

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 8: Parenting Skills & Child Behavior Management



### Contents

Introduction & Importance .....	1
Tip Sheets for Supporting Protective Caregivers .....	2
<b>INFANTS TO TODDLERS</b> .....	2
<b>SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN</b> .....	3
<b>TEENS</b> .....	5
Behavior Management & Discipline .....	6
Creating Norms for the Household and Shelter .....	6
Using Praise, Reward, & Attention .....	6
How to Define Rewards for your Child .....	7
Differential Attention & Ignoring .....	7
Natural & Logical Consequences .....	7
How to Develop and Give Effective Commands .....	8
Preventing Aggression and How to De-Escalate .....	8
Child Behavior Management Activities .....	9
Resources .....	10

### Introduction & Importance

Knowledge of useful parenting techniques and child behavior management is critical to preparing new children and youth advocates. Understanding that the caregiver is the expert in their family's lives and using methods of encouraging different parenting styles is key for working successfully with families. There are many good sources of information, and most advocates are always developing their proficiency in this area. Children & Youth Advocates working with families should take into account the cultural influences on parenting styles and child behavior management (Refer to the [New Advocate Manual: Specific Communities](#). You need a login to access this information and scroll down to the MEMBERS-ONLY Resources).

### Tip Sheets for Supporting Protective Caregivers

Below are charts of behaviors that may be observed by protective caregiver’s children and how you may support the protective caregiver at three different developmental stages; Infant to Toddlers, School-Aged Children, and Teens.

INFANTS TO TODDLERS	
What may be observed	How you can support caregivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being upset at reminders and doing their best to avoid reminders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that children cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Disturbances in feeding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If they have a home visitor from public health, ask for suggestions</li> <li>• Model routines and offer 2-3 choices to choose from</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of helplessness &amp; passivity</li> <li>• Generalized fearfulness</li> <li>• Specific new fears</li> <li>• Easily startled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name the child’s feelings</li> <li>• Help child anticipate what will happen</li> <li>• Understand that children cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation</li> <li>• Provide reassurance when the child needs it</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of recently acquired developmental skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read a book with them designed for their age level</li> <li>• Spend time in face-to-face interactions, lots of baby talk and giggles</li> <li>• Some protective caregivers may benefit from a parenting courses or parenting books</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinginess and separation anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that children cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation</li> <li>• Spend time in face-to-face interactions, lots of baby talk and giggles</li> <li>• Help them prepare for school</li> <li>• Help find people the caregiver trusts to babysit</li> <li>• Consider using childcare even if the caregiver is not working</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhibited play and exploration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give choices</li> <li>• Provide reassurance when the child needs it</li> <li>• Expect to need to do these repeatedly. It is normal for children to need continual reassurance.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking and talking about the traumatic event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the protective caregiver seek out friends, family or professionals for emotional support</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach that hands are not for hitting, hands are for non-violence.</li> <li>• Your actions will speak louder than words</li> <li>• Have clear rules and consequences so they know what to expect</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continually Expecting danger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support caregivers in keeping their children close to them</li> </ul>

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 8: Parenting Skills & Child Behavior Management



SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN	
What may be observed	How you can support caregivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posttraumatic play: A kind of play that some children engage in who have been exposed to trauma. Is a repetitive reenactment of a traumatic experience or event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer reassurance that you and the caregiver are working together to keep the family safe</li> <li>• Name the child’s feelings and encourage the child to find ways to express them through language, play, or drawing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking and talking about the trauma</li> <li>• Being upset at reminders of the trauma and doing their best to avoid reminders</li> <li>• Specific fears, often triggered by traumatic reminders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer questions truthfully and simply</li> <li>• Listen to the child’s concerns</li> <li>• Explain the violence in terms of rules                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Example: “There is a law, a very serious rule, that people cannot hit others. This is a good rule. It keeps everyone safe. The non-protective caregiver knows this rule. They must learn to live with people and not break this rule.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Offer reassurance that you and the caregiver are working together to keep the family safe                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Be careful about blaming the non-protective caregiver for the violence or the separation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Name the child’s feelings and encourage the child to find ways to express themselves through language, play, or drawing</li> <li>• Support the caregiver in letting the child stay close</li> <li>• Help the child anticipate what will happen next</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling guilty about the trauma and responsible for what happened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the violence in terms of rules                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Example: “There is a law, a very serious rule, that people cannot hit others. This is a good rule. It keeps everyone safe. The non-protective caregiver knows this rule. They must learn to live with people and not break this rule.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Children of this age may need to explain a non-protective caregiver’s violence using external factors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Substance abuse</li> <li>○ Bad childhood</li> <li>○ Current stressors like financial worries</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impaired concentration and difficulty learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give choices</li> <li>• Name the child’s feelings and encourage the child to find ways to express them through language, play, or drawing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Headaches, stomach aches, or other physical symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer reassurance that you and the caregiver are working together to keep the family safe</li> <li>• Support the caregiver in letting the child stay close</li> </ul>

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN	
What may be observed	How you can support caregivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive behavior</li> <li>• Fantasies of revenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the violence in terms of rules</li> <li>• Example: “There is a law, a very serious rule, that people cannot hit others. This is a good rule. It keeps everyone safe. The non-protective caregiver knows this rule. They must learn to live with people and not break this rule.”</li> <li>• Give choices</li> <li>• Have clear rules and consequences so they know what to expect</li> <li>• Listen to the child’s concerns</li> <li>• Name the child’s feelings and encourage the child to find ways to express them through language, play or drawing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawn behavior</li> <li>• Concerns about their own safety and the safety of others</li> <li>• Fear of being overwhelmed by their feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the caregiver in letting the child stay close</li> <li>• Name the child’s feelings and encourage the child to find ways to express them through language, play, or drawing</li> <li>• Today is far more important to the child than what happened in the past</li> <li>• Help the child anticipate what will happen next</li> <li>• Listen to the child’s concerns</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regressive behaviors like bed wetting, consistent use of baby talk, sucking thumb for comfort, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the caregiver in letting the child stay close</li> <li>• Help the child anticipate what will happen next</li> </ul>

TEENS	
What may be observed	How you can support caregivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detachment, shame, and guilt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help teens find ways to express their strong feelings                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Journaling, Writing stories or poems, or Art</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-consciousness about their fears and intense feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let them know they both have someone to talk to when they are ready</li> <li>• Provide an environment in which the teen can talk about concerns</li> <li>• Answer questions honestly</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Acting out” and sensation-seeking behaviors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ May include life-threatening reenactments</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek out friends, family or professionals for emotional support</li> <li>• Help them learn to meet their wants without intimidating or threatening others</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abrupt shifts in relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let them know they both have an someone to talk to when they are ready</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire for and plans to take revenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help them learn to meet their wants without intimidation or threatening others</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radical changes in attitude and self-identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find activities they can connect with peers</li> <li>• Help them succeed at school</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Premature entrance into adulthood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help them succeed at school</li> <li>• Make sure their schooling does not fall too far behind</li> <li>• Support caregivers in letting their teens stay close to them                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Even relatively independent teens may need extra support after a traumatic event</li> <li>○ Answer questions honestly</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reluctance to leave home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting caregivers in letting their teens stay close to teen                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Even relatively independent teens may need extra support after a traumatic event</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Find activities they can connect with peers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being upset at reminders of the trauma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let them know it is okay to talk about the non-protective caregiver</li> <li>• Do not express your anger at their non-protective caregiver in front of them</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing their best to avoid reminders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let them know when they’re ready they have someone to talk to</li> <li>• Let them know it is okay to talk about the non-protective caregiver</li> <li>• Do not say they are like their non-protective caregiver</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping behaviors that may include self-endangering behaviors                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Substance abuse, Self-harm, Suicidal ideation &amp; thoughts, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help teens find ways to express their strong feelings.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Journaling, Writing stories or poems, or Art</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Help teens anticipate what will happen next</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regressive behaviors like bed wetting, consistent use of baby talk, sucking thumb for comfort, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect to have to do these things again and again</li> <li>• Help teens anticipate what will happen next</li> </ul>

### Behavior Management & Discipline

Understanding the behaviors in the context of trauma is critical to working with children and families. Children who have been traumatized may feel threatened or be reminded of the traumatic event in a situation that looks harmless to someone else, even their caregiver; don't take it personally. When a child is reminded of their trauma by something in the environment, their bodies respond with fight, flight or freeze for protection as if they are back in the dangerous moment. Hormones and chemicals are fired in the brain. They are having a physical and emotional reaction to the trauma trigger and cannot sort the conflicting feelings and thoughts.

### Creating Norms for the Household and Shelter

Having a list of norms or guidelines that everyone agrees on can help a family better manage their expectations. See creating norms in the [Age-Appropriate Support Groups](#) section of the Children & Youth Advocate Manual.

### Using Praise, Reward, & Attention

Praise needs to be:

- Specific
- Immediate
- given without “buts” and other back-handed comments
- Consistent- given every time the desired behavior is demonstrated by the child

Rewards need to be:

- Immediate
- Creative
- Small
- motivating - refocus on positive behavior and praise what you want to see in the future

Attention needs to be:

- Focused on the positive. This is MUCH more effective than focusing on the negative. The warmer the relationship between caregiver and child, the more motivated the child is to do the right thing
- 80% positive and 20% negative. Typically, caregivers practice the reverse - 80% negative; 20% positive - and don't get good results
- Refocus on positive behavior – praise what you want to see in the future

### How to Define Rewards for your Child

Defining rewards can differ from child to child. Some children will respond to something as small as stickers, and others may do better with something like a special activity for them. These rewards will also differ for age group. Another tip for caregivers is to try working with your child or teen to come up with their rewards. Using their input will likely lead to incentives and rewards that they will value and work to earn. See the resources section for more information on rewards for children and teens. Below are some examples of healthy rewards for Children & Teens.

Children	
<b>Tangible Rewards</b>	Keep a box with small items from a dollar store or something similar and let your child choose something when they have earned it.
<b>Special Activities</b>	Doing something your child likes can be an incentive, for example, playing a board game or an extra bedtime story
<b>Coupons</b>	Using coupons that give the child the option to choose their favorite meal or not having to do a chore
<b>Token System</b>	providing your child with tokens or stars when they have done something good, which can be redeemed for rewards like going to the park
Teens	
<b>Extended Curfew</b>	Allowing teens to hang out with their friends for a little longer can be a good reward.
<b>Favorite Meal</b>	Giving your teen the opportunity to choose their favorite meal or dessert for the family dinner
<b>Car Privileges</b>	Like extended curfew, this allows the teen a little more freedom and the feeling that they have earned more of your trust

### Differential Attention & Ignoring

- What behaviors can you ignore and what behaviors can't you ignore?
  - Do they feel impossible to control or too dangerous to ignore?
- What happens when you give in after a period of ignoring?
  - INCONSISTENT REINFORCEMENT IS THE MOST POWERFUL WAY TO KEEP A BEHAVIOR.
  - Children may learn that they can outlast their caregivers if they simply continue the bad behavior long enough.
- Model the opposite of the behavior you are ignoring or want to go away.
  - Example: if you want the child to stop whining or back-talking then respond in a more age appropriate voice or with respectful language.

### Natural & Logical Consequences

- A Natural Consequence is the natural result of your behavior.
  - Example: you didn't wash your uniform last night when I told you to, so now you will need to wear a dirty uniform to the game.
  - Or you left your bike outside when I told you to bring it in and now it is rusted from the rain.
- A Logical Consequence is still related to the behavior but used when a natural consequence is not safe or practical.
  - Example: you went down the street when I told you to stay in front of the house so now you must play inside.
  - Or you threw your toy so now you can't play with it for the day. A consequence should be as directly related to inappropriate behavior as possible.

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 8: Parenting Skills & Child Behavior Management

### How to Develop and Give Effective Commands

- Use Statements vs. Questions.
  - Example: “It’s time for bed”
  - Versus “Are you ready to go to bed?”
- Use a calm voice
- Offer meaningful choices, where either response is acceptable.
  - Example: “Do you want to wear your blue pants or your red pants?”
  - Versus “Do you want to get dressed now?”
- Give one command at a time, simply stated and phrased positively.
  - Example “Please put all these blocks in the bucket.”
  - Versus being vague: “Clean up this mess.”
  - Or issuing too many commands at one time: “Put those blocks away and get your clothes hung up and make your bed.”
- Provide praise after each act of compliance, particularly with younger or oppositional children.
  - Praise the children during the actions, rather than waiting until the very end when the entire task is completed.
  - Example: “You have ten blocks in the bucket already? You are doing a great job listening!”
- Describe in advance the positive consequences of compliance.
  - Example: “We can read this book together as soon as the books are put away” or “Once you take out the trash, I can take you to the mall.”

### Preventing Aggression and How to De-Escalate

#### What makes kids aggressive?

- Perception of threat
  - feeling like they need to protect themselves
- Environment
  - If kids don’t have enough space to move around and do different activities
  - Example: children of all ages grouped together watching TV in a small room and one wants to dance
- Shelter rules dictating that caregivers must always be with child
- Insufficient resources
  - If kids don’t have enough resources, it generates competition and frustration
  - Example: one game controller for 10 kids
- Boredom
  - Not enough to do or no activities planned
  - Do NOT wait until children complain or are aggressive before changing activities or play opportunities
- Previous traumatic events can influence a child’s perception of being threatened in current fairly nonthreatening situations

#### What can we do about it?

Given your knowledge of child development, parenting skills, and children’s responses to trauma, please consider the following practical options:

- What can we change about the shelter environment?
  - Example: add toys, structure activities, brainstorm with children and caregivers about improvements
- What can we change about the shelter rules?
  - Example monitoring of children, support of caregivers

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 8: Parenting Skills & Child Behavior Management



### Child Behavior Management Activities

The following two activities are meant to both help the protective caregiver and their children. Advocates strongly encourage that you practice the activities with the protective caregiver, so they have some experience with it before trying on their own with their children.

[Clean Up Activity](#) for younger children: This is a common request in many homes, and a commonly ignored request. Try this exercise to see if these seven steps get results.

[Negotiation Activity](#) for teens: Negotiation is an important skill when you have teenagers. It is the basis for problem solving and setting rules or limits with teens

[Age Appropriate Chores for Children](#): This handy FREE printable is a good start on thinking about age appropriate chores for children from *The Spruce*.

Keep in mind that all children are different, and age is not the only factor when determining the right chore. Note that for the older age groups, you can select chores from the younger aged categories to build an appropriate list. Set your child up for success and choose an appropriate and doable number of chores and timeline in which to complete them.

In addition; to age, think about these for each child when selecting chores:

1. Maturity level
2. Physical ability
3. Interest

They also have [12 Chore Chart Tips For Success](#).

1. Be reasonable in your expectations
2. Be an example
3. Involve the children in the process of selecting a chart
4. Consider your rewards
5. Make chore charts visual
6. Have consequences without being harsh
7. Get organized before you expect everyone else too
8. Make sure there are breaks
9. Keep it interesting
10. Supervise
11. Train your workers
12. Include homework and mandatory activities

# Children & Youth Advocate Manual

## Section 8: Parenting Skills & Child Behavior Management



### Resources

[Center for Suicide Awareness: Hopeline](#) is a text-based service in Wisconsin that is free and available 24/7. Trained volunteers text back within seconds of receiving a message.

[The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#) is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with professional crisis counselors who—through interpreters—aid in over 170 languages. The hotline offers crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are confidential.

Education and Behavior has an article called [25 Privileges You Can Let Your Child Earn for Good Behavior](#) which has some good ideas for rewards for children.

[Helping Children Exposed to Violence at Home: An Essentials Guide](#) This resource is an updated and revised version of the 2004 publication titled “Helping children thrive: Supporting woman abuse survivors as mothers”, the 2007 publication titled “Little eyes, little ears: How violence against a mother shapes children as they grow” and the 2008 publication titled “Helping an Abused Woman: 101 Things to Know, Say, and Do”.

[Managing Challenging Behavior of Children Living with Domestic Violence](#) this factsheet is to help you understand how children may react to domestic violence, and how you can best help them feel safe and valued and develop personal strength. The other factsheets that may be of interest include:

- [The Importance of Playing with Your Children](#)
- [Keeping Your Children Safe and Responding to Their Fears](#)
- [Helping Your Child Navigate a Relationship with the Abusive Parent](#)

*Trauma-Informed Care for Children Exposed to Violence: Tip Sheets* these tip sheets from Safe Start and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention walk through tips for people working with children who have been exposed to domestic violence.

- [Tips for Parents and Other Caregivers](#)
- [Tips for Child Welfare Staff](#)
- [Tips for Early Childhood Providers](#)
- [Tips for Engaging Men and Fathers](#)
- [Tips for Agencies Working with Immigrant Families](#)
- [Tips for Parent Education Programs](#)
- [Tips for Pregnancy Prevention Programs](#)
- [Tips for Domestic Violence and Homeless Shelters](#)
- [Tips for Teachers](#)
- [Tips for Agencies and Staff Working with Youth](#)

Very Well Family published an article on [How to Reward Your Teen for Good Behavior](#). It has some good information on ways to use a reward system with their teen. (For Teens)

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*Please notify the LGBTQ & Youth Program Director, [Cody Warner](#), if ANY links are no longer working.*

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