

Children & Youth Advocate Manual

Section 8: Parenting Skills & Child Behavior Management



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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.

Tip Sheet: Supporting Protective Caregivers with Infants to Toddlers

Here are various behaviors that infants and toddlers may exhibit, along with suggestions on how to assist protective caregivers. Encouraging youth to express their emotions through discussion, play, or art can be an effective means of supporting them. It's vital to comprehend child development to best assist families in need.



Being upset at giving or avoiding reminders.

- Help protective caregiver communicate in developmentally appropriate ways.

Sleep or feeding disturbances.

- Model routines for the whole family.
- Offer 2-3 options to choose from.
- If they have a home visitor from public health contact them.

Loss of recently acquired developmental skills.

- Read a book with them designed for their age level.
- Spend time in face-to-face interactions, lots of baby talk and giggles.
- Some protective caregivers may benefit from a parenting course or parenting books.

Posttraumatic Play: Repeatedly thinking and talking or acting out the traumatic event.

- Help the protective caregiver seek out friends, family or professionals for emotional support.
- Allow space for child to talk with the advocate so the parent does not burn out or become triggered.

Feelings of helplessness & passivity. Generalized fearfulness. Specific new fears. Easily startled. Continually expecting danger.

- Help the child name their feelings.
- Help child anticipate what will happen.
- Understand that children cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation.
- Provide reassurance when the child needs it.

Increased separation anxiety.

- Understand that children cannot understand the concepts involved in family violence and marital separation.
- Spend time in face-to-face interactions, lots of baby talk and giggles.
- Help them prepare for school.
- Help find people the caregiver trusts to babysit.
- Consider using childcare even if the caregiver is not working.

Aggressiveness.

- Teach that hands are not for hitting, hands are for non-violence.
- Your actions will speak louder than words.
- Have clear rules and consequences so they know what to expect.
- Be consistent with messaging.

Inhibited play or exploration.

- Give choices.
- Provide reassurance when the child needs it.
- Expect to need to do these repeatedly. It is normal for children to need continual reassurance.

Tip Sheet: Supporting Protective Caregivers with School-Aged Children

Here are various behaviors that school-aged children may exhibit, along with suggestions on how to assist protective caregivers. Encouraging youth to express their emotions through discussion, play, or art can be an effective means of supporting them. It's vital to comprehend child development to best assist families in need.



Impaired concentration or difficulty learning.	Physical symptoms routinely showing up.	Feeling guilt or responsible for the traumatic event(s).	Aggressive behavior or fantasies of revenge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give 2-3 choices. • Reflect on the developmental stage the child may be in and share information with protective caregiver • The child's brain may be overwhelmed by a trigger and need accommodations to help them calm back down to learn better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give 2-3 choices. • Reflect on the developmental stage the child may be in and share information with protective caregiver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the violence in terms of rules • Children may need assistance that non-protective caregiver's violence using external factors like substance use, financial stressors, etc. are not excuses for the harm they caused. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give 2-3 choices. • Reflect on the developmental stage the child may be in and share information with protective caregiver
Regressing in developmental behaviors.	Withdrawn behavior. Concerns about their own safety and the safety of others. Fear of being overwhelmed by their emotions.	Posttraumatic Play: Repeatedly thinking and talking or acting out the traumatic event.	Specific fears from trauma and avoidance of trauma reminders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the caregiver in letting the child stay close. • Help the child anticipate what will happen next. • Help identify any trauma triggers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today is far more important to the child than what happened in the past • Help the child anticipate what will happen next • Listen and validate the child's concerns. • Support the caregiver in letting the child stay close 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer reassurance that you and the caregiver are working together to keep the family safe. • Allow space for child to talk with the advocate so the parent does not burn out or become triggered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer questions truthful, developmental ways. • Listen to the child's concerns. • Offer reassurance that you and the caregiver are working together. • Be careful to not blaming the non-protective caregiver. • Help the child anticipate what will happen next.

Tip Sheet: Supporting Protective Caregivers with Teenagers

Here various behaviors that school-aged children may exhibit, along with suggestions on how to assist protective caregivers. Encouraging children to express their emotions through discussion, play, or art can be an effective means of supporting them. It's vital to comprehend child development to best assist families in need.



Sensation seeking behaviors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them learn to meet their wants and needs. • Help them connect with something bigger than themselves (i.e. volunteering, project specific help, etc.). • Identify appropriate self-soothing behaviors. 	Self-consciousness about their fears and feelings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the family know they all have an advocate to talk to when they are ready. • Provide an environment in which the teen can talk about concerns. • Answer questions honestly for their development. • Validate fears. 	Abrupt shifts in relationships or self-identity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out positive informal and formal supports. • Help them learn to meet their wants and needs. • Find activities they can connect with peers. 	Triggered by trauma or avoiding trauma triggers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time and space for the child to feel what they are going through. • Let them know it's okay to talk about the caregiver that caused harm in positive ways and negative ways . • Answer questions truthful, developmental ways. • Hear the valid concerns from the teen. • Offer reassurance that you and the family will collaborate together. • Be careful to not blame the non-protective caregiver. • Help the child anticipate what will happen next. •
Premature entrance into adulthood. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying age appropriate activities for children. • Explain youth development for teen years. • Answer questions honestly. 	Detachment, shame, and guilt. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help teens find ways to express their strong feelings. • Help teens anticipate what will happen next. 	Regressive behaviors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess what the protective caregivers concerns are with them. • Set expectations with teen and protective caregiver. • Connect them with a healing professional that best fits their family (i.e. therapists, healers, shamans, psychiatrists, etc.) 	

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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

Tips to Using Praise, Reward, and Attention

Praise needs to be:

Given without 'buts'

Specific

Immediate

Given without
backhanded
comments

Consistent - given EVERY time the
desired behavior is demonstrated

Rewards needs to be:

Refocusing on the
positive behavior

Motivating

Creative

Immediate

Small

Attention needs to be:

Reflecting on the positive
more than the negative.

Focusing on the
present situation.

Helping the child learn in
an age-appropriate way.



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

Natural & Logical Consequences

A consequence should be as directly related to inappropriate behavior as possible.

- A Natural Consequence is the natural result of your behavior.
 - Example: I asked you to wash your uniform before the game today and you didn't. We don't have time to wash it and we don't have another you can wear so you're going to have to use a dirty uniform today.
 - I almost stepped on and broke your toy yesterday. I know you like your things and I want to keep them safe too, so if I request that you put your toys away if you want them to continue to stay safe.
- 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. This was scary to not know that you were. So I know you are safe and can trust that what you are telling me is what you will be doing you must play inside.
 - Or you threw your toy so now you can't play with it until after we eat lunch.

How to Develop and Give Effective Commands

Tips: How to Develop and Give Effective Commands with Children

Use statements vs questions

Use a warm, calm voice
as possible

Give one command
at a time

Each command should
be phrased positively

Responses to the choices given
should all be acceptable

Offer positive feedback for
each completion of a task.

Encourage children during tasks
by praising them for their effort.

Commands should
be simply stated

Describe in advance the positive
consequences of following
through with the action

Offer meaningful choices



Preventing Aggression and How to De-Escalate

Youth Needs to Avoid Aggression

Do NOT wait until children complain or are aggressive before changing activities or play opportunities. If you are picking up on signs that a youth is being triggered, that would be the opportunity to transition to something else that is not as emotionally activating or take a break.

- Youth will feel the need to protect themselves when they feel there is a perception of a threat.
- Previous traumatic events can influence a child's perception of being threatened in current nonthreatening situations.
- Youth need an environment that has different spaces to move around and do different activities.
- Shelter rules dictate that caregivers must always be with their children, giving neither of them space from each other if needed.
- Frustrations over long wait times occur and can generate competition if youth don't have enough resources.
- Being underwhelmed or boredom from limiting activities.

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?
 - Add toys, structure activities, and directly ask the children and caregivers about improvements.
- What can we change about the shelter rules?
 - Monitoring of children, support of caregivers, cross-train all staff to have a basic understanding of working with families, meet families where they are at.

Child Behavior Management Activities

The following two activities are meant to both help the protective caregiver and their children. Advocates are strongly encouraged to 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.

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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 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](#)

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