

Resource Families Should Actively Promote Social-Emotional Competence in the Children They Care For



For children who live in out-of-home care, a healing family should promote competence in managing behavior and regulating emotions. Here are six ways to start:

1. Create an environment in which children feel safe to express their emotions. Help them learn to put their feelings into words. (Examples: “You can tell me that you’re mad. You won’t get in trouble.” “It looks like you might be sad and maybe a little afraid. Is that what is going on right now?”)
2. Be emotionally responsive to children and model empathy. Reach out, connect, be affectionate and model healthy emotions. (Examples: “Sometimes when I am sad, I want to cry and it helps to have a hug. Do you want a hug right now?”)
3. Set clear expectations and limits. (Examples: “People in our family don’t hurt each other.”)
4. Help children separate emotions from actions. (Examples: “It’s okay to be angry, but we don’t hit someone when we are angry.” “You got some big feelings going on. Let’s deal with them in a way where everyone stays safe.”)
5. Encourage and reinforce social skills such as greeting others, saying please, and taking turns.
6. Create opportunities for children to solve problems. (Example: “What do you think you should do if another child calls you a bad name?”)

Social-Emotional Competence includes:

Self Esteem—Good feelings about oneself

Self Confidence—Being open to new challenges and willing to explore new environments

Self Efficacy—Believing that one is capable of performing an action

Self-Regulation/Self Control—Following rules, controlling impulses, acting appropriately based on the context

Personal Agency—Planning and carrying out purposeful actions

Executive functions—Staying focused on a task and avoiding distractions

Patience- Learning to wait

Persistence- Willingness to try again when first attempts are not successful

Conflict Resolution—Resolving disagreements in a peaceful way

Communication Skills—Understanding and expressing a range of positive and negative emotions

Empathy- Understanding and responding to the emotions and rights of others

Social Skills- Making friends and getting along with others

Morality—Learning a sense of right and wrongs

Other Parenting Strategies

HANDOUT 3-4

TEACHING AND PREVENTION TECHNIQUES:

Teach a child what you want him to do and set up your home so that problems won't happen in the first place!

Establish some simple house rules that keep everyone safe and protected. Talk to children about their behavior. Give them specific information about what you expect. Give praise and let your children know how you feel when they do well. Remind them of rules and calmly talk about problems. Make the rule clear and repeat it often.

Routines bring predictability and predictability brings security. Establish rhythms for mornings, evenings, bedtime homework, visits, saying goodbye and hello, have a place for things in your home such as coats, toys, clothes. Give simple chores to everyone (use a job chart or a posted list) and remember to mix work and play.

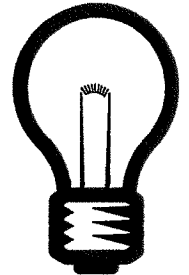
Pre-teach or talk to children about how to act in certain situations and practice ahead of time. Or set the situation act so you give your child a chance to practice a skill and then provide praise. (EXAMPLE: *Okay Bobby we talked about the rules about going to the grocery store together and about accepting "no" as an answer if I say you cannot have candy at the checkout stand. Let's practice. You ask me if you can have some candy, and I'm going to say no.*)

Have regular family meetings to talk about the upcoming weeks, have a family activity, talk about problems that happened during the week, negotiate new rules and privileges and to acknowledge good things that happen during the week is a great way to help children learn to solve problems, negotiate and communicate. Give each child a chance to chair the meeting if old enough.

Model the behavior you want to see. Remember, children imitate the adults around them. Set an example by the way you act.

OTHER IDEAS TO USE TEACHING AND PREVENTION TECHNIQUES:

- ✓ Write important rules down. Post rules.
- ✓ Show children how to do a task and let them practice under your supervision.
- ✓ Use structure and routines. (Morning routines, bedtimes, after school)
- ✓ Use visual reminders (notes, pictures, charts, posting rules)
- ✓ Remind children of expectations before events. (Pre-teaching)
- ✓ Role-play how to handle situations such as when you get angry, upset, hurt.
- ✓ Adjust your expectations for emotionally immature and delayed children.
- ✓ Re-direct or intervene. (Good for young children, but works with older too.)
- ✓ Model- your actions speak louder than words.
- ✓ Talk to the child. (Not lecture.) Focus on results of his behavior. "What you did was not okay." Not "you're a bad boy!"



Other Parenting Strategies

HANDOUT 3-4

REWARD OR POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TECHNIQUES

Respond positively to when a child acts the way you want him to so he'll do it again!

Use Rewards: Rewards are positive consequences for behaving in a desirable way. When trying to think of rewards for children, think of what is experienced as rewarding by a child. This does not have to be material, but can be other things. Some examples are: A child can receive rewards even if he can't do a behavior perfectly. If a child makes an attempt, or a small improvement, reward the attempt.

Choosing a favorite meal

Dinner out

Inviting friends over to play

Extra bed time

Special sleep out in the living room

Time with a favorite adult

Praise

Play a computer game

Stickers or Reward Chart

Coloring books

Playing a game with a parent

Trip to the library

Invite a friend to dinner

Use approval and praise to your advantage. Notice when a child does something good. Point out his strengths. Use "prompts" or set a child up to succeed. Let a child overhear you talking to another person about how well he is doing. Give choices to children so they feel some control. Help a child feel good for a job well done.

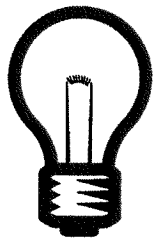
EXAMPLE: *You did the right thing when you told your sister you were angry but didn't hit her. I'm proud of you for remembering the right way to act.*

Try Behavior Modification. This can be as simple as listing out a few chores that a young child needs to do every day and checking it off before she goes to sleep or before she goes out to play. It can also be a more involved system of earning points that can be traded in for privileges such as phone, curfew, bedtime or friends. State your goal positive such as "Each school night I get to bed on time, I earn an extra fifteen minutes of bedtime on Saturday night." Keep the times short (the same day for a young child, the same week or two for an older child.)

For young children or children with developmental delays, use something visual such as stars on a chart, poker chips in a bowl or quarters in a jar. Sometimes rewards work better in reverse—a child starts out with five dollars in a jar and is fined 50 cents each time he breaks a clearly defined rule (such as no swearing, or doing the dishes within an hour that dinner is ended.)

OTHER IDEAS TO HELP REINFORCE AND REWARD GOOD BEHAVIORS:

- ✓ Write important rules down. Post rules. Use visual reminders (notes, pictures, charts, posting rules)
- ✓ Use job cards (list the basic steps of a chore on a card.)
- ✓ Use charts or check off lists. Use pictures or photos for young or disabled children.
- ✓ Remind children of expectations before events. (Pre-teaching)
- ✓ Adjust your expectations for emotionally immature and delayed children.
- ✓ Behavior modification (Earning points, privileges, special activities.)



CONSEQUENCES

Teach children that their actions have consequences, both negative and positive.

Consequences teach children that they need to accept how their actions affect others. Help children learn to take responsibility for what they do. Natural consequences are great teachers. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *If you don't wear your mittens, you have cold hands by the time you get to school.*

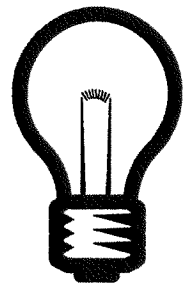
Logical consequences mean you use a result that is directly connected to the child's actions. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *If you do not take care of your bike or toys, you lose the privilege to play with them.* Pick consequences carefully. Remember — you need to live with it, too!

Let children experience earning or losing privileges. It is important that children know the difference between rights and privileges. Rights are things that are guaranteed like the right to be physically safe, to be fed, to be able to visit families according to the court plan, etc. Privileges are benefits that are granted to people. For children, these benefits are phone privileges, watching television, going to special events, having friends over, etc. It is important that we do many things for our children without them having to earn them (such as spend time with them, come to events, etc.) because that is how we build positive relationships. But, privileges can be earned by a child by appropriate behavior and privileges can be taken away as a result of inappropriate behavior. **FOR EXAMPLE:** *30 minutes of phone time is granted after homework is finished and the dishes are washed. Coming in 30 minutes late after curfew results in a 1 hour loss of curfew for the next two nights.*

Call a time-out. Time-outs help children (and parents) get back in control. Time-outs should give either parents or children a time to cool-off and calm down. Keep a time-out brief. It should be no longer than 10 minutes for young children because young children have a sense of time that is much longer than adults do. Generally a time-out should last one minute for each year of the child's age. Come back together and talk about what happened and how to deal with it next time.

OTHER IDEAS OF HOW TO USE CONSEQUENCES:

- ✓ Making amends. (If you break it, clean it up. If you stole it, return or replace and apologize.)
- ✓ Losing privileges. (Not rights.) Losing time on curfew.
- ✓ Repeat the task until you get it right.
- ✓ For older kids, writing down: what you did, what happened, what you should have done and what you will do differently next time then discussing this with a child.
- ✓ Focus first on safety. Separate children, stop action, protect child from hurt. Let the tantrum wind down. Then focus on behavior.
- ✓ The *1-2-3 Magic!* Technique. (Using counting and timing out.)
- ✓ Use corrective teaching. (Explaining what the expectation is and having the child practice with you along with a consequence for the behavior.)





DE-ESCALATING ANGRY SITUATIONS

- 1. Lower your voice.** Talk slower. Listen. Be gentle. Think before you talk. Slow the pace down. Signal for another person to help you. **STAY CALM!**
- 2. Back Away.** Don't move into someone's space if they are agitated. (Though sometimes, younger children welcome an adult's presence to help them keep in control.)
- 3. Take a Break.** Take a two-minute time out. Tell the child you want to talk about this, but you want to think about it. Count to ten. Put your hands in your pocket. Sit down. Leave the situation for a while. Signal to a co-worker to provide support.
- 4. Don't take what the child says personally.** When a child calls you a name or says he doesn't like you or says you are mean, don't take it personally. This is a child who hasn't learned how to deal with frustration or anger so he strikes out.
- 5. Avoid getting into a power struggle** whenever possible. Instead of forcing a child to do something, offer a choice or a consequence. Anticipate problems (such as bed time) and try to find ways to give children choices while doing what they have to do.
- 6. Don't escalate problems by calling a child names,** by making sarcastic remarks or making fun of a child.
- 7. Be supportive.** Don't attack - be curious. Remember, you are the adult! You do not have to defend yourself. Ask questions, and reflect feeling. "I can see you are really upset about this." "Tell me what you think should happen." "I don't understand, but I want to." It is hard for a child to fight against someone who is on his side.
- 8. When a child keeps trying to engage you in an argument, keep calm and use Broken Record Approach.** That means keep yourself focused, by acknowledging you heard the child, but continue to repeat your request.
- 9. When things begin to escalate, don't try to reason a child out of it.** Leave reasoning for when things have calmed down. Remember, *you don't try to teach a drowning person to swim. You wait until he is in shallow water and calmed down.* Focus on his current behavior ("You need to calm down and lower your voice. Then we can talk about this some more.")