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EMPOWERING PARENTS TO TEACH THEIR CHILDREN WITH POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

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# **Research says this is how to use positive parenting from a position of strength**

# To many, [positive parenting](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/positive-parenting-strategies/), also known as [authoritative parenting](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/authoritative-parenting-now/), sounds like a misnomer. If you take away punishment, how will a child know who is in charge? Find out how to execute positive parenting from a position of strength and raise well-adjusted, responsible children.

# Last week, a question popped up in my facebook group that sent me back to the beginning of my parenting journey.

*I understand we shouldn’t use punishment with children. But I’ll be honest, I don’t really understand how to execute positive parenting. I would love your parenting tips.*

My daughter was a few months shy of three and my son was close to his second birthday. Tensions in our household were running high. I was sleep-deprived as my son hadn’t stopped night nursing. We had outgrown our small two-bedroom apartment but were struggling financially. My husband was looking for a new job. There was a good chance we were going to move across the country.

Though we were careful not to talk about our worries in front of our children, our stress was palpable. And, our girl seemed to pick up on everything.

### **As our tension mounted, our strong-willed sensitive child’s behaviour became less and less manageable.**

Almost overnight, our daughter became angry, willful and was [hitting](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/stop-toddler-hitting/) her brother and, at times, us when something didn’t go her way.

Having studied developmental psychology during my undergraduate degree, I knew that parents who used punitive (authoritarian parenting) were more likely to raise children with lower self-esteem, lower school performance, and poorer mental health ([1](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31144101)). Moreover, children who are raised with way appeared to be more reliant on the approval and acceptance of authority figures ([~~2~~](https://www.sciencedirect.com/user/error/ATN-20?errorContext=arp-450f6678-0b90-4092-a176-d9f3caf56603)). Not only that, but they are less likely to internalize their parents’ moral reasoning as [conditional parenting](https://raisedgood.com/punishments-time-outs-rewards-conditional-parenting-doesnt-work/) relies on external forces to get the child to behave ([3](https://psychology.jrank.org/pages/431/Moral-Development.html#ixzz4MbvOfS7T)).



**Related reading:**[**Parenting a Strong-Willed Sensitive Child: Here is what you need to know**](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/parenting-a-strong-willed-sensitive-child/)

[**Parenting a strong-willed child**](http://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/parenting-a-strong-willed-child)

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### **In order to execute positive parenting, I needed to do my best to not to:**

* use of threats,
* yell,
* shame,
* take away privileges ([4](https://journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent)),
* demand obedience,
* use physical and arbitrary punishments.

Though I understood what I **shouldn’t** do, I had no clue what I **should** do. I felt weakened. Adding to this feeling was the fact that the society I grew up in had me believing the only way to parent was to force children to behave. Because of this, I had a prevailing doubt that I was risking slip into permissive parenting.

### **The truth is I didn’t know how to execute positive parenting.**

I felt limited by what I shouldn’t do. And, there were times where I just ignored misbehaviour. And, in all honesty, there were times where I defaulted to yelling or threatening to take away privileges because **I just did not know what to do.**



It took a lot of my own research, trial and error as well as starting my graduate studies to get a good handle on how to execute positive parenting.

**Related reading:**[**How to discipline a child: Science says this is the best approach**](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/how-to-discipline-a-child/)

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## This is how to execute positive parenting from a position of strength.

### **1. Connect with children to improve behaviour.**

Research shows that people who execute positive parenting:



* comfort and seek to understand their children when they are upset.
* regularly hug, kiss, and hold their children.
* are sympathetic when their children are hurt or frustrated.
* appreciate what their children are trying to accomplish or have accomplished.
* are responsive to their children’s needs and feelings.
* encourage their children to talk about their troubles.
* and, spend quality time with their children ([4](https://journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent)).

All of this shows that connection is crucial to positive parenting. This is because it fuels good behaviour and also gets misbehaviour back on track.

### **The reason?**

When children misbehave, their brains are operating in the fight, flight or freeze response ([5](https://www.amazon.com/Whole-Brain-Child-Revolutionary-Strategies-Developing/dp/0553386697/ref%3Das_li_ss_tl?crid=54NPRXCZMYSI&keywords=the+whole+brain+child&qid=1564016459&s=gateway&sprefix=The+Whole+Brain,aps,213&sr=8-1&linkCode=sl1&tag=parefromthe00-20&linkId=ca8a271c399a76cfaa9e471f570a23da&language=en_US)). Their prefrontal cortex, responsible for self-regulation, can shut down ([6](https://www.phoenix-society.org/resources/entry/calming-trauma-how-understanding-the-brain-can-help)). When parents address a child’s behaviour coming from a place of connection, the child is more likely to have oxytocin released calming the child ([7](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/oxytocin), [8](https://www.livescience.com/35219-11-effects-of-oxytocin.html)).



### **This means in day-to-day life, parents should:**

* show affection, attention, and encouragement.
* appreciate what a child is doing regardless of if the parent understands it or not. For instance, “I see you have a lot of containers out with shaving cream and food colouring. Can you tell me what’s going on?” And then, “Okay. I need everything cleaned up when you’re done making your potion.”
* consider the child’s perspective before giving directions. For example, “I love your lego set-up. You’ve worked so hard. In five minutes, I need you to clear it off the table for dinner.”
* validates the goodness in the child when faced with misbehaviour like this example from [Correction Through Connection, As It Turns Out, There’s No Other Way](https://www.heysigmund.com/correction-through-connection-as-it-turns-out-there-is-no-other-way/):

*‘I know you’re a great human. I know that for certain. That decision you made didn’t end so well, but I imagine there was something that might have felt okay about it at the time. What made it feel like a good idea?’ Then, ‘I get that. I’ve felt that way myself. How do you think it went wrong?’ And finally, ‘What might be a better thing to do next time?’ Or, if needed, ‘Is there anything I can do to make it easier for you to do that?’
Or, ‘Things seem pretty upside down right now. What might you be able to do to put things right?’*

### **2. Work together to establish rules and then follow through on those rules.**

Research shows that people who execute positive parenting:

* collaborates with children to establish the family rules.
* explain the reason for rules and expectations.
* uses [front-loading](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/strong-willed-toddler/) by explaining expectations and rules ahead of time so children know what is expected of them.
* explain the [consequences](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/consequences-for-kids/) of behaviour ([4](https://journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent)).
* are consistent about following through on rules and expectations.



**Related reading:**[**Front-loading, redirection and connection: 3 strategies for your strong-willed toddler**](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/strong-willed-toddler/)

### **This means in day-to-day life, parents should:**

* be clear about expectations beforehand.
* allow children to express how they’re feeling regardless of if the parent agrees.
* take into consideration the child’s perspective when following through on rules and expectations.
* allow for natural consequences to happen when they happen. For instance, my daughter didn’t clean up her LOL dolls after being warned that my parents’ dog would eat them. When they were eaten, she had to save her money to replace the figurines.
* wait for cooperation after expectations have been explained. For example, if my own children refuse to wear their helmets bike riding, I tell them we won’t go until they comply. Or, when the house needed to be cleaned before we went to the pool, our departure time was pushed back until everything was done.
* use logical consequences when safety or wellbeing is at stake. For instance, I took away the scissors my two-and-a-half-year-old was using until he was willing to sit down while using them.
* take a [time-in](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/time-in/). Specifically, take a child to the side of a social interaction or to her bedroom and help her calm down. Stay with her if she would like or leave her if she wants space. Once she is calm, talk about different ways to problem-solve the upsetting situation.

### **3. Model instead of lecture.**

Lecturing can make a child feel as if he, or at the very least, his behaviour is under attack.



When this happens, his fight, flight, or freeze response is triggered making him defensive against what is being said. As outlined in the section about connection, when we use our love of and attachment for our child as a means to understand and explain what went wrong, the child becomes more receptive to the parent’s direction.

Additionally, modelling calm behaviour as opposed to chastising out of anger, creates an invaluable lesson. Specifically, whenever we model the behaviour we want to see in our children, the actual function of their brain changes. The more they see their parents respond calmly, reasonably and responsibly, the more neural pathways form around those events within the child making them more likely to act the same ([9](https://www.amazon.com/Yes-Brain-Cultivate-Curiosity-Resilience/dp/039959468X/ref%3Das_li_ss_tl?keywords=the+yes+brain&qid=1564097592&s=gateway&sr=8-1&linkCode=sl1&tag=parefromthe00-20&linkId=e90b5b270461940f1dae55555f94fd20&language=en_US)).

### **This means in day-to-day life, parents should:**

* observe their responses to events.
* speak calmly and kindly as often as possible.
* model how to respond when they have acted out of anger or frustration.
* find ways to exemplify their beliefs and principles in their daily lives.

**Related download:**[**{FREE} Guide to Positive Discipline With Printable Cheatsheets**](https://pages.convertkit.com/1160947b81/f419f63bcc)

### **4. Redirect behavior.**

Aside from modelling and front-loading, one of the most powerful ways to execute positive parenting is by redirecting a child’s energy from an undesirable behavior to a more desirable one.

Different forms of redirection include:



* making substitutions.
* changing the environment.
* demonstrate and request better behaviour.

### **This means in day-to-day life, parents should:**

* Offer toys a child can play with when others are in use.
* Suggest an alternative idea to one your child has suggested. For example for a tween, this could be dropping and picking up him and his friends from the movie theatre instead of leaving him at the mall unattended.
* Take [time-ins](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/time-in-time-out/).
* Get outside to release pent up energy.
* When backtalk arises, shut off screens and spend quality time together.

### **5. Use ‘re-attunement’ when parenting gets off course.**

No matter how proficient any parent is at positive parenting, there will always be less-than-ideal moments. In a study on emotional development, Shore found that new mothers responded “the right way” to their babies approximately 30% of the time ([8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lY7XOu0yi-E)). What separated the best mothers from the mean was their propensity to re-attune. Meaning, when they failed to get their responses right the first time, these mothers tried again to find ways to get it right. As such, he concluded that the real power in parenting is in the “good enough mother.” It’s guaranteed that all parents will get parenting wrong often. However, what separates the best parents from the average is their desire to get back on track and re-attune themselves with their parenting goals and what is best for their children.

### **This means in day-to-day life, parents should:**

* re-connect with children through shared fun activities.
* re-read parenting materials that support parenting goals.
* forgive themselves when they get off track.
* take care of themselves so that they can parent effectively.
* apologize to their children when they make mistakes such as yell or threaten.
* explain to the child in age-appropriate terms that the parents’ mistakes are not a reflection of the child but because of other stressors.



## A final note about how to execute positive parenting

Since the other shoe has dropped, I am able to guide and teach my children in a way that both respects them and models the behaviour I want to see in them. Though I will falter, I can use the opportunity to demonstrate to my children how to act when they make mistakes. This style of parenting is invaluable because it understands both the child and adult are human. We will both make mistakes but when they do, I will continue to love and respect my children through their problems. And when I do, I will model contrition. I cannot think of a more meaningful way to raise my kids.

### **More articles and resources you may find helpful:**

[Stop yelling at kids using one simple trick](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/stop-yelling-at-kids/)

[The Best and Worst Consequences for Moral Development](https://parentingfromtheheartblog.com/consequences-for-kids/)

[Punishments, Time Outs and Rewards: Why conditional parenting doesn’t work and what does](https://raisedgood.com/punishments-time-outs-rewards-conditional-parenting-doesnt-work/)

[**{FREE} Guide to Positive Discipline With Printable Cheatsheets**](https://pages.convertkit.com/1160947b81/f419f63bcc)