

10 Essential Parenting Tools



**A handbook for stress-free
parenting**

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Welcome to *10 Essential Parenting Tools!*

We've all been there: at wit's end, ready to blow our top, tired of dealing with the same misbehaviors from our children. While it's comforting to know all parents face struggles and uncertainties, that knowledge alone doesn't solve the problem.

That's where *10 Essential Parenting Tools* comes in.

If you are reading this book, it means you are tired of battling your child and feeling like a failure as a parent. You are ready to trade in your stress and frustration for more effective and positive parenting. Congratulations!

Or perhaps the situation in your family is not that dire. You simply want to add a few new tools to your parenting toolbox, or reinforce the strategies you're already using. That's great, too!

These tools are the foundation upon which you can build the skills for more effective (and easier!) parenting.

You might be asking yourself, "How does Coach Mark know these tools really work?" The answer to that question is simple: this book is the product of 30 years' worth of experience working with youth and families as a

counselor, therapist, behavioral interventionist and, nowadays, as a Certified Youth, Parent, & Family Coach. This experience has provided me the opportunity to collect and test a multitude of parenting tools and techniques to find the most effective ones, which I have gathered together in this book.

Of course, like all parents, I have also learned what works through trial and error with my own child.

Used consistently, these tools will not only make your life as a parent easier, they will lead to a better relationship with your child.

The key word here is “consistently.” At the end of this book I have included an extra “bonus” tool explaining the importance of being consistent in your parenting. But for now, let’s start with the 10 most effective parenting tools.

Some of these tools are easy to share in a few sentences, others take a bit more explanation. But all of them are time-tested strategies that work.

Don’t just take my word for it. Give them a try and then let me know the results!

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Tool #1: Provide Structure

Every child craves—and deserves—structure from a parent or caregiver. Structure helps a child feel safe. It also prepares them to take on new challenges in their world by giving them a secure and stable basis from which to operate. Essentially, structure is the bedrock of effective parenting.

What exactly does “structure” mean?

Structure means setting up a household in which parents are in charge while also attending to a child’s needs, which in turn ensures a stable environment for your child.

You can provide structure in three primary ways:

“Be there” for your child

Children need guidance and support, and they depend upon parents and caregivers to provide this.

The most fundamental way to provide structure is making sure you are physically and mentally available to monitor and supervise your child.

If something is prohibiting you from being available for your child, work on eliminating the cause of the distraction so you can truly “be there” for your child.

Daily routines

Setting up predictable daily routines is another important part of providing structure. Examples include:

- *A morning routine for getting off the school
- *Mealtime routines
- *Self-care routines
- *Bedtime routines

Routines provide children (and parents!) a blueprint about how each day will unfold, which helps a child feel stable and secure.

Benefits of following daily routines include:

- *Helping children learn how to take care of themselves.
- *Teaching them that organization and predictability make life run more smoothly.
- *Freeing a parent from spending time negotiating and/or reminding a child what needs to be done. This, in turn, vastly decreases the likelihood of power struggles between parent and child.

Give reasonable consequences for behavior

The third essential component of providing structure is giving reasonable consequences for behavior. This applies to what you want your children to do *and* what you want them not to do.

While many parents focus solely on disciplining misbehavior, rewards are just as important and, many times, a more effective means of promoting good choices and compliance from children.

Rewards. Although we all want our children to do as they're told simply because we have their best interests at heart, let's face it: everyone responds to effective rewards.

Earning a paycheck is a great example of this. Even if you love your job, without a paycheck at the end of the month you would not be able to support yourself. Promotions, recognition, bonuses—the work world is full of rewards designed to motivate employees. Why not use the same effective technique with your children?

Rewards for children can take many forms, not all of which cost money. Children crave the attention of their parents. They love interacting with them. You can leverage these cravings by offering your child extra play time with you, or a special outing.

You can also offer additional free time to play video games or some other favored activity.

For younger children, sticker charts for completing a chore or a school assignment can be highly motivating, especially if you offer an extra reward for earning a certain number of stickers in a given period of time (be sure to keep the time period for earning the “extra” reward to a maximum of one week, otherwise a young child will lose motivation).

Offering a special treat, a small toy, or additional quality time together are three highly effective rewards for kids using sticker charts. It’s amazing the effort a child will give in order to earn a \$1 toy!

Even a simple compliment can be highly effective in motivating a child to follow the rules and/or complete a task. Everyone—especially a child—loves knowing their efforts are noticed and appreciated!

Punishment. As adults, we have all learned that every behavior has a consequence, be it good or bad. Although it’s much easier on a parent to give rewards for compliance, every parent needs to be willing and able to impose reasonable punishment when warranted. Why?

Providing fair but nonnegotiable punishment for infractions or misbehavior teaches a child to be accountable for their actions.

Timeouts, loss of privilege(s) for a given amount of time, extra chores—these are the top 3 methods of disciplining a child, though the options are limited only by your creativity and commitment to following through.

A word of advice about punishment:

Start small so you have room to add more consequences if necessary.

An example would be setting up a consequence in which a child loses a day of television time for a certain infraction. If the consequence proves ineffective and the infractions continue, the parent can incrementally increase the time that the child loses television privileges, until the child becomes compliant.

Of course this works only up to a point: if a child loses, say, two months of television time they may not be able to see the “light at the end of the tunnel.” They may lose motivation to comply simply because they feel the consequence will never end. In this case it is better to try a different consequence, again starting small so you can add to it if needed.

One more thing to keep in mind:

Rewards and punishment work only if they involve something the child cares about.

Sounds like a no-brainer, right? You’d be surprised how many parents I know who have been ineffective because they failed to offer rewards or

impose punishment of real meaning to their child. Without any meaning, there will be little effort to comply.

The best way to know what will motivate your child is to simply ask them. Brainstorm a list of options for rewards, then pick the one(s) that will mean the most to your child while also being the easiest for you to deliver.

Knowing what rewards motivate your child will many times also give you a great idea of what you can take away for punishment.

Involving a child in the process of setting up rewards and punishments not only provides you with ideas of what will motivate them. It also gives the child more investment in the entire process.

Tool #2: Keep it short and simple

Overloading a child with longwinded lectures or explanations vastly decreases the odds of compliance. It also leads to unnecessary confusion and possible noncompliance due to the child not really knowing what a parent wants. Even worse in terms of your relationship with your children, they may simply tune you out.

So . . .

Whenever possible, use as few words as possible when giving directives and/or punishment.

“Brushing your teeth helps you stay healthy” is a much more effective message than “Proper dental hygiene impacts not only whether or not you get cavities, it also influences your general overall health as shown by recent medical research. . . .”

In this example, I exaggerated for humor and effect, but my point is serious: limit the amount of information you say to your child and you will significantly increase the chances for compliance.

Keeping it short and simple also has an added benefit: it's easier to repeat a simple message, if necessary, than launch into another diatribe!

Tool #3: More action, less talk

This goes hand-in-glove with Tool #2: Keep it short and simple. Children do not learn from words and lectures, or threats and yelling. Begging, bribing, pleading, and coercing are also ineffective ways to teach proper behaviors.

These approaches entangle both the parent and the child in an endless cycle of bargaining, frustration, and failure.

It's far better to speak succinctly and then focus on leading by example.

Behave the way you expect your child to behave. Show your child that the rules of life apply to all of us, not just to children. They will see your rules as being fairer. They will be more likely to comply. And they will emulate the example you set.

Tool #4: Do not make up rules or decide on punishment when angry

This is another profoundly important tool for parenting, not always easy to achieve.

Let's start with the quintessential example of overreacting when imposing punishment while angry: "You're grounded to your room until you're eighteen!" Inevitably, blurting out such a statement will lead to the parent coming back at some point to apologize and reduce the punishment.

While it can be healthy for a child to see a parent owning a mistake, this can be accomplished in plenty of other situations. Everyone makes mistakes—even parents. Showing children it's okay to own your mistake, make amends if necessary, and move on is a powerful way to teach them how to deal with similar situations in their own lives.

However . . .

When it comes to making rules or deciding on punishment, repeated overreactions followed by apologies leads to mistrust and acting out from children.

If necessary, it's perfectly acceptable (and much healthier) to tell a child you need some time to come up with an appropriate rule or punishment. Unless there is an imminent safety concern, what's the harm in waiting a few minutes to calm yourself down before deciding what to do? Taking space to calm down models to your child the benefit of not acting "in the heat of the moment." It also helps you maintain consistency (there's that word again!) by avoiding the need to apologize and backpedal, as already mentioned.

For recurring misbehavior, determine a punishment ahead of time to avoid overreaction.

I love this tool because it takes all the stress and second-guessing out of the giving consequences. Determine an appropriate consequence when things are calm, and share it with your child.

For example: "The next time you _____ [fill in the blank with the specific misbehavior], you will have a ten-minute timeout."

By determining the punishment ahead of time, and alerting your child to it, you will not have to try generating an appropriate consequence "in the heat of the moment." You will simply have to remember, and impose, the punishment you already laid out.

Of course, this technique also works for rewards. Let your child know ahead of time what they will earn for good behavior. Knowing the tangible reward for their choices will help motivate your child to succeed.

Make sure that whether your child earns a reward or a punishment, you follow through with your end of the deal!

Tool #5: Whenever possible, use natural and logical consequences

This is another long one to explain, but so very important to eliminating a child's misbehavior and/or poor choices.

As already noted, all actions have consequences. This is one of life's important lessons. By using natural and logical consequences—instead of simply imposing a punishment—parents teach children responsibility through making the connection between their behavior and the consequence of that behavior. This leads to children learning to make better choices.

Children learn best when they feel the impact, positive *and* negative, of their choices.

Let's start with natural consequences . . .

Natural consequences occur as a result of a child's behavior, without any need for parental involvement or input.

Sometimes the lesson is learned quickly, such as if a child chooses not to wear a raincoat on a rainy day and then gets soaking wet and uncomfortable.

Other times, a consequence may need to be experienced numerous times before the child learns to change their behavior. An example of this might be if a child doesn't follow the rules of a game and ignores the prompts from other players. Eventually the other kids will not let the child play with them, and the child will learn to either change their behavior or risk continuing to be shunned.

If you rescue your child from experiencing the natural consequences of their behavior, you enable them to continue making poor decisions.

There are a few instances when natural consequences should not be allowed to occur. Primary among these is when a consequence creates an unsafe situation that may harm the child. If a child is playing in the street, for example, the natural consequence of being hit by a car is too dangerous.

Another instance when natural consequences are not effective is when the delay between the behavior and the consequence is too long. In this case, the child will not associate the behavior with the consequences.

Finally, if the consequence impacts others, it's also not appropriate. An example of this is when a child misses the school bus and a parent has to drive the child to school. Both the parent *and* the child are impacted by the child's decision, in which case it would be better to impose a logical consequence, which I cover next.

Logical consequences are generated by a parent or caregiver. They are most useful when natural consequences are not available or might harm a child.

Logical consequences are similar to what would happen to an adult in a similar situation, which is why they are so effective at teaching children skills that will help them be more successful later in life.

To be most effective, logical consequences need to:

*Make sense. If a child breaks a window, for example, it makes more sense for him/her to earn the money to replace the window than to lose video game privileges.

*Occur as soon as possible after the misbehavior. Just as natural consequences work best when they happen soon enough for the child to make the connection between behavior and consequences, the same applies to logical consequences.

*Be enforceable. If you cannot follow through on a consequence, you should come up with an appropriate alternative that can be enforced.

*If possible, be agreed upon in advance by both the parent and child. By agreeing to a logical consequence when things are calm, a child has less wiggle room to argue if/when the consequence happens.

Generally, logical consequences are fairly easy to generate if you remember this simple formula: the consequence relates to the misbehavior.

So . . . if a child breaks something, they have to pay for it by earning money or using their allowance.

If they break a curfew, they miss their next social outing.

If they don't do their homework, they cannot have free time.

And so on.

Remember . . .

Effective consequences are those that are: immediate, impacting, relatively short-term, and logically related to the misbehavior.

Tool #6: Follow through on warnings, rewards, and punishment

You've heard me mention "following through" several times already. This is perhaps the surest way to build trust with a child.

It's simple, really: if you give a warning and/or decide on a logical consequence and your child misbehaves, you **MUST** follow through on giving the consequence. If you do not follow through, or do so only intermittently, your child learns they are not always held accountable for their actions. They will be more prone to debate when you do follow through, or simply defy you on the chance that this time you will forget and/or not follow through.

Following through on warnings, rewards, and punishment, provides structure and builds trust with your child.

Here's something many parents miss: following through on rewards is just as important as following through on warnings and punishment. If a child makes a good choice with the expectation that they will receive a reward offered by a parent, not receiving that reward erodes trust while also greatly increasing the likelihood that the child will not continue making good choices.

Think of it this way: if your boss offers you a bonus for completing a certain project, then does not deliver on the bonus, how likely are you to work hard on the next project? What happens to your trust of your boss?

The same thing occurs if you do not follow through with your child.

Tool #7: Give new strategies time to work

As mentioned in the Introduction, over the years I have served many roles in the mental health field. This is where I learned the saying: “Things will get worse before they get better.”

When you work on changing maladaptive patterns that have become the norm for your family, you and your children may hit some rocky patches on the path to changing those patterns. Kids will balk, complain, or whine, hoping things will return to what they know.

It’s okay to let them be frustrated or annoyed. Most people are wary of change. Learning a new way to do things takes time.

The longer you and your child have been in a dysfunctional pattern, the longer it will take to correct it.

The important thing to remember is: stick with it. Don’t give up after trying a new tool or approach only a few times. It might take several weeks, or even longer, to change an established pattern. In the long run, the payoff in terms of a more harmonious family life will be well worth the effort.

Think of it this way: if you are prescribed an antibiotic for an illness and you stop taking the pills before you finish the whole bottle, your illness may not be completely cured, even if you're feeling temporarily better.

The same holds true for sticking with new parenting strategies!

Tool #8: Ignore behaviors you want to eliminate, focus on behaviors you want to encourage

Too many times parents focus only on problem behaviors, failing to acknowledge and appreciate when a child makes good choices.

When you focus only on negative behaviors, a child will likely continue the behavior in order to keep getting your attention.

Focusing solely on misbehaviors binds you and your child in an endless cycle of negative attention-seeking. Unless there is a safety issue that requires you to intervene, you can choose to let natural consequences do their work. You can be there to help your child understand why a consequence occurred and how they can avoid it next time, without engaging in a discussion, debate or power struggle over the topic.

Focusing on positive behaviors and good choices is far less stressful and frustrating for all parties involved. It also helps parents and children deepen their bond.

Focusing on positive choices and behaviors encourages a child seeking attention to continue making good choices in order to receive that attention.

Praising a child for good behavior enhances self-esteem and increases the chances that a good choice will be repeated in the future. The natural pattern that develops is based on positive interaction instead of negativity.

This leads to another good parenting rule of thumb: whenever possible, try phrasing directives in a positive way. Rather than saying, “If you don’t put your toys away, you can’t watch your favorite show,” try saying, “If you put your toys away, you can watch your favorite show.”

It’s a subtle yet profound shift in the way your message is delivered and received, and is yet another way to model the type of language, behavior and attitude you want in your child.

Tool #9: Allow your child to fail and learn from mistakes

This is a tough one for many parents. They fall into the trap of believing that if they do not rescue their children from unpleasant situations, they are failing as a parent. In fact, the opposite is true.

When you rescue a child from experiencing the natural or logical consequences of their behavior, you are setting them up to face much harsher repercussions in the future.

It's better to let your child learn the true impact of their mistakes while still living at home, where you can provide context, safety, and support, rather than having them suffer the consequences later in life.

Another way this theme is manifested in our current society is by not acknowledging that in competitions, someone wins and someone loses. Too often today I hear people lamenting that kids are not learning how to handle disappointment. By setting up a false reality in which a child always "wins," we are not teaching them how to handle disappointment and loss.

It's all right to be honest with your child about the nature of winning and losing. You can acknowledge that the other team played better today

without fear that somehow you are damaging your child's self-esteem. In fact, I would argue the opposite is true: working harder to improve your skills—so you'll have a better chance of winning the next game—is actually one of the ways to build self-esteem.

Tool #10: Pick and choose your battles

Not every issue requires your immediate attention. Some battles are best left unfought, or best fought on another day. To prevent burnout or feeling overwhelmed, learn to pick and choose your battles.

Prioritize which misbehaviors cause the biggest problems for your family, then focus first on changing those behaviors.

Picking and choosing your battles allows you to build upon your successes without feeling helpless or overwhelmed trying to “fix” everything at once.

It’s akin to taking on any complicated project: if you focus on all the different things you have to do in order to accomplish the task, it can easily overwhelm you. But if you break the project into manageable pieces and then focus on solving each piece, one step at a time, before you know it the project is finished!

Bonus Tool: Being consistent is the key

In the Introduction I gave you a spoiler alert about the need to be consistent in your approach to parenting.

It's a concept that's easy to define, though it can be hard to accomplish.

Consistency in parenting means doing what you say you will do. It also means acting (and reacting) the same way over time with your child.

Being a consistent parent means:

*Following through on commitments, obligations, or promises made to your child.

*Reacting the same way to the same situations.

*Providing consistent structure.

Parental consistency builds trust with your child. Knowing they can count on you to be the same person in any given situation makes them feel safe.

Conversely, being inconsistent not only breeds distrust and fear—it can also be very damaging to a child’s emotional growth and overall wellbeing.

Do what you say you will do—every time—and your child will trust you, respect you, and respond with less misbehavior!

That's it!

**You have stocked your parenting toolbox with 10
Essential Parenting Tools.**

**Use these tools to hone your parenting skills and
become the best parent you can be!**

**Questions? Feedback?
Email me at happyhomeparentcoaching@gmail.com
and share your thoughts!**

About the Author

Mark Roughsedge is a Certified Professional Coach and a Certified Youth, Parent & Family Coach. He is the owner of Happy Home Parent Coaching, LLC. Visit www.happyhomeparentcoaching.com for more parenting tips and information about coaching.