for them to have fun or get too distracted. Don’t talk to them!

Set a timer and tell them they can get up when the timer goes off.

Tip: The length of the time out should match the child’s age in minutes. The time is NOT related to the severity of the offense or how upset you may be about the behavior.

Ignore whatever your child says or does during the time out — as long as they are safe and they stay in the time out area. Don’t talk to them or pay attention to them at all. The main idea is for the child to do as you ask. Don’t demand that the child be absolutely quiet or sit still during the time out - in fact, a child learning to soothe them self by singing, rocking or even crying can be a helpful life skill. Again, the main point is that they stay where you told them to stay.

Tip: If your child tries to leave, calmly and WITHOUT TALKING return them to the time out area. Use your judgment about restarting the timer. If the child leaves the chair again, stop the time out and take away a privilege. Work this out in advance with your child so that they know what the consequence will be. You may be tempted to increase the length or severity of the consequence because you are angry with your child for misbehaving. But remember, if you stay calm when frustrated you will be modeling for your child the same behavior you want from them. Let the consequence that you arranged do its work. Over time your child will learn that finishing the timeout makes the most sense for them. And most importantly they will learn that you mean what you say and you say what you mean.

When the timer goes off, thank your child for doing their time out.

Tip: Briefly remind them about the broken rule that resulted in the time out. Then change the subject.



Effective Discipline Strategies

Negative Consequences and Punishment: Ignoring

A positive approach to discipline does not mean parents can never use negative consequences and punishment. The overall emphasis should be on positive consequences but there is a place for negative consequences. Some parents get discouraged when their child misbehaves. They think, “This attention, praise and rewards stuff isn’t working!” Children will still break the rules - because they are learning, exploring and testing the limits of their world. A positive discipline approach includes positive parenting strategies AND tools to use when children misbehave.

Ignoring

- When your child misbehaves and you ignore them, you don’t look at, talk to, touch or seem to listen to your child.
- This discipline strategy works best with younger children.
- Do not ignore your child if they are in danger of hurting themselves or others. Use this strategy for behaviors such as nagging, whining or temper tantrums.
- Be consistent! Realize the targeted behavior will often get worse before it gets better. Your child has learned that if they nag, whine or cry long enough, they’ll usually get their way.
- Show your child positive attention for an appropriate behavior as soon as possible after ignoring their misbehavior.
- Your child is having a tantrum on the floor of your living room because you asked them to put on their pajamas and you turned off the TV. They are not in any danger or hurt, so you walk around them, don’t talk to them and look at the newspaper or pay some bills. When they quiet, you calmly restate your request and offer to help them with their pajamas.



Effective Discipline Strategies

Setting Limits

A major goal of discipline is to teach your child acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The best way to achieve this goal is by setting limits. Children need limits in order to get a sense of what they can and cannot do, and how they can balance their own desires with the desires of other people.

Here are the basic steps to setting limits. Even though the nature of limits will change as your child gets older, the basic principles stay the same.

#1: Consider the rules and consequences you want to use.

Rules need to be age-appropriate and reasonable. Make sure the same rules apply to everyone in the family. If you expect your child to not slam doors, then neither can you. Consequences need to be age-appropriate, realistic and safe. Don't state a consequence that you cannot or wouldn't want to enforce.

#2: Make a request or state the rule

Make sure you have your child's attention. The best way to be sure of their attention is to make eye contact with them. Making a request while your child is engrossed in their favorite TV show will likely not be effective. Be clear, brief, respectful, and concrete in making your request or setting the limit. Don't ask – just calmly state. Try to start your request with "I" rather than "You." The request "I want you to wash up for supper" is more effective than "It is dinner time – you know what you need to do."

#3: Explain consequences

Clearly explain the consequence if your child does not comply with your request or rule. Be clear, calm and direct. The best consequences are natural and logical – a direct result of the child's actions. "If you fail Algebra again this 6 weeks, you'll have to study more so you won't be able to play on the basketball team."

#4: Follow through with the consequences

Implementing the consequences is the toughest part of setting limits. Many parents have difficulty with this step, often because they threatened unreasonable consequences. Are you REALLY not going to EVER buy them something again? Consider reexamining both your rules and your consequences if you frequently don't follow through. The important part of setting limits is not the actual consequence – rather, the most important part is doing what you say you're going to do.



Effective Discipline Strategies

Negative Consequences and Punishment: Taking Responsibility

A positive approach to discipline includes negative consequences and punishment. Some parents get discouraged when their child misbehaves. They think, “This attention, praise and rewards stuff isn’t working!” Children will still break the rules - because they are learning, exploring and testing the limits of their world. A positive discipline approach includes positive parenting strategies AND tools to use when children misbehave.

Taking Responsibility for Misbehavior

- When your child misbehaves and you have them take responsibility for their behavior, you let the natural and logical consequences of their behavior be the “punishment.”
- This strategy works with all ages. Even toddlers can quickly understand that if they hit you with a toy, they no longer get to play with that toy.
- There are 2 ways to let the consequences of your child’s misbehavior BE the punishment: natural consequences and logical consequences.
- When you let the natural consequence be the punishment, you basically don’t do anything! You let the natural consequence of your child’s actions play out. As long as your child is safe, you don’t rescue them from their decision or actions.
- “I’m sorry you forgot your lunch again today. But I told you, if you forgot again, I wouldn’t bring your lunch to school. You can go through the lunch line and ask for the free peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Yes, I understand it might be embarrassing. But this is what happens when you don’t put your lunch in your backpack in the morning.”
- When you use logical consequences as the punishment, you have your child fix the problem caused by their actions. Think about that old saying, “Make the punishment fit the crime.”
- “So, let me get this straight. You were mad at your boyfriend, you threw your phone at him, the phone won’t work now, and you want me to buy you a new phone. Seems to me getting a new phone is your responsibility – not mine. I didn’t break it.”



Effective Discipline Strategies

Negative Consequences and Punishment: Withdrawal of Privileges

A positive approach to discipline includes negative consequences and punishment. Some parents get discouraged when their child misbehaves. They think, “This attention, praise and rewards stuff isn’t working!” Children will still break the rules - because they are learning, exploring and testing the limits of their world. A positive discipline approach includes positive parenting strategies AND tools to use when children misbehave.

Withdrawal of Privileges

- When your child misbehaves and you use loss of privileges, you don’t let your child engage in a desired activity.
- This discipline strategy works best with older children and teenagers.
- What does your child value the most? Playing soccer? Going to a friend’s house? Having a phone? Driving the car? These are all “privileges” that can be removed for a period of time when your child breaks a rule.
- “You didn’t clean up your room as I asked, so you may not go to Blaine’s house this afternoon – you can go tomorrow if you get your room clean.”



The Basis of Effective Discipline

Your Relationship with Your Child

Discipline works best when there is good parent-child communication and a warm, supportive relationship. You don't have to be your child's best friend, but the more solid your relationship the easier it is to discipline. If your relationship has experienced a disruption, take time to re-build your relationship. You don't always have to teach or guide or control – sometimes you can just enjoy being with this incredible human being who is your child!

Understanding Your Own Emotions

Children can really push buttons! The more aware you are of your own emotions, the better in control you will be when your child makes you angry. If you're returning from a deployment, you'll likely experience a wide range of emotions. Work to identify your various feelings – put a name to them and spend some time thinking about how you can be aware of these reactions as you discipline your child. The better you get at controlling your emotions, the better parenting decisions you will make.

Understanding Your Child's Emotions

Children and teenagers are learning how to handle intense feelings and emotional pressures. Often their misbehavior is connected to their emotions. For instance, your child may refuse to go to school because they are worried about taking a test. If you only focus on the behavior ("Get to school, young lady, or else!"), you miss the opportunity to help your child learn how to cope with their various emotions, worries and insecurities.

Working Together with Your Child's Other Parent

Children benefit from parents parenting "together." If you've been apart, your child has become used to their other parent's rules and discipline. With your return to active parenting, work together with your child's other parent. Your child will naturally resent sudden changes to rules or expectations. Talk with the other parent and older children about what is working now and discuss possible changes. Take the time to get to know your child again as they are now. Take it slow, and realize the goal is for you again to be an active, fully engaged parent in your child's life.



Parenting For Veterans

Instructions: Start scheduling some time for yourself using this calendar. For each day, write down one activity to do by yourself. Be creative! If you have a hard time thinking about things you would like to do, review the pleasurable activities list for ideas.

Monthly Calendar

Month: _____

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



Common Signs of Stress

This list contains some common signs of stress. Review the list and determine if you may be experiencing any signs of stress now. Save the list to continue to monitor your stress signs as needed.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Headaches
- Excessive sweating
- Stomach problems
- Tense muscles
- Weight gain or loss
- Sleep problems
- Shortness of breath
- No energy or feeling fatigued
- Loss of sex drive
- Unexplained hair loss
- Rapid heart beat

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- Drinking too much
- Using drugs
- Eating more/less than usual
- Sleep problems/difficulty sleeping
- Increased tobacco use
- Increased caffeine use
- Nail biting, hair twisting
- Pacing
- Grinding your teeth
- “Overdoing” activities
- Acting “bossy”
- Laughing or crying inappropriately
- Yelling or shouting
- Picking fights
- Driving too fast
- Road rage
- Compulsive gambling
- Compulsive buying
- Avoiding friends and family

EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Quick irritability with others
- Loss of interest in leisure and play
- Sadness or depressed mood
- Frequent uneasiness, restlessness
- Anger, resentment, hostility
- Feeling pressured or trapped
- Sudden shifts in mood
- Impatience
- Increased mood sensitivity
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Overreacting to unexpected situations

PROBLEMS WITH THINKING

- Trouble concentrating
- Misunderstanding others
- Trouble remembering things
- Poor judgment
- Confusion
- Racing thoughts
- Difficulty making decisions
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Self-doubt or low self-confidence
- Criticizing yourself
- Negative “self-talk”



Dealing with Unhelpful Thoughts

Managing your emotions starts by paying attention to what you are saying in your head. Many thoughts often FEEL true, but really they are not. For instance, consider this thought:

“If I can’t get my four-year-old to behave in the restaurant, everyone will think I’m a terrible parent.”

Is this thought really true? Consider how you will feel if that thought is in your head while you are waiting for your order to be delivered. How will you start feeling? How will you react to your child’s behavior with this thought lurking around in your brain? It’s much more likely you will get angry and let your emotions rule how you deal with your child if you’re thinking in your head that everyone is judging you to be a poor parent. The trick is to recognize unhelpful thoughts, and then to find more helpful, realistic thoughts to replace them.

Below are different pairs of thoughts. See if you can identify the unhelpful thoughts that just make you feel worse, and the replacement thoughts that lead to better emotional control and helpful problem solving.

	Helpful	Unhelpful
1. He’s a terrible child.		
2. He’s really having a bad day.		
3. She will never get into college if she doesn’t do her homework.		
4. I wonder if she needs some help with her homework.		
5. I’d like my child to do what I say, but sometimes kids break the rules.		
6. My child should always do what I say.		
7. He doesn’t want to play with me so he must be mad at me.		
8. He might need some time alone right now.		
9. My four-year-old sure is being a toot today – might be time to leave.		
10. Everyone thinks I’m a terrible parent because my four-year-old is acting up.		

Answer Key: Helpful thoughts: 2, 4, 5, 8, 9 Unhelpful thoughts: 1, 3, 6, 7, 10



Larry's Thought Replacement Worksheet

REPLACING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS WITH HELPFUL ONES

- 1. Describe a situation in the family or with your child in which you felt upset.**

Answer: He doesn't come home on time or call me when he'll be late.

- 2. Identify the feeling and rate its intensity using the feeling thermometer.**

Answer: Red, at least a 90 I'd say

- 3. Identify the thought or thoughts that preceded or were associated with the feeling:**

Answer: Because he doesn't call, he must not have any respect for me.

- 4. Select the thought distortions that might be contributing to your feeling: (See Larry's Answer)**

All or Nothing

Negative Filter

Should Statements

✓ Assuming the Worst

✓ Taking It Personally

Labeling

- 5. Use the Positive Thought Replacement Handout or your own imagination to identify a replacement thought that is more balanced and helpful. Remember it for next time!**

Answer: He might not call because he's just not thinking about me being worried when he's having fun with his friends. He's still learning how to think about other people too. Maybe it's really not all about me!

Managing Parental Stress

Stress Reduction Strategies

Take Care of Yourself

The first step to managing your stress is making it a priority. The healthier you are, in body and spirit, the better parent you can be to your child. So make a commitment – you are worth it! Identify some simple things you can do throughout your day to relax or decrease your stress. You are not only recharging your batteries, you are also modeling for your child the importance of taking care of yourself.

Recognize When You Need a Break

Learn to recognize the signs of stress from your body and mind. Headaches, an upset stomach, forgetting things or a short fuse can all be signs that you need a break. The sooner you can recognize the signs, the better you'll get at taking action – BEFORE you blow your top!

Switch Gears Between Work and Home

Career and job demands often create stress. In order to not dump your tension or frustration about work on your loved ones at home, practice deliberately “switching gears” between work and home. Try to start decompressing the last few minutes of your work day. Don't bring work home. When you get home, create a routine that further helps you to switch gears. Turn off your work phone if you can. Play with your baby for 10 minutes before you do anything else. Enlist the help of your children or spouse at home. If you need 30 minutes of “alone time” when you first get home, figure out a plan to make it happen.

Practice Relaxation Exercises

There are many great ways to relax that are healthy, affordable and don't take much time. Sure a week vacation is nice, but you need to find ways each day that you can slow down and take a breather from stress. Whether you choose deep breathing, yoga or just closing your eyes, practice makes perfect. Commit to doing the strategy every day for even a few minutes. You'll feel less stressed, you'll be more relaxed, and you'll find more energy and patience with your children.



Pleasurable Activities

1. Listen to the radio
2. Watch people
3. Look at clouds
4. Eat a good meal
5. Help a neighbor mow the lawn
6. Care for a houseplant
7. Show an interest in what others say
8. Notice good things that happen
9. Give a compliment or praise someone
10. Talk about sports or current events
11. See beautiful scenery
12. Take a walk
13. Make a new friend
14. Go to a movie or play
15. Go to a museum
16. Play cards or chess
17. Watch a sunset
18. Do artwork or crafts
19. Learn something new
20. Collect things
21. Join a club
22. Read something inspiring
23. Volunteer at the animal shelter
24. Go to a garage sale
25. Help someone
26. Rearrange your room or house
27. Talk on the telephone
28. Volunteer
29. Accept a compliment
30. Read books, magazines, or poetry
31. Daydream
32. Brush your teeth
33. Cook a good meal
34. Do crossword puzzles
35. Take a long bath or shower
36. Talk about old times
37. Write stories or poetry
38. Spend time with friends
39. Sing
40. Go to church
41. Read the newspaper
42. Go to a meeting or a lecture
43. Exercise
44. Solve a personal problem
45. Listen to music
46. Do outdoor work
47. Get a haircut or your hair done
48. Pray
49. Sit in the sun
50. Have peace and quiet
51. Go to a park, fair, or zoo
52. Write letters
53. Listen to birds sing
54. Go to the library
55. Keep a clean house
56. Plant flower seeds
57. Spend play time with family/children
58. Eat a piece of fresh fruit
59. Do your laundry
60. Shine your shoes
61. Recycle
62. Practice playing the guitar
63. Take a class
64. Improve your math or reading skills
65. Have the oil changed in your car
66. Learn yoga or Tai Chi
67. Wear clothes you like
68. Write down 3 things you are grateful for



Positive Thought Replacement Handout

All or Nothing Thinking: Seeing things as either/or with no middle ground.

- Negative thought: Because my child misbehaved today, he must be a defiant kid.
- Replacement thought: He is a good kid who seems to be having a rough time at the moment.

Assuming the Worst: Exaggerating the importance of an event or outcome.

- Negative thought: If this birthday party doesn't go smoothly, I have failed my family.
- Replacement thought: Even when I do my best, things happen that are not in my control. When it doesn't turn out the way I want it to be, I have still learned a few things that I can use to do better next time.

Negative Filter: Tendency to emphasize one or more negative events while ignoring positive experiences and evidence to the contrary.

- Negative thought: Since my wife is upset with me today, we must have a bad marriage.
- Replacement thought: Our marriage has been through rough patches before and then improved. Sometimes the rough patches show the way toward a better relationship.

Taking Things Too Personally: Feeling that you are the cause of a negative event for which you were not responsible.

- Negative thought: He's not talking to me and seems upset, I must have done something wrong.
- Replacement thought: There are many possible reasons for this behavior and a lot of them have nothing to do with me. He might even blame me for the way he's feeling, even though it's not me. Let me see if I can understand what has been happening to him lately.

Should Statements: Having a fixed idea of how things must occur or how people should behave.

- Negative thought: I should be able to do this without help.
- Replacement thought: No one is capable of functioning perfectly at all times. We can set ideals for ourselves but they are ideals and not really attainable.

Labeling: Putting a fixed and overgeneralized label on self or others.

- Negative thought: I am such a terrible father.
- Replacement thought: Yes, I forgot his soccer game today, but that doesn't make me a bad parent. Even good parents forget some things.



Thought Replacement Worksheet

1. Describe a situation in the family or with your child in which you felt upset.

2. Identify the feeling and rate its intensity using the feeling thermometer.

3. Identify the thought or thoughts that preceded or were associated with the feeling:

4. Select the thought distortions that might be contributing to your feeling:

All or Nothing

Assuming the Worst

Negative Filter

Taking It Personally

Should Statements

Labeling

5. Use the Positive Thought Replacement Handout or your own imagination to identify a replacement thought that is more balanced and helpful. Remember it for next time!



Common Children's Reactions to a Parent with PTSD

When a parent is struggling with mental health issues, almost all children quickly figure out that the parent who returned from war is NOT the same parent who left. All children will react differently, but every child will have feelings about their parent's changed behavior – feelings usually expressed through their behavior.

Confused and upset

Children will sense there is a problem, sometimes before parents are comfortable acknowledging or discussing the issue. Children will be confused by your changed behaviors, as well as the “atmosphere” at home. Often, children will first blame themselves for any changes in your relationship.

Emotional distance

Some children will distance themselves to cope with changes at home. Emotionally, a child's “I don't care about you” attitude is a form of protection from feeling hurt or rejected. A child might even physically distance themselves, as they isolate themselves in their room or escape family stress by spending more time with friends.

Take on more

Children also may react to a parent's changed behavior by “doing more.” They may adopt a more adult role as they seek to take care of the parent. Or they may try to be “perfect,” by making better grades or being careful to not cause any trouble for the family. Being a caretaker or a perfect child may seem helpful to an already stressed family. However, children can miss out on many equally important tasks of childhood.

Feels like a loss

Having a parent with a mental health issue can feel like a loss for children. They sense their parent is there physically, but not emotionally. Older children miss the parent they remember. Common responses to such feelings are to cling more tightly for reassurance or act out negatively for attention.

Common questions

Remember, even if your child isn't asking the questions, they are probably thinking them: What did I do wrong? Can I catch it? Why does Daddy sleep all day and stay up all night? Why doesn't Mom come to my games anymore? When will Dad be like he used to be and read to me at bedtime? Will it ever go away?