

Tip Sheet

Tips for Service Providers: Healthy Parenting Practices

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER for
HEALTHY MARRIAGE and FAMILIES



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“Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children and no theories.” – John Wilmot

Healthy relationships and healthy parenting practices go hand-in-hand. Both benefit children by creating secure attachments, sustaining an environment conducive to playful exploration and learning, and modeling healthy communication.¹ One of the most important parts of developing healthy parenting practices involves finding a balance between individual, couple, family, work, and other relationship needs and responsibilities.

Service providers should understand the importance of helping clients find balance in their lives to strengthen their parenting skills and promote healthy relationships. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families has a virtual library with free resources. Visit

www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/Library and use the keywords “parenting skills” and “family relationships” to access tip sheets, worksheets, activities, and more that you can use with your clients to help them develop healthy parenting skills.

Healthy parenting involves practices that lead to stable and satisfying parent child relationships built upon a strong friendship that is safe, secure, loving, and nurturing, as well as being characterized by an ability to negotiate differences and resolve conflict, with the absence of abuse, neglect, or violence.²

Healthy Parenting: Finding a Balance

Balance is the positive sense of well-being and equilibrium parents feel when they are regularly meeting their own needs and the needs of others at work, home, and other settings.

Parents play many different roles in work and family settings. Achieving a good balance among the demands of these different roles can be difficult. The tips below can help families develop healthy parenting practices and achieve balance.

Develop and nurture relationships

Research shows that the quality of a couple’s relationship has a “spillover effect” on the parent-child relationship. Healthy couple and coparenting relationships increase the likelihood that children will be reared in a safe, nurturing, and stable home environment. When things are going well in a couple’s relationship, the positivity promotes positive parenting. The opposite is also true; when things are not going well within a couple’s relationship, the result is often negative and ineffective parenting. Encourage families to develop and nurture healthy relationships by pursuing information and skills in areas such as conflict management, communication, and financial literacy from books, websites, workshops, classes, or other sources.

Focus on meeting needs

A family's needs are met when everyone feels safe and secure, loved, respected, and that they belong.³ Keep in mind when working with families that parents come in many different forms, including coparents, single parents, stepparents, and grandparents.

- **Parents as Individuals:** Parents should take the time to meet personal needs and revitalize themselves socially, emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. When parents take care of their personal needs, they are better able to help their partners and their children meet their own needs.
- **Parents as Couples:** Parents need to intentionally prioritize their couple relationship and be careful not to let distractions get in the way of nurturing a healthy relationship. *Remember, a "healthy" relationship assumes both parents have a vested interest in meeting the child's needs as well. It may not be a healthy relationship if a parent is in a relationship where the partner excludes or trivializes appropriate needs of the child to a degree that may seem hurtful or neglectful.*
- **Parents as Workers:** Parents need to carefully manage potential work-to-family and family-to-work spillover and to stay child-centered as much as possible. Being organized, managing time well, and focusing on the quality of time spent with family can help minimize stress for working parents.
- **Coparenting:** Unmarried or divorced coparents need to keep their children's best interests in mind, control their anger, choose not to put the ex-partner down in front of their children, avoid unintentionally putting the children in the middle of a conflict, encourage their

children to have an ongoing relationship with their ex-partner, and not allow children to play the coparents against each other.⁴ For more information about healthy coparenting, download the free brief on *Encouraging Effective Coparenting in Blended Families* at <http://tinyurl.com/coparenting-blended-families-p>.

There are four general styles of parenting, determined by how responsive parents are to their children and how demanding they are of them. To learn more, download the free fact sheet *Building Strong Parenting Partnerships* at <http://tinyurl.com/parenting-partnerships-p>.

Seek quality childcare

To help parents find balance with their work and family roles, encourage them to seek out childcare that prioritizes children's health and safety, promotes learning, and encourages parental involvement. If a family is using group daycare, the center should be licensed and have a low ratio of childcare providers to children.⁵ The Federal Office of Child Care offers information for parents including guidance on selecting and paying for quality child care at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/parents#resource>.

Child care assistance is available to eligible families through State agencies that administer Federal Child Care and Development grants. Each State determines eligibility requirements for families within its State. Contact the agency in your State directly for eligibility information and how to apply for assistance. Visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/resource/ccdf-grantee-state-and-territory-contacts>.

Three Keys to Healthy Parenting Practices

There are at least three general keys to healthy parenting practices: (1) parents are warm and positive with their children; (2) parents stay connected with their children; and (3) parents monitor their children and help them to learn to manage their own behavior successfully.⁶



Cultural considerations

Parenting styles and practices vary across ethnic and cultural groups. Regardless of parenting style employed, healthy parents are generally more *intentional* about what strategies they use to raise and parent their children. Children, regardless of ethnic or cultural heritage or influence, have been found to thrive more successfully in two-parent households. Continuously married, two-parent households tend to provide the most cognitive, social, emotional, and economic stability and well-being for children overall. To learn more, download the free tip sheet *Cultural Collisions* at <http://tinyurl.com/cultural-collisions-p>.

Sources

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 - ³ Coplen, R. D., & MacArthur, J. D. (1982). *Developing a healthy self-image*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.
 - ⁴ Allgood, S., Higginbotham, B., & Skogrand, L. (2007). *Helpful strategies to deal with ex-partners in remarriages*. Retrieved from http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/FR_Marriage_2007-02pr.pdf
 - ⁵ Harris, V. W., Johnson, A., Olsen, K. (2013). *Balancing work and family in the real world*. Plymouth, MI: Hayden-McNeil.
- Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Retrieved from http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9824
- ⁶ Harris et al., 2013; Roggman et al., 2008.

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Strong Families: Tips for Healthy Parenting Practices

A companion tip sheet is available to share with families interested in learning about healthy parenting: <http://tinyurl.com/families-parenting-p>

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