

# Twelve Strategies for Enhancing the Parent/ DHH Child Relationship

**1. Express love.** Expressions of love can head off undesirable behavior. When a child feels loved, she wants to please her parents. A warm facial expression, a kind tone, a look of admiration and enthusiasm, a hug, all express love in an unmistakable way. Older children, who may be embarrassed by physical expressions, welcome the personal attention of a one-on-one game or special time with Mom or Dad.

**2. Be predictable.** Children thrive in a predictable environment. Routines and schedules carried out with consistency provide stability and security. This is also true with parenting behavior, consistent messages and consistent, reasonable consequences result in a child who trusts his parents. And it can be especially important for some deaf or hard of hearing children who have limited communication skills.

**3. Communicate clearly.** Make sure your words and actions are sending the same message. Young children need to have things spelled out for them to teach an abstract concept like sharing, use examples. If there is a communication challenge, because of deafness or hearing loss, acknowledge the need to purposefully develop strategies to close the gap. With a deaf or hard of hearing child, consider creating a 'quality control' test to make sure your message was understood as intended, including consequences. Have her repeat back what she understood you to say. Role-play to teach productive, appropriate questioning techniques that will be essential at home, at school, and everywhere.

**4. Understand problem behavior.** By being good observers, parents can gather information that will help them understand what a child's problem behavior means. Look for a pattern. What happens before the behavior starts? When, where, and with who does it occur? Is there a physical cause such as hunger or fatigue? Was the communication experience unsuccessful, resulting in frustration, anger and lashing out? Does he feel threatened, hurried or ignored? Is the child seeking attention in an unappealing way? Is he having trouble expressing himself and projecting his negative energy in a physical way? Which is needed... punishment, or a shoulder to cry on?

**5. Catch your child being good.** It's easy to take for granted what we approve of, and hard to ignore what we don't like. This makes it easy to neglect opportunities to praise good behavior and focus on bad behavior. Let your child feel and see your approval. Turn 'no' statements into 'yes' statements, e.g. I love how careful you're being with that antique vase.

**6. Set up a safe environment.** Children love to explore and thrive in tactile environments where things can be pulled on, climbed over, taken apart and put back together again (maybe). This isn't being naughty, this is their nature. Make her environment safe. The more there are appropriate things available to explore the fewer problems with inappropriate behavior she will have. Consider how this applies to adolescents and even teenagers. A safe environment is one where the rules and limits are defined and understood. Can she have the car Friday night? Yes, if we know whom she's with, where she's going, and when she'll be back.

**7. Set sensible limits.** Neither parents nor children want to live in a police-state atmosphere in which there are so many rules it's impossible to avoid breaking them. Generally, very young children can remember only a few rules and a great deal of adult supervision is required to enforce them. Make the language simple and direct, like: Use words. No hitting. The limits expand as the child grows older. Going outside established limits is an exercise in trust between parent and child. If your adolescent or teenager demonstrates responsible behavior, he should be rewarded with certain privileges. If he demonstrates a lack of responsibility, the limits may need to be more tightly drawn and defined until trust is built again.

**8. Defuse explosion.** Step in while your child is still calm enough to discuss a problem. Intervene before anger gets out of control. If certain situations are recipes for disaster, talk about them ahead of time and create some plans for coping and resolving. For deaf and hard of hearing kids, not being understood because of a communication mode difference or gap is a common occurrence, and one that lends itself to frustration and anger. Anticipate these kinds of circumstances. Often parents can help children avoid a meltdown with by pointing out problem-solving alternatives that can be employed before the problem rises to a crisis state.

**9. Teach good problem solving skills.** There are good solutions to problems, and not-so-good solutions to problems. How do you get your child to know the difference? Start by clearly labeling unacceptable behavior and explain why. Follow up with positive suggestions for what to do next time. For children under four, it's best to simply state what you want them to do next time. For older kids who can express themselves and think abstractly, ask them what they could do next time that would be better. Suggest additional alternatives. As kids get older and more mature, they'll be able to employ these tactics more successfully if they've been practicing them since childhood. If the problem stems from communication gaps, which is often true for children with deafness or hearing loss, use the same strategies and exploit every opportunity to expand the child's language base around conflict resolution. Knowing how to express himself and state his position will increase your child's sense of empowerment to successfully solve problems.

**10. Don't overreact.** Giving lots of attention to problem behavior can create another whole set of problems. Telling a child to go to a time-out place or removing her from the play area where she misbehaved delivers a consequence for bad behavior without creating an attention-getting incentive to do the thing again.

**11. Seek professional help when needed.** Most children grow out of common behavioral problems with the patient guidance of parents and other caring adults. But for a small percentage (5 to 15%) the problem behaviors persist and can become severe. Professional help is an excellent resource that can provide support and a constructive plan of action.

**12. Be patient with your child, and yourself.** Misbehavior happens. It's human nature to learn from our mistakes. And a key to the healthy psychological development lies in the child's ability to do just that. If you follow all 11 steps faithfully and still experience a repeat of bad behaviors, remind yourself that your child is in a learning process called childhood. Your consistency, patience and love will provide him or her with the support needed to emerge into mature, autonomous adulthood.