



# Survival Guide

FOR PARENTS



# Table of Contents



Parenting Begins with You.....	2
What to Expect and What to Do.....	3
How to Help Your Teen Build Self-Esteem.....	10
Be a Better Parent by Taking Time Out.....	11
Tips for Parents.....	12
Coping with Stress.....	15
How to Choose a Child Care Center.....	16
School Age Children.....	18
Discipline Doesn't Have to Hurt.....	19
Where Can I Call If I Need Help?.....	20

# Parenting Begins with You

Parenting is one of the best and most rewarding jobs in the world. A simple smile from your two year- old or a childish “I love you” whispered before bedtime can make all the frustrations of the day disappear.

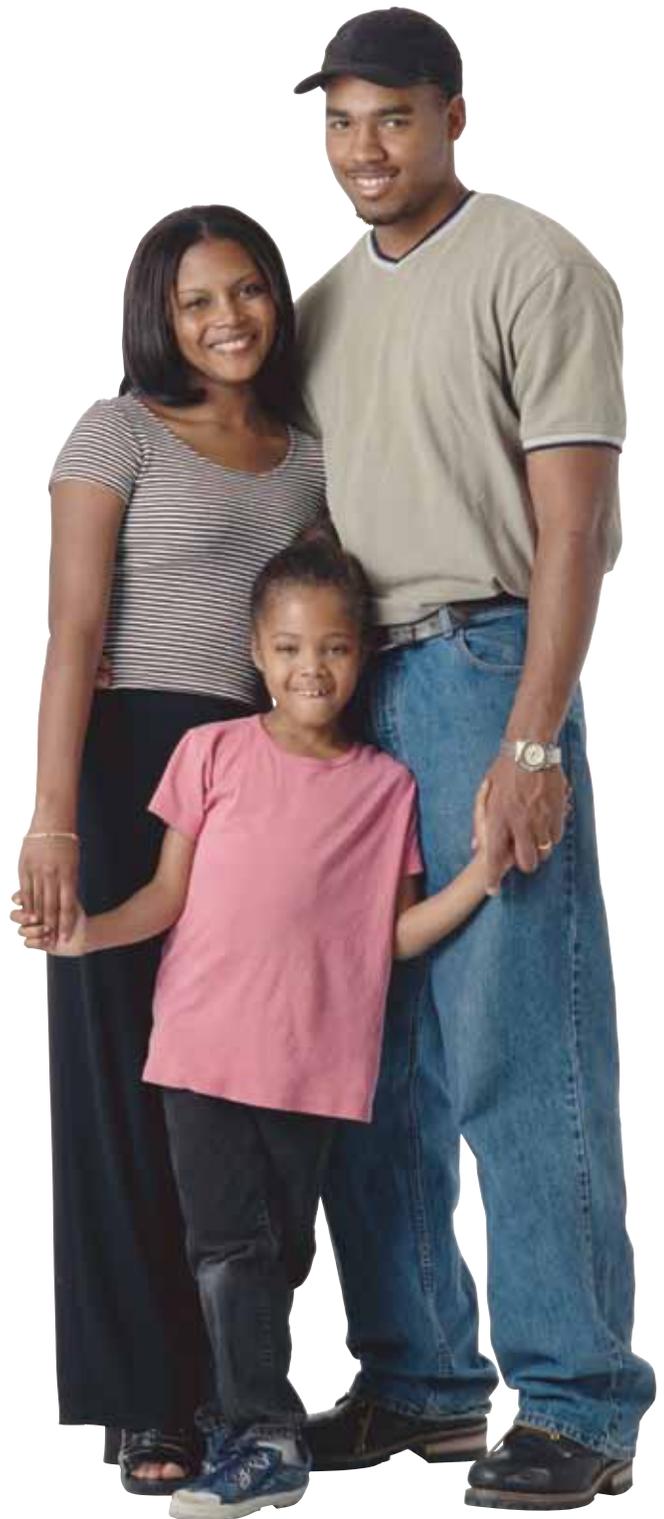
Parenting is also a tough, 24-hours-a-day job. There are several keys to surviving your job as a parent. The most important of these is knowledge – knowing what to expect from your child, knowing what your child needs, knowing how to deal with your child, and knowing how to take care of your own needs.

This book provides some of the knowledge needed to help you in your important role as a parent. Learning more about parenting and child development can make a world of difference for both you and your child. Increasing your understanding, together with your love for your child, can help you become a better parent – a very special person in your child’s world.

## **You expect a lot from your child ... but your child’s age determines what you’ll get.**

Parents somehow know that their child is not always going to behave perfectly. A child’s needs and actions change as he or she grows older, and all children develop at different rates. This is perfectly normal. However, knowing what to expect as your child goes through the different stages of life can help you a great deal.

On the following pages you’ll find some behavior traits to expect as your child grows into an adult.



# Newborn to Six Months

## WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

**Your baby has just come from a quiet, warm and safe place and wants to feel secure**

- **TRY** wrapping your baby snugly in a small blanket so he will not be frightened.
- **TRY** cuddling your baby and speak in soft affectionate tones. Talking to your baby helps her to develop social skills and to learn about her new world.
- **DON'T** be afraid that you're spoiling your baby. Newborn babies cannot be spoiled. Pick your baby up and love him as much as possible

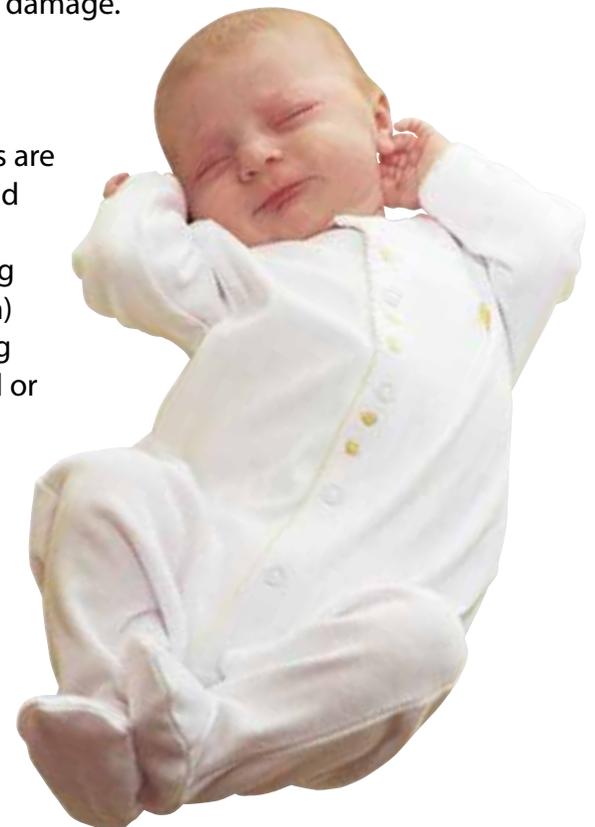
**Eating, burping and bathing are basics for newborns. However, because your baby cannot verbally communicate what he wants, your baby may cry a lot as a way to communicate. Don't stress out - crying is normal. All babies do it.**

**How to cope with a crying baby:**

- **MAKE** sure the baby's basic needs (food, diapering, appropriate clothing, etc.) are met.
- **OFFER** the baby a pacifier
- **WALK** the baby around holding him or her close to you.
- **DON'T** ignore your baby's cries or shake or hit your baby to make him stop. Shaking and hitting may inflict serious and permanent injury to your baby. Remember, a baby will outgrow crying, but shaking a baby may cause permanent damage.

**Make sure that baby's sleep time is a safe time.**

- **PLACE** baby to sleep on his or her back.
- **DON'T** sleep with your baby in a bed or couch. Adult beds are not safe as baby can get trapped between the mattress and wall, headboard or footboard.
- **DON'T** bed share. Research shows that bed sharing (falling asleep with your baby) can be unsafe as adults (or children) can accidentally roll onto baby while sleeping. Bed sharing is especially dangerous if an adult has taken drugs, alcohol or medication that makes them sleepy.
- **PLACE** baby's crib in your room or a place where you can hear him.
- **DON'T** cover a baby's head. Soft materials can interfere with baby's breathing. Baby should not sleep with pillows, quilts, comforters, heavy blankets or stuffed toys.
- **USE** a wearable blanket or other type of sleeper. Use safe sleepwear without strings or ties.



# Six to Eighteen Months

## WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

**Teething will begin during this time, causing your baby to be cranky at times.**

- **TRY** comforting your baby with a cool teething toy (the ones that can be chilled in the refrigerator are ideal) or apply a special pain reliever.
- **DON'T** try to discipline your baby or ignore your baby's cries. She does not know right from wrong at this time so try to make your baby as comfortable as possible.

**Your baby will develop a sense of humor and laugh when amused and cry when unhappy.**

- **TEACH** your baby simple games like Peek-A-Boo and Patty-Cake and to point to eyes, nose, mouth and ears.
- **DON'T** ignore your baby when he cries but try to find something to amuse him. Babies like books with large bright pictures, especially when you talk about the pictures with them.

**This is a time of rapid development. Your baby will learn to sit, crawl, stand, walk and even talk during this stage. Your baby will enjoy being with other people most of the time. Sometimes, however, the baby will not want to leave your side.**

- **LET** your baby follow you around as you go through your daily routine at home. It will amuse the baby to "help" you.
- **DON'T** get frustrated if your baby seems to lag behind in learning skills compared to other children the same age. Babies mature at different rates. Your baby will catch up.

**When your baby starts walking around the house, she will want to touch things because she is curious. She may break things of value if they are within reach. Or she may get hurt if she pulls something over.**

- **CLOSE** the toilet seat cover. Your baby could get seriously injured by falling into the water.
- **PUT** valuables and items that may be harmful out of your baby's reach. Try to divert her attention away from forbidden objects by providing another play object.
- **AVOID** scolding your baby every time she gets near something breakable. In time, your baby will learn to recognize what is forbidden, but right now she is still too young to know the difference. You'll have to remind your baby time and time again to do or not to do things.



# Toddlers

EIGHTEEN MONTHS TO THREE YEARS

WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

**At this age, your child is starting to realize he is separate from mother. Your child may want to show independence—often by saying “NO” to requests and suggestions.**

- **TRY** letting your child do things for himself. Let your child take off his own clothes, put on hats, carry small grocery items that won't break if dropped, or feed himself.
- **OFFER** your child choices whenever possible. This will let your child make decisions without defying you.
- **DON'T** spank your child for being stubborn. Instead, try to be patient but firm.

**Toilet training will most likely occur during this time. Remember that toilet training is a matter of maturity, and not all children mature at the same time.**

- **HAVE PATIENCE** during potty training. Experts recommend that first you should sit your child on the potty fully clothed and explain the process. Then work up to letting your child play near the potty chair without a diaper on and remind him what the potty is for. When your child succeeds in using the potty, give lots of excited praise.
- **DON'T** pressure your child or punish him for potty training mistakes by withholding toys or favorite foods—this could make potty training a longer, more stressful process.

**Sharing is a skill that will have to be developed during this time.**

- **PRAISE** your child when she shares, but don't yell if your child chooses not to share.
- **DON'T** lecture your child about the importance of sharing—lecturing won't do any good. Show her by example instead.



# Pre-Schoolers

THREE- TO FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

**Your child will ask a lot of questions of you during this time period. This is the natural way your child learns and develops.**

- **ANSWER** your child's questions in short, simple sentences and try to be patient when she asks "Why?" over and over again.
- **DON'T** tell your child to stop asking so many questions or that you don't have time to answer.

**Showing off and using "bad words" are typical behavior.**

- **IGNORE** the bad words, but pay attention to your child when she needs or wants you.
- **DON'T** yell or spank your child for using swear words. Don't tell your child to go away when she is showing off.

**Some children may develop certain fears during this time as part of a developing imagination.**

- **GIVE** your child a nightlight or stuffed animal to help her feel more secure at bedtime.
- **DON'T** tell your child she is being a "scaredy cat" or leave your child alone in the room at night to cry it out.

**A lot of time is spent playing—often imitating.**

- **HELP** your child develop coordination by letting your child play with puzzles, blocks and crayons.
- **DON'T** get frustrated when your child is constantly underfoot. Remember your child needs lots of space to be active.



# School Age Children

## SIX- TO TEN-YEAR-OLDS

### WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

**Your child may cry and whine over unimportant things.**

- **TRY** to remain calm, and make every effort to determine the cause of the problem.
- **DON'T** scream back or call your child a "cry baby."

**Your child will begin to develop a conscience and appreciate the value of rules.**

- **KEEP** rules consistent so your child knows what to expect.
- **DON'T** hit your child when he breaks the rules. When disciplining your child, remember to use "child timeframes." Ten or fifteen minutes may seem short to an adult but not to a first grader who is being made to sit in a chair.

**Your child will start to develop friendships.**

- **ENCOURAGE** these friendships, and provide opportunities for your child to meet other children.
- **DON'T** constantly bring up your child's lack of friends. Instead, help your child meet other children through scouting, community groups, sports and other activities.

**These years are very important for your child because they set the tone for all future academic achievements.**

- **ENCOURAGE** your child as much as possible. Praise her when she does well in school. Set up a study area.
- **AVOID** comparing your child to others when he is doing poorly. Don't say "I was better when I was your age." If your child is doing poorly, talk with your child's teacher and develop a plan to help your child improve his grades.



# Early Adolescence/Preteens

## WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

**Your child may start to challenge adult authority at this stage and question the fairness of decisions.**

- **SET** a good example for your child to follow and try to let your child in on making some decisions. When a rule is presented, explain the reason for it.
- **DON'T** exaggerate the consequences of breaking the rules. Young people at this age find security in structure and enforced rules help. Be fair, but firm.

**Your child may begin to establish his/her own sense of maleness or femaleness at this stage.**

- **REALIZE** that boys and girls need many activities with children of the same sex.
- **MOTIVATE** boys and girls to participate in sports. Note: Research shows that girls who participate in sports experience a more positive body image and higher psychological well-being than girls who don't.

**Puberty usually begins during this age, especially for girls.**

- **BEGIN** discussions about sexuality as soon as you think your child is ready.
- **EXPLAIN** to your child that menstruation or signs of male puberty might begin shortly. This will reduce anxiety about puberty, as well as the whole period of adolescence.

**Curiosity about sexual matters may arise during this stage, mostly concerning your child's own body.**

- **MAKE** sure that your child has accurate information about the changes taking place in his body. Be open and frank with answers to your child's questions about sex.
- **DON'T** ignore your child's requests for information.

**Hormones have control of your child's body and moods may vary greatly.**

- **REALIZE** that there is a physical need for increased rest and that too little rest can result in moodiness.
- **ENCOURAGE** your child to share difficult emotions with friends, family members or trusted role models. All children, especially boys, need to know that sharing feelings is healthy. Don't overreact to your child's moods.
- **DON'T** slap your child, call your child names or tell your child how much you can't stand being around him.

**It's not too early to address the topics of drugs, alcohol and sex.**

- **DISCUSS** the dangers of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex before your child encounters them.
- **INVOLVE** your child in group activities and social clubs such as art classes, plays, computer clubs and music.

**Research shows that early adolescents have a better likelihood of succeeding in school when their parents are involved in their education.**

- **ESTABLISH** good study habits with your child. Set a regular homework time, arrange a quiet study area and provide an assignment calendar.
- **SHOW** a good example of how the educational skills your child is learning now will help her in adulthood.
- **KEEP IN TOUCH** with your child's teachers and counselors. Education works best when teachers and parents work together.



# Teenagers

## WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT TO DO:

### **Your child may hide the need for affection in order to appear “mature.”**

- **TRY** to remember this and find other ways to show affection and appreciation – a card, a flower, a dinner out—whatever is pleasing in your family.
- **DON'T** be put off when your child refuses a hug. Offer it anyway.

### **Your child may develop annoying habits, such as untidy dress, in an attempt to become independent.**

- **LET** your child know that appearance is her own responsibility but set strict standards when it is important to you (for example, on a special occasion).
- **DON'T** call your child names, tease your child or constantly remind your child that he looks awful.

### **Your child may worry about the added responsibilities of becoming an adult, school pressures and her social life, causing her to be frustrated and depressed.**

- **TRY** to remember all the scary feelings you had as a teen.
- **DON'T** try to force your values and expectations on your child. Instead, help your child develop the things he enjoys most and is good at.

### **Your child may find less and less time to spend with the family.**

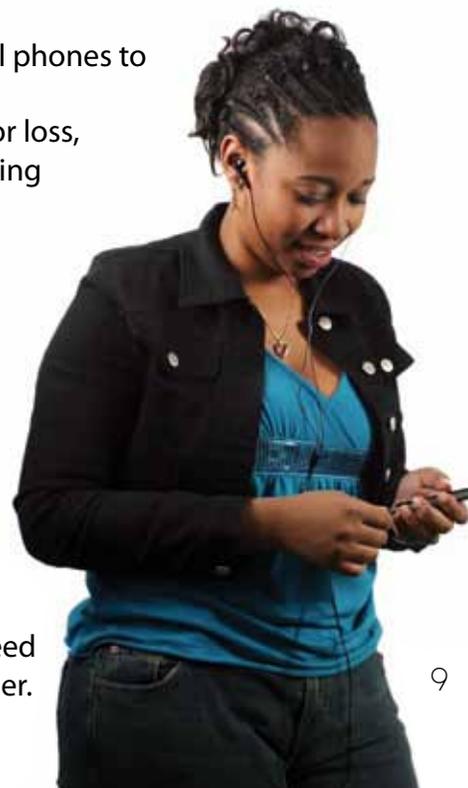
- **PLAN** things that will interest your child. A shared activity enjoyed by both the parent and teen enhances the likelihood of spending time together and will increase communication.
- **DON'T** get angry if your child would prefer to spend time with friends rather than family.

### **Adolescence is a time of experimentation, but sometimes that can lead to risk-taking behaviors. Being proactive and involved as a parent increases the chances that your child will make the right decisions when faced with peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, or intimate relationships.**

- **ROLE-PLAY** with your teenager what to say in situations where peer pressure could lead to an unhealthy decision. Pick a quiet time to practice, like in the car when you have your teenager's attention.
- **KNOW** what your teenager is doing, with whom and when. Use cell phones to keep in touch.
- **BE ALERT** to the warning signs of problems: extreme weight gain or loss, sleep problems, drastic changes in personality and/or friends, slipping grades, isolation and secrecy.

### **Developing a sense of identity and individuality is one of the most important tasks of adolescence. Your teenager needs opportunities to explore the questions: “Who am I?” and “Who will I become?”**

- **HELP** your teenager “try on” different roles by encouraging participation in a variety of school and community activities, such as volunteer work, sports, creative activities, youth programs and work experience.
- **RECOGNIZE** that boys and girls sometimes face different challenges in developing their identity. Girls may need help expressing anger and becoming more assertive, while boys may need to learn how to cooperate and express other emotions besides anger.



# How to Help Your Teen Build Self-Esteem

One of the most important things you, as a parent, can do for your teenager is to help build her self-esteem. Teenagers often doubt themselves and are uncomfortable with who they are because of the changes they are going through. Here are some guidelines to help your teen through this difficult period:

**Help your teen develop realistic goals,** because teens often demand too much of themselves or expect to reach their goals too quickly.

**Focus on your teen's strengths** by referring often to his good qualities and accomplishments.

**Remind your teen of her past accomplishments,** especially when she lacks confidence.

**Recognize effort and improvement,** thereby motivating your teen to continue working on a difficult task.

**Avoid comparison** with brothers, sisters and peers.

**Encourage individual differences** among brothers and sisters and between friends. Let your teen know you appreciate her for who she is.

**Include your teen in difficult decisions,** especially when he is feeling down.

**Involve your teen in decision making** and allow her to practice making decisions with the family.

**Give your teen responsibilities,** especially interesting tasks that will motivate your teen to succeed.

**Respect your teen's right to be herself** and her growing need for independence.

**Compliment your teen often,** even if it looks like your teen isn't listening.

**Be accepting of your teen's interests** by paying attention to things that are important to your teen such as sports, dress and music trends.

**Develop partnerships** with your teenager's friends' parents and know their phone numbers. Other parents can be your allies in sharing mutual information and support in an unobtrusive way.

**Set fair expectations** that your teenager can strive to meet. Achieving good grades, serving as a volunteer and participating in extra-curricular activities all promote a sense of accomplishment.



# Be a Better Parent

## BY TAKING TIME OUT FOR YOURSELF

Being a good parent takes a lot of time and effort. The job is a 24-hour-a-day responsibility that lasts until your children are on their own.

Although most parents want to spend as much time with their children as possible, it is also important that you have time for yourself. Sometimes those moments will last only as long as a bath while your toddler is napping; sometimes they can be a whole afternoon spent exercising while the children stay with a sitter.

It's also important to know that good child care—and self-care—actually start even before your child is born. If you are pregnant, it is important that you see your doctor often, eat properly, avoid drugs and alcohol, and get plenty of rest. There are many services available to help you during this time. Check with your doctor, clergy and friends with children for suggestions. Listed below are some tips to help you during each stage of your child's life. And remember, as your child gets older you'll generally have more time for yourself.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD IS...

### **Newborn to Six Months**

- Learn to nap when your baby does. Your baby's sleeping schedule can ruin everyone else's, and exhausted parents tend to lose their tempers more quickly.
- When your baby finally settles into a routine, find special time for yourself. A portion of nap time could be used to take a breather from housework and do something you like.
- If you start feeling isolated, plan daily outings and take your baby with you or arrange to meet with other parents of infants.

### **Six to Eighteen Months**

- Teach your child to eat pureed vegetables or cereal. It's messy, but it will keep your child busy for long periods of time—and it teaches coordination!
- Find a babysitter you can trust so you can spend time with other adults.

### **Toddler: Eighteen Months to Three Years**

- Find ways to relieve daily stress brought on by constantly chasing after your toddler. Physical exercise is wonderful and many health spas provide on-site child care free or for a minimal charge. If you can't afford a health spa, have a friend watch your baby while you exercise and you do the same for her. You can also exercise – in the house – while your baby is napping.
- Make it a point to talk to adults at some time during the day. Give a friend or a relative a call.

### **Pre-Schooler: Three to Five Years**

- As your parenting skills are developing, so are your child's social skills. Try a mother's morning out program at a local community center to give both of you a break.

### **School Aged: Six to Ten Years**

- Find other parents you can talk to on a regular basis. Join a support group, take a parenting class, or become involved in your child's school activities.

### **Pre-Teen**

- This is a time of developing independence for your child, so encourage him to spend a few days away from home at camp or with a favorite relative or friend. Use that time to reacquaint yourself with the rest of your family and some of the pastimes you enjoy most.
- When your child says, "I'm the only one who has to..." check out rules with other parents. You'll probably find out you're not the meanest parent in the world.

### **Teenager**

- Because your child is on his own more and more, you may feel as if you've lost your main responsibility. Try to put new focus on your adult relationships and get out into the community.

# Tips for Parents

As a parent, you will find from time to time that your child care needs will change, whether temporarily or permanently. By knowing how to take care of your needs during this time, you will be able to give your child better care.

## SINGLE PARENTS

In New Jersey, many households with children are headed by one parent. Because, as a single parent, you may have no one with whom to share parenting responsibilities, you must pay extra attention to taking care of your needs as well as those of your children. Some tips for single parents:

- 1. Make sure your children have adequate supervision.** Because most single parents are also working parents, it is important that you make arrangements for adequate child care while you are at work. The Child Care Helpline (800-332-9227) can help you locate child care resources in your area. Also make sure your children are prepared for unexpected times alone. (See article on page 18.) Knowing your child is safe will give you tremendous peace of mind.
- 2. Develop sources of support by maintaining contact with other single parents.** Set up a system in which you babysit for each other or call each other when you're at your wits' end. There are also many organizations that provide similar services to single parents. Check with local community groups to see if there is one near you.
- 3. Expect to feel tired and frustrated.** Single parents have twice the child care responsibilities, twice the demand on their time and energies, and half the earning power. This can all add up to a sense of frustration. Learn to recognize these problems before they get out of hand. Talk to someone about your feelings. Seek professional counsel if necessary.
- 4. Manage home responsibilities sensibly.** Realize that time spent with your children is more important than a sparkling clean house. Get your children to help you with simple chores. You can even make a game of housecleaning, rewarding your children for a job well done.

- 5. Remember that your child is not an adult.** Don't make unreasonable demands on him, but assign household chores and responsibilities that your child is capable of completing.
- 6. Don't try to do everything yourself.** Learn to recognize problems when they are small, and don't hesitate to ask for help from family and friends. Trying to do everything yourself is next to impossible. Family, neighbors, school personnel, clergy, community and government agencies and informal organizations for single parents are just some of the sources of help available.
- 7. Don't neglect your social life.** Make it clear to your children that you love them very much, but that you also need time alone with other adults.

Involve your child in a structured social activity if at all possible. This will provide good social skills for your child, as well as a break for you.



## WORKING PARENTS

In most two-parent households, both parents work. Parents who work must juggle the demands of both family and job, which can often lead to stress.

- 1. Spend time with your children.** Set aside a period of time (maybe an hour) every day to spend talking and playing with your child. This way you will become knowledgeable about what your child is learning while not under your care. It will also reinforce your parental role.
- 2. Set priorities for the things you think must be done.** There are only so many hours in a day. Put the items in order from the most important to the least important. Know that you can't always do everything.
- 3. Learn to share responsibilities with your spouse or partner.** When one of you is sick, frustrated, angry or overwhelmed, the other one should take over.
- 4. Take care of your marriage.** Children take a lot of your time and attention and can strain even the best marriages. Take a break from the kids to spend some time with your spouse alone. Talk about things that bother you. Do something special.
- 5. Agree upon and enforce a curfew time for kids.** This not only gives your child the rest he or she needs, it also provides you with time in the evening to catch up on your tasks and set up for the next day.



# Tips for Parents CONTINUED

## TEENAGE PARENTS

Because teenage parents are still growing up themselves, the parenting job for them is particularly difficult. If you are a teen parent, there are ways to make your job a little easier.

- 1. Learn about your responsibilities and how to care for your child.** There are many agencies that offer parenting classes and even special classes for teenage parents. By learning how to be a good parent, both you and your baby will benefit.
- 2. Learn about the services available to help you and your baby.** There are many services available for teen parents. Take time to seek out these services. Some services to explore include family planning clinics, local and county health departments, social service agencies and special programs for teenage parents.
- 3. Set aside time for recreation, even if it means finding a babysitter.** The demands of child care, housekeeping and a job and/or schoolwork can cause you to feel uptight and frustrated.
- 4. Keep in touch with parents, family and friends.** They can be an invaluable source of help while allowing you to spend time with those you are close to.
- 5. Ask for help with child care, parenting skills and decision making.** Other parents whom you admire are often good sources of support and information. Don't try to do everything on your own.
- 6. Take time to learn about family planning.** Talk to your school nurse, guidance counselor, family physician or a local clinic.



# Coping with Stress

Sooner or later everybody feels stress or frustration on the job, especially when the job is the full-time position of being a parent. No matter how much you love your child or children, there are times when their actions or outside frustrations cause you to reach the boiling point. Don't let off steam by striking out at your child. Instead, consider the following alternatives:

- 1. Count to 10.** Give yourself a chance to regain control by going to another room or outside for a few minutes. If your child is young, put him or her in a safe place first, such as a crib or playpen.
- 2. Lie Down and Relax.** Put your feet up, place a cool cloth on your forehead and for a few minutes let your thoughts drift to some place far away from your everyday life. Daydreaming is free.
- 3. Vent Your Frustrations Privately.** Go to another room, close the door and scream or cry. Or write your frustrations down in a journal.
- 4. Call Someone Who Cares.** It might be a friend or a relative, but do call someone who understands you and knows what you're going through. By talking the situation over with them, you'll get the support you need and rid yourself of the frustration and sense of being alone with your stress. If you don't know who to call, call 1-800-THE KIDS.
- 5. Pamper Yourself.** When your child takes his nap, don't rush to make dinner or clean up the house. Instead, take time off to listen to music, watch TV, read a book or newspaper—or do nothing at all.
- 6. Do Something Physical.** You don't have to stay cooped up in your house, letting the stress of the day build up. Take your child out for a walk to the playground or go shopping. The physical activity is good for all of you and is a great outlet for pent-up feelings of frustration.
- 7. Change Your Daily Routine.** The same old routine day in and day out is frustrating to everyone, especially to parents. Vary what you do every day and have something different to look forward to at the beginning of each day—even if it is only a walk to a new location.

- 8. Try to Arrange Neighborhood Babysitting Groups.** If there are other parents in the neighborhood at home with children, see if they would be willing to do alternate caring for the children. This frees everyone up for a day to themselves and gives the children the opportunity to meet others their own age.

If the stress you feel cannot be relieved by using any of these suggestions, it's possible that you need outside help in dealing with stress. Refer to the list of emergency numbers on page 21 in this booklet. Remember that there is help available and often it's offered free of charge. Don't think that what you're feeling is so bad you can't share it with someone else: it's happened to many other people, and there are ways of helping you and your children through the crisis.



# How to Choose a Child Care Center

In New Jersey, most mothers are now working outside their home. Consequently, most parents will find it necessary to use the services of outside child care facilities, whether on a daily basis, during an emergency situation or during school recesses and summer vacation. No matter what the situation, you should know the basics to look for in a center. Also, because demand for child care is high, you should start your search early.

You will want to make sure the child care center where you leave your child is credible. Check the center's license, which must be posted. The licensing agency ascertains that the center meets basic requirements in physical plant and life safety, staff qualifications, staff/child ratios, health care and program activities. In New Jersey, centers serving six or more children under the age of 13 must be licensed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Child Care Help Line (1-800-332-9227) also provides information on child care centers.

If the child care center is providing services for less than six children, and is therefore not licensed, check with other parents who are using the service to make sure the quality is up to your standards.

You can obtain the names of child care centers from the Child Care Helpline, DCF's Office of Licensing ([www.nj.gov/dcf/divisions/licensing](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/divisions/licensing) or 877-667-9845), the yellow pages, classified ads, libraries, faith-based organizations and community groups. Also check with friends, neighbors and co-workers about the centers they use.

## **When looking for the right child care center, ask yourself these questions:**

1. Do you need a full- or half-day program?
2. Are the hours of operation on a prescheduled basis or on a drop-in basis?
3. Do you need the services every day or only a few days a week?
4. Is the center close to home?
5. Are the fees within your budget?
6. Do the center's hours of operation coincide with your work schedule?
7. Are lunches and/or transportation provided by the center?

## **You must also consider your children's needs:**

1. Does the center have a clean, safe environment with appropriate sanitary procedures?
2. Does the center provide an opportunity for learning and creative expression?
3. Will your children have the opportunity to socialize?
4. Is the staff friendly and outgoing?
5. Does the center provide activities and an environment that your child will enjoy?

After you have asked yourself these questions and investigated several centers, you can make a decision that is right for both you and your child.

## **WHEN CHOOSING A CHILD CARE CENTER, REMEMBER TO:**

1. Start your search early.
2. Consider your needs.
3. Consider your child's needs.
4. Make sure the center is licensed.
5. Find out about funding and costs.
6. Observe and evaluate the center's programs.

# How to Choose a Child Care Center

## CHECK LIST

### Who Operates Child Care Centers

- Private Owners
- Non-profit organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Head Start (for children from low-income families)

### Where to Find Names of Child Care Centers

- The Child Care Helpline
- DCF's Office of Licensing  
([www.nj.gov/dcf/divisions/licensing](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/divisions/licensing))
- The Yellow Pages
- Classified ads in newspapers
- Libraries
- Faith-based organizations
- Community groups
- Friends, neighbors and co-workers



### Look for Programs That Meet Your Needs

- Do you need a full-day or half-day program?
- Does the center operate on a prescheduled basis or can you use it on a drop-in basis?
- Will you need the service every day or only a few days a week?
- Is the center convenient to home and/or work?
- Do the hours of operation coincide with your work schedule?
- Are the fees within your budget?

### Look for Programs That Meet Your Child's Needs

- A center with a clean and safe environment.
- A center that provides an opportunity for learning and creative expression.
- A center that provides opportunities for children to socialize.
- A friendly and outgoing staff.
- Activities and an environment that your child enjoys.

### Make Sure the Center Has a License

Child care centers in New Jersey that care for six or more children under the age of 13 must be licensed by DCF's Office of Licensing. The license must be posted. The license ensures that the facility has met the basic requirements in:

- Physical plant safety
- Life safety
- Staff qualifications
- Staff to child ratios:
  - Under 18 months.....1:4
  - 18 months up to 2 1/2 years.....1:6
  - 2 1/2 years up to 4 years .....1:10
  - 4 years .....1:12
  - 5 years and older.....1:15
- Health care
- Program activities

### Find Out About Funding and Costs

- Compare costs of care.
- Some programs are subsidized by corporations or other groups and may be less expensive.
- Contact 1-800-332-9227 for the agency in your county that manages the child care subsidy program for low income families.

### Observe and Evaluate the Center's Programs

- Talk to other parents who use the center.
- Talk to the children at the center.
- Never choose a center without visiting and observing its facilities first.



# School Age Children

Children left home alone after school are commonly known as “latchkey children” because they must let themselves into their house after school and take care of themselves until their parents return from work. These children should not be left home alone, even for only a few hours after school. Children left home alone are in potential danger—they are at risk of hurting themselves or being hurt by others.

As a parent, you should take every step necessary to find adequate supervision for your children at all times. Some sources to investigate include schools, family child care homes, boy scouts, girl scouts, child care centers, YMCAs, YWCAs, and after-school programs. For more information on where to find supervised child care programs in your area, call the Child Care Helpline at 1-800-332-9227, or look in the yellow pages of your telephone book under child care.

Although your child should never be left home alone, there will be times in an emergency when this cannot be avoided. To help your child stay safe should such an emergency arise, teach your child some basic rules and procedures in advance. Also sit down with your child and establish a set of rules to be followed for those times you will be late. To avoid confusion, these rules should be similar to those enforced when you are home. The rules should be based on common sense.

**The following guidelines will help you prepare older children for short periods of time alone.**

- 1. Establish house rules.** This will help your child feel more secure because she will know what her limits are. You should discuss specific rules and the need for such rules with your child. Some rules to discuss include using the telephone and computer, using gas or electric appliances, allowing friends or strangers into the house and leaving the yard or house.
- 2. Post important phone numbers,** including numbers for your job, the police department, fire department, ambulance, doctor, poison control center and neighbors. Show your child how to use the telephone, and tell your child not to hesitate to call the appropriate number should an emergency arise. Very young children should be taught how to dial “911” for help.
- 3. Teach your child practical skills** that will make her feel more at ease when you are away. Some skills to be learned include how to respond to phone calls or visits by strangers. Also, you should teach your child that she should never tell anyone that you are not at home.
- 4. Set up emergency plans** to ensure that your child reacts calmly and rationally during emergencies. You should teach your child what to do if she loses the house key, misses the bus, is approached by a stranger, discovers a fire, finds a window broken or a door open, or is injured. Most important of all, actually act out an emergency situation with your child. This will help your child remember better.

You, as a parent, should also follow rules. If you tell your child you are going to be fifteen minutes late, make sure you telephone if you’re going to be longer. A delay of only a few extra minutes can cause your child to panic. Some professionals also suggest that parents teach their child a family “code word” to be used in case someone other than you must interact with your child. The code word will let your child know that a stranger has been sent by you.

# Discipline Doesn't Have to Hurt

The word discipline comes from “disciple,” which means to teach. However, many parents take the word discipline to mean punishment. You as a parent should see the value of discipline as a means of teaching your child to become a better person. One of the most important aspects of teaching your child is to show respect for your child’s views and to let your child have some say in decisions that concern him.

**Here are some guidelines to help you teach your child to respect you and household rules:**

**Love.** Your child needs lots of love and approval. Your child’s desire to please you is one of the most important tools of effective discipline, so praise and hug your child often.

**Communicate With Respect.** As part of your love for your child, learn to take time to listen and consider your child’s point of view. If you respect your child, he will be more willing to listen to what you have to say.

**Acknowledge Good Behavior.** Praise your child for the many good things he does each day. It’s much easier to encourage acceptable behavior than to have to punish a child who misbehaves.

**Do It Yourself.** Remarks like “Wait until your father gets home” tell your child that you can’t punish him. It’s better to deal with the misbehavior when it occurs.

**Prevent Trouble Before It Happens.** Childproofing your house can prevent a great deal of frustration for both parents and child. For small children, place valuable objects out of reach. Make sure that older children know which items are off-limits to them without parental supervision.

**Set Clear Limits.** Telling your child in advance what is expected of him and what the rules are also helps to prevent trouble before it happens. Be prepared to repeat the rules several times before your child learns them.

**Be Consistent.** Whatever style of discipline you choose, use it in every situation, even in public or when you have guests visiting. Consistency is the key to effective consequences.

**Make Sure The Punishment Fits.** Punishment is most effective when it is directly related to the child’s misbehavior. Your child will learn by experiencing the logical consequences of his actions. For example: “If you don’t come home on time today, you can’t play after school tomorrow.” This will also help your child learn to consider the consequences before he breaks the rules.

**Be Firm and Consistent.** Don’t say you will do something unless you are prepared to carry it through. When you give in to a nagging or crying child, the child will know he can use this tactic to get his own way.

**Be Prepared.** Discuss disciplinary methods with your spouse, babysitter and other child caregivers ahead of time. It’s important that you support each other when disciplining your child. If you disagree on discipline, talk about it in private. Try not to “gang up” on your child; when one parent starts to discipline, the other should not interfere.

**Check Your Emotional Pulse.** Before you discipline a child who has done something to anger you, frustrate you or push you to your limit, take a time out. Give yourself and your child a short period of time to calm down. Then, immediately address the situation.

# Where Can I Call If I Need Help?

Many agencies and organizations throughout New Jersey can offer you the type of assistance you need in dealing with the problems all parents have. Local community organizations may have the type of counseling services you need. Perhaps a self-help group like Parents Anonymous (where parents talk about problems with each other and a counselor at confidential meetings) is the answer.

IF YOU NEED TO SEEK HELP, KEEP IN MIND THAT:

## **YOU SHOULDN'T GIVE UP.**

If the operator takes too long to answer, don't despair—dial again. And, if you're put on hold, stay there. Someone will come to the phone.

## **YOU'RE NOT ALONE.**

Don't be afraid to call because you think your situation is one the agency has never dealt with before. They have, and they're prepared to help you without preaching or being critical.

## **IT'S OK TO ASK QUESTIONS.**

Don't be afraid to find out if the agency you called is appropriate to your needs. Find out what kind of services they provide; what they expect of you and vice versa; who will you talk to if you call, or if you have to come in for an appointment; and how much, if anything, will the service cost.

## **TAKE ACTION.**

Get involved with the agency in a way that's comfortable for you. Help to improve services for parents. Ask to be on their Board of Directors, join the parent advisory council or help to design or change the program that will meet the needs of parents.



# Resource Numbers

**PARENTS ANONYMOUS  
FAMILY HELPLINE  
1-800-THE KIDS**

Parents Anonymous is a self-help group that offers parenting support and referrals to resources in your community. If you are feeling stressed out, you can call their Helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and speak to a specially trained volunteer to help you work through your frustrations before a crisis occurs.

**CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE  
1-877-NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)  
TTY 1-800-835-5510**

If you have reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected, call the child abuse hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Calls may be made anonymously.

**CHILDREN'S SYSTEM OF CARE  
1-877-652-7624**

Call this number to find out about services for children and teens with emotional and behavioral health care challenges and their families.

**2NDFLOOR YOUTH HELPLINE  
1-888-222-2228  
[www.2ndfloor.org](http://www.2ndfloor.org)**

This is a youth helpline serving all youth and young adults in New Jersey. Youth who call are assisted with their daily life challenges by professional staff and trained volunteers. Anonymity and confidentiality are assured except in life-threatening situations.

**SAFE HAVEN INFANT PROTECTION HOTLINE  
1-877-839-2339  
[www.njsafehaven.org](http://www.njsafehaven.org)**

This is a toll-free hotline for distressed parents who wish to give up an unwanted infant anonymously with no fear of arrest or prosecution. While information will be requested, no names or records are required.

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
[www.nj.gov/dcf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf)**

P.O. Box 729  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0729  
1-855-INFO DCF (463-6323)  
For general inquiries, contact DCF at:  
[AskDCF@dcf.state.nj.us](mailto:AskDCF@dcf.state.nj.us)

**DCF OFFICE OF LICENSING  
1-877-667-9845  
[www.nj.gov/dcf/divisions/licensing/](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/divisions/licensing/)**

**CHILD CARE HELPLINE  
1-800-332-9227**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE  
1-800-572-SAFE (7233)**

**2-1-1  
[www.nj211.org](http://www.nj211.org)**

This phone number connects callers to various human services in their community and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**NJ HELPS  
[www.njhelps.org](http://www.njhelps.org)**

NJ Helps is a web site to find out about services and programs for children, families and individuals. You can also prescreen to see if you are eligible for programs such as Food Stamps, Medicaid and others.





[WWW.NJ.GOV/DCF](http://WWW.NJ.GOV/DCF)