

Skills 4Parents

Empowering families through the
development of positive parenting
skills

LEARNING GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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Foreword from the authors

Families are at the core of the fabric of our societies. They are natural safety nets, social and economic units on which any individual should be able to rely on. But to fulfil this role, they need to be supported. The well-being of a child growing up in a family is closely interrelated with the wellbeing of the parents and the entire family.

Of course, part of this responsibility lies with the States and public structures that have to support families in fulfilling their role by making sure that they can access the necessary resources, time arrangements and access good quality, community-based services. And to a certain extent, the European Union is taking action to make this happen in the framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights, notably with the European Child Guarantee scheme that is to be implemented this decade and that should support all children to break out of the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, this framework recognises the central part of the families and the parents in achieving this. The same must be said of the efforts made to support families to achieve work-life balance. Support to families and children is also complemented through education (formal and non-formal) and in this respect, the Erasmus+ programme has a crucial role to play to guide families in their parenting journey.

As six organisations working on a daily basis in different fields of parenting and education, we joined forces to create bridges between these fields. Given our expertise, we wish to help parents and families to develop the skills that will accompany them through their parenting journey (and through life) in order to support them in their wish to develop a nurturing and safe environment for their children to grow up in and foster meaningful and caring relations in their families. Hence, we came together in the Skills4Parents project and we are proud to present here the first output directed to parents: **The Skills4Parents self-learning guide!**

We hope that this guide can serve as support for all parents and caregivers wishing to improve their existing skills or wishing to acquire new ones. This guide can also be used by other family members, uncles, godmothers, family friends etc., who are curious about the project and want to check their understanding on communication, empowerment, problem solving, mediation and digital skills. The learning packages of this guide are open and accessible to everyone!





What is Skills4Parents?

Skills4Parents is an Erasmus+ project aiming at creating an innovative online platform to **support learning parents in their parenting journey**. Gathering the expertise of 6 partner organisations across 5 European countries, the Skills4Parents project is grounded in 6 core values:

- Human Rights;
- Non-discrimination;
- Social inclusion;
- Gender equality;
- Intergenerational solidarity;
- Empowerment of parents, respect for all families.

The Skills4Parents guide is an intermediary product that contains all the relevant information about the learning packages which will be available in the online platform by the end of 2022. At the same time, it aims to cater to the needs of parents who prefer to have their learning material available in a downloadable format so they can enjoy an overview of all that the Skills4Parents platform can offer offline.

Why was Skills4Parents developed?

With modern technologies developing fast, many parents need more support, guidance and mentoring in meeting the everyday challenges in raising their children. Through this project, we defined these motivated parents in need of support as **LEARNING PARENTS**.

With years of experience in supporting learning parents, the Skills4Parents project partners agreed on recognising that parents often struggle with common issues that are present in the everyday lives of families. The solution to this is in “upskilling” parents, which leads to their better understanding of children's needs and their mutual relationship which can further lead to better quality of life of families – children, but also parents themselves. It provides parental support, which can be defined as the provision of services aimed at strengthening the skills and abilities of parents so that they can adequately care for their children and meet their physical, emotional and social needs.

And all parents will need some kind of support at some stage of their parenting journey. While the creators of this guide are advocating for appropriate State support for parents to have access to the appropriate, resources, times and services to be able to fulfil their parenting role in the best environment possible, we also acknowledge the need to provide educational material for parents to develop certain specific skills and this is why we have come together to create this guide.



How can Skills4Parents support me?

As a growing body of research is showing, parents and caregivers influence children's development in a multitude of ways. Amongst many legal and expert documents, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**¹ (the key international child rights agreement between countries) **recognises that parents and the family have a decisive role in the child's upbringing, education and well-being.** Consequently, modern prevention science emphasises the importance of adopting various positive parenting skills as a factor which enhances the child's chances to grow into a happy, psychologically healthy and functioning member of society while maintaining healthy and fulfilling family relations. Through the different learning packages contained in this guide, parents and caregivers will have an overview of some of the skills that can help them in their journey to create the best family environment possible for their children.

I am a parent

The Skills4Parents project adopts a **self-learning approach**, allowing all learning parents to choose the content that they need to tackle the parenting challenges they are encountering at their own pace. Being a parent is not an easy job. There is no universal method on how to become a good parent...instead, there are multiple methods! This is why Skills4Parents is addressed to all parents regardless of their style, family type, number of children... all the ones who want to learn, are curious about certain topics, want to find inspiration on how to work on their relation with their children and their family life... This is why the guide is divided in different chapters, and contains explanations, tips, activities, conversation starters to allow parents to create the self-learning programme that fits their family best. With this guide, we aim to support you in your parenting journey so that you can strengthen your family ties and learn how to deal with specific situations with more confidence.

I am a professional working with parents

The Skills4Parents self-learning approach has been thought from the start as something easily adaptable into trainings. In addition to the general tips and knowledge offered by the different learning packages, you can find a guide for professionals to download on the Skills4Parents website that will support you in the development of the guide content into a training.

¹ United Nations (1989). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Geneva: United Nations.



What can I learn?

The skills and knowledge that figures in the present guide have been selected following a careful selection process. First, partners have built on their experience working with parents and adult educators and a thorough literature review to preselect a set of skills. This list was then put through a “reality test” as all partners organised focus group sessions to test the skill sets in five countries. All organisations of the consortium completed their task resulting in the creation of a cross-European focus group with different profiles of parents and educators.

The learning parents participating in the focus groups came from various backgrounds and each of them face different challenges in their everyday lives. From divorced and single parents, migrant parents, special needs parents with hearing or visual impairments to parents from big cities, suburban areas to rural. The group was gender-balanced and was representing diverse family forms and geographical origins. For more information about the selection of the learning packages, [you can check our report](#).

The 5 skills selected (Communication, Empowerment, Mediating, Problem-Solving and Digital) were then broken down into concrete learning outcomes, looking at what part of these topics would be particularly relevant to learning parents. Then all partners used their expertise and knowledge to develop learning packages corresponding to each skill, containing theoretical background (referring to renowned parenting experts such as D.W. Winnicott and his “good enough parenting” theory, as well as the “Parenting theory” of Alice Van Der Pas), case studies and stories to help develop the concepts and advice, and of course activities and concrete tips to put them into practice!

We are confident that the five packages presented below have something for each parent in them, giving them a mix of new knowledge and new skills. Have a look yourself at the content:



| Package | Knowledge | Skills |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Communication skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the concept of communication and effective communication; - List the tips and strategies for effective communication with their children and teenagers; - Put in practice their effective communication skills with their children and teenagers to address sensitive topics in everyday family life; - Put in practice their negotiation skills with their children and teenagers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify ineffective or aggressive communication and prevent it; - Improve their communication skills and in that way positively influence their teenager's communication skills; - Build healthy communication channels with their children and teenagers; - Understand and have a clear picture of what their children want and need. |
| Empowerment skills | <p>Learn about and understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive parenting practices and effective ways of engaging with their child; - The needs of their child; - The behaviour of their child, especially challenging behaviour; - How to build psychological resilience in their child through the use of empowerment skills. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better recognise and respond to their child's needs; - Effectively cope with a much broader scope of issues and situations as a parent; - Demonstrate a non-judgmental attitude and respect the child's authentic views and opinions; - Build psychological resilience in their child in daily life; - Foster a quality, nurturing, warm and understanding relationship with the child; - Increase the participation of the child in the matters that are of importance to them. |
| Mediating skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn how to set boundaries; - Comprehend all phases of mediation; - Know how to behave the best way possible when children are in conflict; - Understand and list the different actions when dealing with non-stop arguing children. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mediate between children when necessary; - Control own behaviour of not projecting own negative feelings on their children; - Apply all phases of mediation; - Apply the methods for sibling conflict resolution. |



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Problem solving and goal setting skills</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the concept of problem solving and goal setting; - List the phases of problem solving ; - Define the terms related to the topic; - List the different types of problem solving. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify a problem-situation; - Apply solutions according to the problem solving approach; - Create strong commitment with their relatives; - Recognise and prevent problems; - Feel like they are working as a team. |
| <p>Digital skills</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the concept of Digital Parenting; - List the signs and effects of excessive screen time use; - Describe the benefits that technology can have on families ; - Become aware of the ways that assistive technology can benefit the lives of children with disabilities and learning difficulties; - Define the terms Cyber security, Malware and Phishing and list the different types of malware. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify if their child is being exposed to excessive screen use ; - Apply solutions on how to manage their child’s screen time; - Use technology to improve their child’s development ; - Create strong passwords; - Recognise and prevent cyber security attacks. |

Now it is up to you to make your own programme and take the best that Skills4Parents can offer you! We wish you a pleasant learning journey through our guide. 😊





COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Learning Package 1



Learning content

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of the learning package contents, target audience and learning outcomes. |
| Scene setter | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Importance of effective communication: What is communication?• Categories of communication. |
| Concrete applications, activities and key tips | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to work on verbal communication skills with your family.• How to boost non-verbal communication skills with your family. |
| Self-assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quiz to test learning outcomes of the package. |

INTRODUCTION

The **Communication Skills learning package** is for learning parents wishing to enrich their knowledge and skills on *effective communication*. Through this package parents will be able to identify signs of ineffective communication and get some tips on how to improve communication between family members. In addition, they will learn how to address ‘sensitive topics’ and improve verbal and non-verbal communication with their children.

| Learning outcomes | Knowledge | Skills |
|-------------------|--|---|
| | <p>After going through the learning package, parents will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the concept of communication and effective communication; - List the tips and strategies for effective communication with their children and teenagers; - Put in practice their effective communication skills with their children and teenagers to address sensitive topics into everyday family life; - Put in practice their negotiation skills with their children and teenagers | <p>After the learning package, the parent should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify ineffective or aggressive communication and prevent it; - Improve their communication skills and in that way positively influence their teenager’s communication skills; - Build healthy communication channels with their children and teenagers; - Understand and have a clear picture of what their children want and need. |



SCENE SETTER

Importance of effective communication

*Communication is a process through which meanings are created in all human relationships.*²

It is the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, or feelings.³ We are all communicators and the way we communicate can have an influence on our relationships, including within our family. The parent-child relationship plays a critical role in a child's development.

We communicate with other people daily for many reasons. Children begin communicating from the moment they are born, letting their mother know they arrived with their first cry. *“When kids have dependable, reliable, consistent and stable relationships with their parents, they have a secure base from which they can explore and experience their world, leading to healthy growth and development”.*⁴

Infants communicate by making noises and babbling. Communication is a key life skill that we practice since the first day of our lives without our acknowledgment.






Source: Photo by [William Fortunato](#) from [Pexels](#)

²Communication in Healthy Parenting: The Interplay of Positive Parenting Strategies and Parents' Communication Styles By Amarachi Ijeoma Dooshima Simon, Submitted: June 16th 2021 Reviewed: October 1st 2021 Published: November 7th 2021
<https://www.intechopen.com/online-first/79257>

³ Definition of communication <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication>

⁴ <https://kids.lovetoknow.com/child-behavior-development-parenting/parent-child-relationship-problems>

There are several types of communication that can be used to convey ideas, emotions and have conversations. Not all types of communication are accessible to everyone, so the way we communicate is based on our preference.

| Communication can be subcategorized into different types ⁵ : | |
|--|--|
|  | <p>→ Verbal communication: it is defined in this package as oral communication. It is when you transmit your message through spoken words. You give words to your feeling, opinion and express them. This is used in oral conversations.</p> |
|  | <p>→ Non-verbal communication: it is all the information that you transmit through other ways than with words. For example your gestures, body language, facial expressions.</p> |
|  | <p>→ Written communication: is a form of verbal communication, it is the information that you write down in words. This is not the focus of this learning package but some of the tips included below can be applied to written conversation.</p> |

Many times, we can trace back family relationship challenges to communication problems, either the lack of it, or ineffective communication. Parents may feel like their children do not listen to a word they say, while children feel like their parents do not understand them or never take the time to listen. When this happens, instead of working harder to communicate, parents and children often stop communicating entirely, leading to anger, sadness and other challenging emotions. With this learning package, we try to give parents ways to improve their communication skills which will help them to show their children how to be effective communicators using their verbal and non-verbal skills! All the tips included in this learning package apply to all genders and families and are introduced as a suggestion for effective communication. There is no wrong or right in parenting!

⁵Definitions adapted from: <https://cloviscenter.libguides.com/Communication/VerbalVSNonverbal>



CONCRETE APPLICATIONS

How to work on verbal communication skills within your family

Effective communication is the basis for a healthy relationship of parents with their children. It is important for parents to take time to build up effective communication skills through activities because this:

- Builds a healthy and quality relationship;
- Helps to build the children's self-esteem as they feel important or valued;
- Provides a sense of safety and security;
- Helps the children develop communication skills and gain emotional intelligence.

Even when parents lose their patience and get angry, they still can communicate respectfully. Without blaming or shaming your child you can integrate them in the conversation and in finding the solution. You will find more tips about how to communicate with your children in challenging situations in the **EMPOWERMENT, MEDIATION, and PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGES**.

It is important to note that parents are communicating differently with infants, children and teenagers. What is common ground for all ages are the 8 fundamentals of communication as defined **according to Stanfield 2017**⁶:

1



Empathy for listening and respect

Empathetic communication is all about listening with your full attention to understand another person's feelings and perspective. When you make someone feel seen, heard and respected, an emotional connection forms.

2



Pausing to improve listening

Allowing brief silences during communication invites the other party to pause and take in the message and stay engaged with the speaker. Pausing also signals to the other party that a new thought or idea is coming and allows them time to ready themselves to receive it and gives clarity to the conversation.

⁶ <https://positivepsychology.com/communication-activities-adults-students/>



3



Introspection⁷ to improve self-understanding

The phrase 'I need to think about that' describes what is called introspection. Introspection is when you think about your emotions, motivations, thoughts, and behaviours. It is a great way to develop awareness of yourself, what is your motivation and how you perceive the world around you.

4



Turn-taking to improve self-regulation skills

The participants in the conversation are encouraged to propose possible solutions and then choose one that is mutually acceptable and attainable, thus focusing attention on the future and the realisation of both parties' goals.

5



Established procedures⁸ to include non-verbal communication

- Simplify and stay on message.
- Engage your listeners or readers.
- Take time to respond.
- Make sure you are understood.
- Listen actively.
- Integrate body language.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Respect your audience.

6



Conversation skills for productive dialogue

- Conversation is a two-way street.
- Be friendly and polite.
- Respond to what they are saying.
- Use signalling to help the other person.
- Create emotional connections.

7



Respectful Vocabulary to avoid heated conversations

Respectful language improves communication in many ways by preventing misunderstandings and conflicts. It is an essential part of the act of listening carefully and responding kindly to others, even if we disagree with them.

⁷ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/introspection-definition-lesson-quiz.html>

⁸ <https://garfinkleexecutivecoaching.com/articles/improve-your-communication-skills/9-tips-for-improving-your-communications-skills>



8

Practise in natural settings to raise confidence for different situations



“Practice makes perfect” as some may say. The more you practise your communication skills the more comfortable you feel to address and respond to different dialogues, situations and conversations.





As you see some of these steps are broader than just being mindful of the word and the tone you use. Being a good communicator is also about being a good listener.



Source: Photo by [Ketut Subiyanto](#) from [Pexels](#)

Active Listening

Active listening is the ability to perceive exactly what the other person is going through and to offer them feedback on what we have noticed. To perceive means to repeat what we have heard, to explain what we have understood, and to check how much it coincides with what the person wants to tell and explain to us. This allows us to try to truly understand the other person, in this case our child, but also sends the very important message that we are trying to understand what it is like to be in their shoes and come up with the best solution together.

| What does active listening consist of? | |
|---|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not interrupt or jump to conclusions! ○ Use verbal confirmation such as: <i>“Yes, I understand”</i> ○ Focus on what the other person is currently saying, not on what they have said or will say! |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paraphrasing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Say in your own words what you understood and check if that is what the other person meant: <i>“Your friend laughed at you, it sounds to me like it made you sad, did I get that right?”</i> |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use mirroring, like: <i>“You sound very upset”</i> |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>“What happened next?”</i>, <i>“What would you like to do?”</i> |



Key tips for parents to improve effective communication with children⁹

- ✓ Give your full attention.
- ✓ Encourage your child to talk about their feelings, perspective and thoughts.
- ✓ Listen and respond to both good and bad news.
- ✓ Set aside time for talking with your children.
- ✓ Avoid any distractions (avoid using your phone when talking with your children).
- ✓ Talk about everyday things.
- ✓ Be open about all kinds of feelings (anger, joy, anxiety...).
- ✓ Involve your child in conversations and ask for their opinion.
- ✓ Be willing to stop what you are doing to listen to your child. Sometimes, you cannot predict when your child will start talking about something important.



Activities to improve verbal communication with your children:

Helping young children to recognise and express their emotions

Emotions can be hard to communicate and to recognise even for adults! However, it is important to learn how to recognize and express different emotions from an early age and this is a tool for life. You can have a designated area for children to express these feelings, in which a printout of an emotions chart is on display, like on the example. This activity is particularly adapted to younger children.



⁹ <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/communicating/communicating-well-with-children>



Practising description skills.

Guess the Object: This is a fun game for children to practise their communication skills. Cut a hole in a box that is large enough for their hands. Make sure that they understand that they are not allowed to peak into the hole. Place an object in the box. Have the child describe what the object feels like and let them guess what it is. You can see an example in the video below!

▶ Under the Sea | What's in the Box | HiHo Kids:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjHTIRAA39g>



Key tips for parents

Effective communication with teenagers

- ✓ Let your teenager finish their thoughts, and **practise active listening: listen in a non-judgmental way** and try to understand their point, rephrase what they are saying to show you are listening.
- ✓ Don't hesitate to take a break if things get heated. As a parent it is normal not to always be in control of your emotions.
- ✓ Be genuinely interested in your teenager's life and ask questions occasionally.
- ✓ Do not shy away from sensitive topics such as sexual orientation, relationships - intimate conversations like this show vulnerability and build trust.
- ✓ **Use "Door Openers"**



→ Encourages your interlocutor to talk openly.

"Tell me what happened." "What do you think is the right thing to do?" "How do you feel about that?" "What happened next?" "That's a good question."

Rather Than "Door Closers"



→ Leads your interlocutor to close up.

"I don't want to hear that kind of talk." "So what?" "I'll tell you what you ought to do..." "Why are you asking me?" "Don't come crying to me if you end up in a mess."



Further reading:

- 39 Communication Games and Activities for Kids, Teens, and Students, Positive Psychology article: <https://positivepsychology.com/communication-activities-adults-students/>



Additional resources:

- Active Listening: How to Communicate Effectively, Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW82k7lwl_U



©Getty Images Signature

Source : Stock Image Families



How to communicate with your children on more sensitive topics

“This is what I do for a living, and I still struggle to have these kinds of conversations with my own child”¹⁰ says Nadine Thornhill, a Toronto-based sex educator and mum to an 11-year-old. There are topics that we rather avoid because they are making us uncomfortable. However, it does not mean that these topics are not important nor that they should be treated as taboo. Communication is also about talking about these topics. If parents can talk about these topics, then you can talk about anything with you children!

Being genuine, truthful and straightforward to your children makes them feel that they can get answers just by talking to you. You may not have all the answers but by showing that you are listening, you open the conversation channel. Integrating sensitive topics within the family builds strong communication channels and enhances your family relationships.



Source: Photo [Ron Lach](#) by [Pexels](#).

The most important thing to understand when addressing sensitive topics within the family is that **it does not have to be a one-time event**. There is no “right” age to talk to your children about periods, sex, sexual orientation, divorce, adoption, death or any other sensitive topic—they are all part of life. Integrating such discussions can start as early as the toddler years! When and how you approach the conversation will depend on your child’s age, maturity level, and interests. The best approach is as an ongoing conversation. Also, as a parent you should recognise you are not the expert, but you can still help: if your child has a question you cannot answer, you can ask for advice and information from other people who can help you (other parents, your child’s paediatrician, teachers, therapist, etc.)

¹⁰ <https://www.todaysparent.com/family/parenting/age-by-age-guide-to-talking-to-kids-about-sex/>



Addressing any sensitive subject is a delicate balance that encourages children to communicate, a balance between avoidance and confrontation. This balance can be challenging to achieve. The following tips can help, and you will also find useful resources in the **EMPOWERMENT SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**:



Key tips for parents on broaching sensitive topics ¹¹:

- Try to be sensitive to children's desire to communicate when they are ready.
- Maintain an openness that encourages children's attempts to communicate.
- Listen to and accept children's feelings.
- Offer children honest explanations and being truthful.
- Answer questions in simple language appropriate for their age.
- Try to find brief, simple, and age-appropriate answers to children's questions; understandable answers which do not overwhelm them with too many words.
- Perhaps most difficult of all, examine your own feelings and beliefs to talk to your children naturally when opportunities arise.



Further reading:

- How to talk to your kids about sex: An age-by-age guide
<https://www.todaysparent.com/family/parenting/age-by-age-guide-to-talking-to-kids-about-sex/>



Additional resources:

- ▶ Video resources example: Kids Learn About Periods | Parents Explain:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIgOu1KZ-bl>
- ▶ Parents Explain #MeToo (sexual assault) to kids:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TklXOw1W0yw>
- ▶ Parents Explain Gender to kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTP4okl0gUk>
- ▶ Parents Explain Childbirth to kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqk4-qkFbck>

¹¹ <https://www.mbfpreventioneducation.org/sensitive-topics/>



How to boost your non-verbal communication skills within the family

Non-verbal communication with children

Non-verbal communication¹² is about conveying your message through gestures, postures, signals, or clues. People give and receive countless non-verbal clues every day. Non-verbal communication is most of the time used at the same time as verbal communication. It is therefore important to be mindful of your non-verbal communication. It can improve your relationships within the family. It is also very helpful (and sometimes essential) when communicating with **pre-verbal** and **non-verbal children**. As oral communication, non-verbal communication is important for your children and an important skill to boost as a family as it helps to better relate, understand and ultimately get along with other people! The right non-verbal communication can reinforce what is said. For example, smiling when you say 'Good morning' sends the message that you're happy to see your child. But if your nonverbal communication does not match your words, your child might focus on the nonverbal communication.



Source: [Canva](#) free pictures

Non-verbal communication and children with additional needs

Children with additional needs can face barriers in communication, verbal or non-verbal. Some children also have **sensory sensitivities** and might find body contact like hugging difficult. These children might be more comfortable with other expressions of warmth or approval. There is no general rule, think about the sort of non-verbal communication that your child likes best!

¹² <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/communicating/nonverbal-communication>



Body language and tone

You can understand a lot more when observing the body language of your child. If you concentrate on the body language of your child, you may be able to understand what they are trying to say! For example, **be attentive to little signs such as eye contact**. Eye contact between people having a conversation is usual in communication, if your child is avoiding eye contact there might be something underneath- or they are just busy with their toys!

But your body language is as important, maintaining eye contact can be a way to show interest to what the other persons says. You can use all the tools that body language offers to show that you are interested in what your child is trying to share with you. Turning your face towards them, nodding, smiling and looking at them. Also try to use positive facial expressions as they can reinforce your message and also affect how your children respond to a message.

The tone of your voice is also conveying a message, and if it does not match the words you are saying it can get confusing for your child. We often tend to pay more attention to the words we are saying than to how we are saying them, however both verbal and non-verbal conversation are important and as parents if you want to communicate effectively with your children you should be mindful of both!



Source: Photo by [Kamaji Ogino](#) from [Pexels](#)



Sign Language

Sign language is mostly use in the deaf community, although not all deaf persons use and understand sign language! Although there is an international sign language, each country has its own, the variety is immense similar to verbal language! Even if your child or you do not have a hearing impairment, using sign language can come in handy.



Additional resources:

- **InSign Advancing inclusive education through International Sign**, EU project: <https://www.uni-siegen.de/zew/insign/insign/index.html.en?lang=en>
- **International Sign language**, European union of the Deaf: <https://www.eud.eu/about-us/eud-position-paper/international-sign-guidelines/>
- **Makaton sign language** is a sign language used with nonverbal individuals along with speaking. Makaton uses signs and symbols and is easily adapted to different needs and communication levels. This sign language can be used with Pre-Verbal or Non-verbal Children.¹³



Glossary:

Pre-Verbal children: They are usually younger children - from the ages of 2 to 4. They understand communication and can communicate intentionally but do not necessarily use words to communicate yet.

Non-verbal children: This term refers to children (usually up to age 10) that do not use speech as a way of communication or have emerging or delayed verbal skills - either short-term or long-term.



Activities to improve non-verbal communication with your children

Below you can see other activities that can easily be integrated into everyday family moments. These activities are suggestions to improve non-verbal communication between family members and especially the children. You can adapt the activities to the sensory preferences of your children.

- Watch a TV show with the sound off. See whether you and your child can work out what is happening

¹³ <https://www.verywellfamily.com/communicating-with-a-nonverbal-child-4177579>



- Do activities together: Go for a walk, enjoy an ice cream, go to a workshop together, play sports, sing, dance, or play with dolls. All these activities can be fun ways to practice non-verbal communication with your child.
- The Disney movie Inside Out can help children understand and talk about feelings and how we express them without words. You could watch it as a family and then talk about it afterwards

An example:

 **Inside Out: Guessing the feelings, YouTube:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOkyKyVFnsS>

- Activities can even be organised to fit your children sensory preference, which can be interesting for parents with children with additional needs
 - Movement → Red Light Green Light Playwork: <https://www.playworks.org/game-library/red-light-green-light/>
 - Jumping → jump around together or bop up and down to a song
 - Spinning → Ring-Around-the-Rosie (Just follow the lyrics): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2KMnpD46jI>
 - Swinging → Blanket swinging , can be a fun, easy sensory-motor activity for you and your child: <https://www.brightconnectionsot.com/bcot-blog-resources/blanket-swinging-a-fun-easy-sensory-motor-activity-for-you-and-your-child>

Key tips for parents

Non-Verbal Communication with your Teenagers

- ✓ Even if they are growing up and becoming independent young adults, they still need affection. Even if this is the case it is also good to teach children through our behaviour that they can put boundaries.
- ✓ Do things together: Do activities together that you both like without necessarily talking about something personal for example watch movies together



Additional resources:

- How to Decode Your Kid's Body Language, Parents: <https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/behavioral/how-to-decode-your-kids-body-language/>
- Non-verbal communication: body language and tone of voice: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/communicating/nonverbal-communication>



SELF-ASSESSMENT

Which are the three main forms of communication

- a) Writing, Reading, Speaking
- b) Verbal, Non-verbal, Written

Communication is a key life skill

- a) True
- b) False

It is better to use “door closers” to achieve effective communication

- a) True
- b) False

To achieve better communication between family members, it is important to incorporate sensitive topics in everyday family life

- a) True
- b) False

Which of the following is an act of non-verbal communication?

- a) Going for a walk
- b) Playing a board game with your children
- c) Smiling
- d) Nodding
- e) All of the above

Solutions can be found in the Annex



EMPOWERMENT SKILLS

Learning Package 2



Learning content

Introduction

- Overview of the learning package contents, target audience and learning outcomes.

Scene setter

- The importance of empowering parents – why work on your parenting skills?
- How to work on your parenting skills – why choose bonding behaviours?
- Empowerment skills – a stepping stone to bonding.

Concrete applications

- The challenges of parenthood.

Final key tips for parents

- Tips for parents.

Self-assessment

- Quiz to test learning outcomes of the package.



INTRODUCTION

The **Empowerment Skills learning package** is for learning parents who aim to broaden their knowledge on positive and attachment-based parenting practices. This can enhance their ability to do well as a parent and make parenting easier and more effective.

Oftentimes, parents come across many unexpected situations with their children, and may feel concerned that their ability to do well as a parent is not enough. The good news is that there are valuable practices to learn and use such as bonding behaviours, providing guidance and setting boundaries, active listening, different ways of asking questions, withholding judgment, using encouraging words and more that may help parents to develop nurturing connections with their children and provide a family environment for healthy child development. And all these skills are developed in this guide.

The aim of the Empowerment Skills learning package is to support the parents in improving their competence and confidence by assisting them to acquire knowledge and skills which will support their child's as well as their own personal development. Consequently, this will help to create deeper, stronger, more stable and more collaborative parent-child relationships, and concomitantly more safe and secure family environments based on mutual respect and trust of its members.

The knowledge of this learning package can be applied to a broad range of issues and situations as it provides **practical suggestions, tips and guidance** on how parents and caregivers can interact more positively and effectively with their children in many different situations.



| Learning outcomes | Knowledge | Skills |
|-------------------|---|--|
| | <p>After going through the Empowerment Skills learning package, parents will learn about and understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive parenting practices and effective ways of engaging with their child; - The needs of their child; - The behaviour of their child, especially challenging behaviour; - How to build psychological resilience in their child through the use of empowerment skills. | <p>After going through the Empowerment Skills learning package, parents will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better recognise and respond to their child’s needs; - Effectively cope with a much broader scope of issues and situations as a parent; - Demonstrate a non-judgmental attitude and respect the child’s authentic views and opinions; - Build psychological resilience in their child in daily life; - Foster a quality, nurturing, warm and understanding relationship with the child; - Increase the participation of the child in the matters that are of importance to them. |



SCENE SETTER

The importance of empowering parents – why work on your parenting skills?

As highlighted in the guide introduction, a growing body of research is showing that parents and caregivers influence child development in a multitude of ways. Amongst many legal and expert documents, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**¹⁴

as the key child rights agreement **recognises that parents and the family have a decisive role in the child's upbringing, education and well-being.** Consequently, modern prevention science emphasises the importance of adopting various positive parenting skills as a factor which enhances child's chances to grow into a happy, psychologically healthy and functioning member of society.

So, taking this into consideration, how do we, as parents and caregivers, approach and treat our children in our everyday interactions? You may want to take just a few mindful moments and reflect on some of the following:

ASK YOURSELF

- Does my child feel safe showing their emotions with me?
- Do I empathise with my child and put myself in their shoes?
- Is my child comfortable with speaking to me openly?
- When my child talks to me, do I listen with complete attention?
- Do I communicate my needs when I am in good spirits, or do I do it more often when I am tired and "have had enough of everything"?
- Do I take my child's needs and desires into consideration when making important or everyday decisions?
- Am I showing appreciation for my child's opinions? Am I encouraging my child to confide in me?
- Am I able to effectively discipline my child? How do I cope with that?
- Do I ever raise my voice at my child, threaten or punish them?

“

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.

- Nelson Mandela

¹⁴ United Nations (1989). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Geneva: United Nations.



Source: [Photo](#) by Kampus Production from Pexels.com

All children need caring relationships with their parents and caregivers that promote their positive health and overall well-being.

They need positive and respectful family day-to-day interactions and environment in which they are committedly listened to and are taken seriously, in which they can freely communicate and express their opinions and views, and in which they and their needs are accurately understood and responded to in a respectful manner.

Although there are individuals who are more naturally inclined to be good at communication, who empathise more easily or choose punitive methods of discipline less often, the vast majority of caregivers will benefit from learning more about these topics. Communication is a skill that is important through life, check the **COMMUNICATION SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE** to learn more.

This is amplified by the requirements of modern society and additionally emphasised by the global Covid-19 pandemic. **Parents have to deal with many stressful situations on a daily basis in order to provide for their families. A plethora of research and empirical evidence indicates that parents' stress negatively affects the child, their development and is a risk factor for developing mental health difficulties of the child later on in life.**¹⁵ This emphasises the need for parents to not only acquire additional skills to support their children better, but also to support themselves better.

With the Empowerment skills learning package **we hope we will provide you both with the tools and an impetus for a broadening of your parenting practices that will help you to be a more confident parent who is able to respect and embrace the wider scope of your child's knowledge, views and perspectives.** This way, your child will feel more heard, acknowledged, understood and respected, appreciated and valued for who they really are, and most importantly they will feel loved and cared for even in times when you are trying really hard to keep up with all of the demands and are not at your best.

By incorporating the following empowerment skills into your parenting, you will be able to more easily create and foster a nurturing family environment in which you and your children will feel more empowered and will thrive.

¹⁵ <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09861-5>



How to work on your parenting skills – why choose bonding behaviours?

The most important question we can ask ourselves as parents is what do we want to achieve through raising our children? Probably every parent can agree they want their child to become a responsible, independent, self-confident person who creates meaningful relationships and can rely on themselves. The upbringing that would lead to such an outcome is, without a doubt, the consequence of thoughtful and patient parenting with long-term goals in sight, all while building a quality relationship with the child as a foundation! And this takes work.



Source: Photo by [Anthony Shkraba](#) from [Pexels](#)

Most parents have at some point used behaviours that are not always the best solution in certain situations with their children. **This does not mean they are bad people, nor that they are bad parents, but very simply - that they are human.** Demanding perfection of parents is unrealistic and can create additional stress, as highlighted in the “Good Enough Parenting” theory that you can check out in the **PROBLEM SOLVING LEARNING PACKAGE**. But becoming aware of our own patterns of behaviour in different situations can empower us to improve and, in the long run, to choose to act in the way that is best for our child (and for ourselves).

Choosing positive, bonding behaviours (praise, encouragement), rather than fear of consequences (punishment) work best as an incentive for children’s desirable behaviours.



Here are some examples of bonding behaviour that strengthens parent-child relationships:



Key tips for parents

EXAMPLES OF BONDING BEHAVIOUR

- ✓ **Avoid making decisions according to the current mood:** needs and desires are expressed when we are in a good mood, rules are set in advance, and decisions are made in accordance with all the above. **Be careful to** adhere to the agreed rules **yourself**.
- ✓ **Do not get into power struggles with your child:** it is not hard to win them when the child is literally life-dependent on us, but they often result in a disrupted relationship. Ask yourself - what triggers this need to win in me, what would help you and what, as a mature adult, can you do to help yourself. Your responses are never your child's fault or responsibility.
- ✓ **Communicate with the child with respect:** Actively listen to them, show trust, understanding and acceptance of their thoughts and feelings. Do not ridicule, disparage or use what they said against them. Nurture a lasting good relationship and a feeling in the child that they can really talk openly about everything with you.
- ✓ **Guide yourself by techniques of positive discipline and the natural consequences of behaviour:** This teaches your child personal responsibility, builds and maintains self – confidence and promotes positive behaviour in a respectful way.
- ✓ **Avoid any form of aggression:** do not yell, push or hit my child.
- ✓ **Try to be patient and give the child responsibility according to age:** although this sometimes takes longer and turns out messier.
- ✓ **Support and encourage your child and their efforts:** Provide your child with a safe space to try, make a mistakes and learn from them. Make sure your child knows you love them, even when you disapprove of their behaviour.



Empowerment skills – a stepping stone to bonding

We single out the following skills that can enhance bonding behaviour as well as empower parents to act in the best interest of a child.

Emotional accessibility

This point consists of two elements - **emotional warmth and supporting emotion**.

It is crucial for the child's mental health to feel a warm, close and constant connection with the caregiver from an early age. In this way, the proper emotional development of the child will be favoured.

On the other hand, as children grow older, they need to acquire a number of skills. They learn to walk, to communicate, to independently explore the world around them. They also learn how to recognise emotions, express and manage them. Over time, they begin to understand the emotions of others and develop empathy.

Accepting and expressing emotions is extremely important for our mental health – and this is being modelled to a child by a parent from an early age.

This can be challenging because it is not always easy to deal with a child's difficult emotions. However, children whose parents respond to feelings such as anxiety, fear, and distress with empathy tend to express their feelings openly, without shame, and are more compassionate towards others. **Parental support in moments of emotional distress empowers the child and makes it easier for them to adopt their own strategies for successfully dealing with emotions.**



Source: Photo by [Alexandr Podvalny](#) from [Pexels](#)



HOW IT WORKS IN REAL LIFE:

Imagine your 6-year-old son at a party. Everyone is having a really good time – there is cake, balloons, a clown and party favours. It is time to go home, he is tired but excited to get his small gift and a chocolate. While walking home you meet his friend Karl, and your child realises Karl got two chocolates. He was the last one to leave, and the birthday girl's mum gave him one for his little sister at home. Your son gets very upset – Karl's sister is small, she does not eat chocolate which means Karl just got two chocolates for himself, and your son wants the same.



Key tips for parents

Here are some tips that can support you in helping your child cope with emotions. These are examples of behaviours to adopt and what you can say or how you can express support in the situation stated above. You do not have to follow these tips in any particular order.

- ✓ **Acknowledge the child's right to anger, sadness or fear and help them connect it to a situation that caused it:**

"I understand you are angry because Karl got 2 chocolates, and you got only one."

- ✓ **Let the child know that all emotions are normal, that everyone has them and that they are not dangerous, only sometimes unpleasant:**

"I sometimes get angry as well. It can be very difficult to handle these feelings, but they are completely normal."

- ✓ **Help them express emotions in an acceptable way:**

"Even though you have the right to be upset, taking Karl's chocolates was not OK. There are other ways to work this out."

- ✓ **The child should be made aware that his feelings will not jeopardize the relationship with you – through words, but also through actions:**

"You can let your big emotions out with me"

- ✓ **Understand the child's emotions even when they are directed at us:**

*"I understand you are also mad at me for not getting you more chocolate.
That is also OK."*

- ✓ **Communicate politely and respectfully, in accordance with age, without ridicule and coercion:**

"The thing is, it is important to eat sweets in moderation to keep our teeth healthy. What can we do to make this better?"



Positive discipline

Guidance and setting boundaries are necessary in the process of growing up. Positive, non-violent methods of disciplining and directing with a lot of love and understanding, help develop self-control and compassion for others in children. To learn more about setting boundaries, please read the **MEDIATION SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**.

In order to better understand discipline, we will start off by explaining what is a punishment, and why it does not work. **Punishment is a form of reactive behaviour which intends to control the unwanted behaviour in a child.** There are four types of punishment: physical (hitting, smacking and similar), verbal (shaming, making fun of or using cruel words), denial of rewards (like phone or TV privileges for bad grades) and punishing (using “time out”).







If we go back to what is the main goal of upbringing, we must ask ourselves are these the messages and lessons we want to pass on? Or do we want to encourage the development of self-discipline and (self)compassion in our children while maintaining positive parent-child relationships. That we can do through **discipline**.



Source: Photo by [RODNAE Productions](#) from [Pexels](#)

Discipline is teaching and leading a child toward positive behaviour. Positive guidance encourages the child to think before acting and choose the right behaviour themselves. It builds self-control and strengthens the child’s skills to coexist with other people.

Discipline requires thinking, planning and patience both in children and parents, and is a process of thinking and trying (again).

| How to discipline without punishment | |
|---|--|
|  | → Set clear family rules and boundaries. Create them in a participatory way and make sure the children understand them and you all agree. |
|  | → Maintain positive discipline. Tell the child what they are allowed to do, instead of what they are not allowed to do. Teach your child by example, and be a good one. |
|  | → Introduce the child to the natural consequences of behaviour. For example, if a child leaves toys outside the house and they are destroyed or stolen - do not buy replacement toys. When appropriate and safe, teach them that every behaviour has consequences. |
|  | → Always focus on the situation, never judge the child. This is very important because it maintains the child’s self – confidence and gives them a clear idea what they can do better next time. |
|  | → Plan ahead. You can try to avoid some unacceptable behaviour by rethinking situations that usually provoke them. Eg. Try going to the supermarket when children are fed and well rested. |
|  | → Keep your composure. Calmly listen to the child's explanation of the problem – do not yell or threaten. Discuss ways to solve the problem. Together, come up with a solution that is acceptable to both the child and you - this approach helps the child learn to take responsibility for their actions. ¹⁶ |

¹⁶ This table has been designed using resources from Flaticon.com



In the end, we want to leave you on a positive note – do not beat yourself up if you sometimes „slide into” **reactive behaviour**. Like we said, we are all human and sometimes we have just had a long and hard day. The point is to recognise when we make mistakes, to apologise, and to try every day to choose better behaviours - because even that teaches our child something worthwhile.



Glossary

Reactive behaviour: *when your feelings depend on an external event which is out of your control. For example, you had a bad day at work and you are in a bad mood. When you come home your responses, reactions towards your children or partner are a result of what you feel that day about work and you do not have a feeling that you can control your responses.*

Proactive behaviour: *opposite to reactive behaviour, when you take responsibility for yourself, you are in charge of your reactions and you choose how you think about certain situations.*



CONCRETE APPLICATIONS



How to put the empowerment skills in practice to deal with some of the challenges of parenthood

In this part, we will show you how to apply the skills we have described in this package in real life examples, using everyday family situations with which you can relate to. Through the stories we will develop concrete tips and pointers to help you picture how applying these skills can bring a positive parenting experience for the entire family. Although, it can be a good idea to consult an expert if you are not sure how to approach a specific issue.



Active listening, empowering and encouraging resilience

Piotr (7 years old) has had bad results in his last volleyball training. After the training, Peter came home and angrily told his parents that he would not go to training anymore, he was no longer interested in it, the boys from volleyball are stupid and he did not like the coach anymore. His parents were surprised because he showed no signs of wanting to quit until now. Piotr sometimes struggles with high expectations of himself in school, practices or other areas.

For a parent, it is difficult to see their child struggle in school, sport or any other area, especially if the child cares for the outcome and the result very much and wants to be good in that area.

Where to go from here?



Understanding the circumstances. In this kind of situation, it is good to start with framing the situation. Do this through asking questions and active listening techniques – see the **COMMUNICATION SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE** for more tips on active listening.

Do not hesitate to rephrase what you have understood, and ask your child if it is correct. In that way parents are showing genuine interest and understanding.

“So, if I understand correctly, the practice didn't go as well as you had hoped for? That made you very angry, am I right? “



Normalise feelings, show empathy. Parents are here to show that making mistakes is normal, just like having uncomfortable feelings around it is also normal. With empathy and supportive conversation, a parent can empower Piotr to feel good about himself regardless of his achievements.



*“I also feel bad when I’m not satisfied with how well the outcome of my work ended.
Especially when I worked several months on the results.”*



Offer a different perspective, encourage confidence. It is the parent’s job to show Piotr that even though he does not always perform well, he can still enjoy doing this activity or have fun in practice. A parent can explain that sometimes we want to give up when something is hard for us, and that can be okay. On the other hand, a parent can teach Piotr not to measure his self-worth based on his accomplishments which helps build inherent feelings of self-worth. This can also help build psychological resilience by teaching a child not to give up on a first sign of discomfort, but to try again.

“If you really want to quit volleyball, I am okay with that. But I want us to discuss it first, and I want you to really think it through. Because sometimes when these difficult feelings emerge, we just want to run away and hide. But when you think about it, if you usually enjoy your practices and get along with your team well, it might be worthwhile to try going again and see if you feel better next time – because that is enough. You don’t have to win to enjoy an activity.”

Making a fun “deal”. A parent can make a “deal” with Piotr to:



- Choose a new activity he knows nothing about.
- Try engaging in something he tried before and enjoyed, but thought he was not good at.
- Observe what is fun and joyful about that activity.

What you can say:

“Maybe we can try go-karting next weekend, but with a little task. You’ve never been go-karting before, so you can’t expect to drive like a pro, right? I want you to observe how you can still have fun even when learning. How does that sound?”



Additional resources:

- ▶ Video for younger children on naming the emotions
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyKg6oMLSvc>
- ▶ Video on self-esteem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdjaxS4ME2A>
- ▶ Unhealthy thinking styles, Becks cognitive model:
<https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/unhelpful-thinking-styles-cognitive-distortions-in-cbt/>



Active listening, paraphrasing, setting boundaries

Claire (13 years old) comes to school and discovers that all classes are planning Father's Day activities by organising fun workshops and games for entire families. Claire felt a strong wave of discomfort inside her, her eyes filling with tears and her heart beating fast. When the class was over, her best friend approached her and asked how she was feeling. This made Claire even more upset, she felt a hot flash and drumming in her head as she said "Leave me alone!" and pushed her friend aside before running out of class. She was angry all day at school and did not want to talk to anyone. At the end of the day when she got home, she ran to her room. Her mother asked her what had happened, but Claire was not in the mood to talk. Her mother guessed that she might have gotten a bad grade, so she said standing from the door, "Did you get a bad grade in that math test?" Claire asked her to leave her room, angry and crying. Her mother realised at that point that something was going on and that this was not normal behaviour after a bad grade. She approached her and said that whatever it was, she could talk to her about it when she wanted and that if it was going to be easier for her, she could just sit next to her and be quiet. That reaction made Claire cry even harder, after which she admitted that she got very upset in class today, hearing how Father's Day activities are being planned. Claire's father moved away couple of months ago and was not keeping in touch. Claire was afraid he left because of something she did, but was too afraid to ask her mother. Then, when she started crying in class, she didn't like how everybody saw her, and how everybody would now know something was wrong.



Be patient and respect boundaries. We want to point out one thing which Claire's mother already did well and which changed the entire course of events. In this example she showed that it is not always desirable to ask a lot of questions because a child might not be ready to talk. Sometimes we can make a situation worse by asking too many questions. An accusatory question about bad grades only caused Claire to shut down and be more upset. Even though it is difficult to be patient and wait for a child to open up when something is bothering them, in this situation, the mother's openness both to talking it out and silently giving support, made Claire open up in her own time and pace. In this way she showed respect for Claire's boundaries and gave space to her feelings.



Paraphrase and name feelings. By repeating in our own words, and making sure we understood what the child meant, a parent can better understand what exactly the problem is.

"If I understand correctly, you felt sad when you realised you couldn't bring your entire family to these events? And then it made you even more upset when Carole approached you? It seems to me this made you feel ashamed – for your situation and crying, so you pushed her away?"



Normalise and explain feelings, show empathy. The mother can acknowledge the emotions she sees by saying:

“It is normal to have all kinds of feelings in this situation. Sometimes you can feel sad, and other times ashamed or angry. These feelings can be very big and very difficult, but are very common. Everybody feels them sometimes, I do too.”

The mother can also use this time to explain to Claire that them getting a divorce has nothing to do with her – and nothing she did caused it. Their relationship was their own, and they are the only ones responsible for how it went and ended. This explanation will vary depending on a situation and it can be useful to talk to an expert on what information a child can benefit from.

Set boundaries, encourage problem solving. After Claire has calmed down, a parent could explain that not all reactions to unpleasant emotions are acceptable.



“Sadness, shame and anger can be very difficult and that can sometimes cloud our judgement – so it is important to take your time and think before acting. Pushing Carole away was not okay – if you wanted to be alone there are other ways you could have told her that. Have you talked to her since? What would you advise a friend if she was in this situation?”

The question “What would you advise a friend if she was in this situation?” encourages self-compassion in Claire because it assumes that we will always find nice and comforting things to say to our friends. This question is also a good starting point for Claire to come up with a way she can reach out to Carole, but also a way to cope with strong feelings when they arise again. To learn more about problem solving techniques you can consult the **PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**.



Additional resources:

- Guide to support parents <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/a-z-guide/anger/>
- Active listening tips https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWe_ogA5YCU
- Resilience in children <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/09/cover-resilience>



Final key tips for parents

- ✓ **Have family meetings.** Nurture this joint time to talk from a young age. Listen to everyone and take everyone's opinion into consideration. You as parents make the final call, but this teaches children they are heard and valued.
- ✓ **Think about the messages you want to send your child in the long run.** Do this especially when your child has done something they were not supposed to or you feel you are running low on energy.
- ✓ **Acknowledge their experience and emotion. Show empathy.** Try to put yourself in their shoes, and always remember how much less life experience they have.
- ✓ **Practice active listening skills and teaching your child about emotion.** It can seem a bit out of character at the beginning – but it will get more natural.
- ✓ **Do not be afraid to set boundaries with the ones around you, especially the ones you love.** The more you care for yourself, the more energy you have in the long run and more capacity to listen, empathise and spend time in quality ways.
- ✓ **Try positive discipline.** It does take more time and effort, but the benefits are long term. This way a child integrates a healthy way of self-regulation.
- ✓ **Talk about yourself.** Create an atmosphere of openness and sharing without judgement. It will teach your children to share as well. Keep it age-appropriate.
- ✓ **Engage in joint activities.** Shared pleasant experiences will strengthen your bond, but also serve as an incentive for a child to open up.
- ✓ **Reach out to an expert.** Do not feel you have to know and do everything alone. There are people who can help you come up with a best solution for your family, especially when dealing with difficult subjects and situations.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

When children exhibit strong feelings, they need:

- a) to go to their room and calm down
- b) to be punished for being too loud
- c) acceptance and support

When listening to your child you should try to:

- a) anticipate what they will say next
- b) check if you understood them correctly
- c) offer them a solution

Setting boundaries:

- a) is good for our mental health
- b) should never be done with close family members
- c) is less important than respecting them

Punishment:

- a) teaches the child a lesson
- b) is never harmful
- c) can have unintended consequences

When disciplining your child, you should always:

- a) raise your voice
- b) explain what is appropriate behaviour
- c) focus on their character, instead of behaviour

Solutions can be found in the Annex



MEDIATION SKILLS

Learning Package 3



Learning content

Introduction

- Overview of the learning package contents, target audience and learning outcomes.

Scene setter

- Article: Parent Mediation for Sibling Conflict Resolution.

Concrete application

- Keep control over your children's disputes.
- The connection between parent and child.
- Setting and respecting personal boundaries.
- Mediating between children.

Key tips or pointers

- Dealing with "non-stop arguing" children.

Self-assessment

- Quiz to test learning outcomes of the package.

INTRODUCTION

The **Mediation Skills learning package** is for parents who wish to enrich their knowledge on *mediating skills between children and parents, and amongst children*. Those skills include clear language, good communication and critical thinking skills.¹⁷ Parent-child mediation is designed to resolve or manage family disputes and improve family functioning. Through this package parents will be able to reflect on their mediating skills in conflicts between their children (and peers). To support this learning package, we have worked with an interesting theory: “Parenting Theory” by Alice Van der Pas, which we explain further in this learning package. On that note, the “Good Enough Parenting” Theory can come in handy as well - to learn more about this theory, check the **PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**.

| Learning outcomes | Knowledge | Skills |
|-------------------|---|--|
| | <p>After going through the learning package, parents will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn how to set boundaries; - Comprehend all phases of mediation; - Know how to behave the best way possible when children are in conflict ; - Understand and list the different actions when dealing with non-stop arguing children. | <p>After the learning package, the parents should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mediate between children when necessary; - Control own behaviour of not projecting own negative feelings on their children; - Apply all phases of mediation; - Apply the methods for sibling conflict resolution. |

¹⁷ Simpson, L. (2017). Mediation can be an effective parenting technique for family disagreements. Retrieved on 12 October 2021 from https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/mediation-can-be-an-effective-parenting-technique-for-family-dis_a_23032431



SCENE SETTER

Parent Mediation for Sibling Conflict Resolution

“Before having kids, I didn’t know splitting a cookie could ignite a brawl. But as a parent I’ve learned that even the smallest things can cause a war.” – Jackie Goldschneider

“He’s breathing on me” or “she changed the channel” are among the shrieks that echo through my home on any given day. And my reactions to their fights range from screaming “STOP” to separating my kids and even locking myself in the bathroom. When I went to fellow parents, they almost always nod in agreement, letting me know I’m not alone.”¹⁸

If you grew up with siblings, you may remember at least one spectacular disagreement with them that ended with your parents separating you, levying consequences, and forcing apologies—or a similar scenario. Interventions like that may be necessary in the moment, but research suggests that when it comes to children’s disputes, parents can play a much more impactful role: **mediator**.¹⁹

“

Knowing how to mediate in a correct way allows to solve short term problems as well as long term problems

- Parent (S4P focus group)

“Mediation empowers disputants to resolve conflicts between themselves,” according to Hildy S. Ross and Marysia J. Lazinski. “When parents are participants, they encourage the children to articulate their own interests and the important emotional consequences of their disputes. At the same time, they empower the children to do the future-oriented planning that will enable them to resolve their differences. In that way, parents elevate their children’s conflict resolution skills, but the children learn by their own participation and that of their siblings.”²⁰

One debate in the literature focuses on whether parents should intervene when their children fight. For instance, Dreikurs (1964)²¹ suggested that parents stay out of their children’s conflicts so that children are given the opportunity to develop their own conflict resolution skills. He believed that children’s fighting is ultimately a bid for attention, maintained by

¹⁸ <https://eu.northjersey.com/story/entertainment/2018/04/06/parenting-how-mediate-when-your-kids-fight/489019002/>

¹⁹ <https://www.waldenu.edu/online-masters-programs/ms-in-education/resource/msed-course-insight-parent-mediation-for-sibling-conflict-resolution>

²⁰ Idem

²¹ Idem



parent involvement, and urged parents to resist their children's attempts to gain their support, a belief that persists today.

“

Conflict management can be stressful, but also can create crucial moments to foster team spirit between the parents and the children

- Parent (S4P focus group)

In contrast, Herrera and Dunn (1997)²² argued that by intervening in sibling conflict, parents provide their children with a conflict resolution model from which children can learn necessary skills and constructive resolution strategies.

In the past, many studies were done to find out the most effective ways to handle conflicts amongst children. With or without parental involvement? In this perspective, research showed that siblings tend to be more aggressive with each other when their mother was present, and conflicts tend to last longer. Although the conflicts are quite intense where parents are involved, researchers found out that children in these families displayed more conciliatory behaviours. On the other hand, when children are left on their own while handling conflicts, the older children most often win these disputes. It looks like some kind of parental intervention during conflicts amongst children, can do no harm.



Source: [Canva](#)

Mediation can be used as a beneficial parenting tool with children as young as 5 years of age. In these cases, the mediation process has been specifically adapted for use in the family setting. In mediation, parents control the negotiation process and facilitate talk regarding the emotional states and interests of their children, while at the same time empowering them to come up with their own solutions to their disagreements.

²² Dunn, J., & Herrera, C. (1997). Conflict resolution with friends, siblings, and mothers: A developmental perspective. *Aggressive Behavior*, 23(5), 343–357



CONCRETE APPLICATIONS

Keep control over your children's disputes

« **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT** is seen by parents as important because it is inevitable that when they make decisions as responsible adults, bearing in mind the long-term well-being of the children, that children will not always like it and sometimes disagreements will arise. In their opinion, this is where **MEDIATION SKILLS** would help as a way of fostering alliances and setting healthy boundaries in a way that shows respect for children »

- *Comparative report, Skills4Parents, 2021*

Mediation is a procedure in which the parties discuss their disputes and reach a common settlement. Parents believe that in relation to this process it is important to develop listening skills, positive communication, self reflecting and empathy. To read more about effective communication skills, we refer to the learning unit about "**COMMUNICATION**" & "**EMPOWERMENT SKILLS**". It is also essential to set boundaries in order to prevent the disputes getting out of hand. When setting boundaries you acknowledge the importance to respect the feelings of your children, but also to make sure you will be respected as a parent too. It might be forgotten when mediating, but will be only beneficial for all parties.

Setting and respecting personal boundaries

We can imagine personal boundaries as invisible fences (with gates) that separate us emotionally and physically from the people around us. These boundaries are the rules and constraints we set in our relationships with other people - and they are ideally where we set them ourselves.

Setting boundaries means that you know yourself - what you like and what you do not like, what is acceptable to you, and what is not – and also having the skills to communicate all of that. Sometimes your boundaries will be softer, sometimes firmer, sometimes you will say yes, and sometimes firmly no. Sometimes you will open that door, and sometimes you will lock it. All that matters is that whatever you do - it is your decision.

There are some basic rules for setting boundaries. Below are those rules you as a parent can set for your children:

- 1. Do not call each other names.** Disagreements or being angry is ok, but hurtful words or behaviour are not.
- 2. Respect each other.** After all, your children are part of the same family and even if there are disagreements between your children and their peers, respect should be the basis of each conflict. Make sure your children understand that they should treat others just like they want to be treated.



- 3. Calmly state what upsets you and why.** Make sure that your children can calmly say what is bothering them and why, so that there is clarity for the solution phase.
- 4. Listen without interrupting.** Just as your children want to be listened to, make them understand that they should also listen to each other when having an argument in order to find a common solution.²³

HOW IT WORKS IN REAL LIFE:

THINK ABOUT THE FOLOWING SITUATIONS

- ✓ **With a child:** You are tired after an entire day at work and want to go home, but your child wants to stay a bit longer in the park.
- ✓ **With your partner:** You really dislike filling and emptying the dishwasher, but somehow you end up being the only one doing it.
- ✓ **With a grandparent:** You try to limit the amount of sweets your child has, but grandparents offer them to your child every time you visit.

WHAT SETTING BOUNDARIES CAN LOOK LIKE

- ✓ **To a child:** *"I can see you are angry with me for wanting to go home from the park, but I am getting very tired and still have to drive us home. "*
- ✓ **To a partner:** *"I am not comfortable with both filling and emptying the dishwasher. Will you please empty it before you go to work?"*
- ✓ **To a grandparent:** *"We try to limit the amount of sweets the children eat. Please don't get them chocolate every time we come over. Can we stick to weekends only?"*

In addition to setting personal boundaries that preserve our mental health, it is important to teach children to set their own boundaries and then respect them.

WHAT RESPECTING BOUNDARIES CAN LOOK LIKE

- ✓ Explaining to our infants why we are carrying or changing them.
- ✓ Respecting the "NO!" of our toddlers.
- ✓ Respectfully explaining why we need to do something after all.
- ✓ Not reading messages on our teenage daughter's phone.

²³ Lowell, 2021. Conflict Resolution: 5 Rules From a Mom to Resolve Conflicts at Home. Retrieved on the 30th of November 2021 from <https://www.lifehack.org/503608/conflict-resolution-5-rules-from-mom-resolve-conflicts-home>



Respecting personal boundaries is not the same as disinterest and negligence - quite the opposite. It is the belief that we have created a good enough relationship with bonding techniques that the child will come to tell us on their own when something important is happening - not that we will have to find out through detective work.

Mediating between children

We can send them to their rooms for a time-out, where they will undoubtedly use the time to plot revenge. We can put them in separate rooms and shuttle back and forth trying to convince them to be fair or reasonable. We can take away privileges such as computer time or visits with friends. We can also offer rewards for good behaviour, which is positive discipline, opposite to the punishments mentioned before and which is more effective. You can check the **EMPOWERMENT SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE** to check how to use positive discipline and why exactly it is better than punishment.

As parents, all we want is peace and quiet. We just want our children to get along. So, how can we help them resolve their disputes quickly and effectively—for their sake and ours?

First, it is important to understand the different phases of mediation, which is explained in the following table. This mediation model can help you successfully guide your children through conflict resolution.



Source: [Canva](https://www.canva.com/)



Phases of mediation²⁴

1

Set ground rules

Mediators must first set ground rules (see page **previous section on boundaries**) and **behavioural guidelines** which minimise escalations and that diminish the possibility of escalation and the hostility/anger between the parties that need mediation, for example two siblings.

2

Room for different perspectives

The issues are then identified, with disputants discussing their own perspectives. This allows the mediation to be directed toward finding a solution that satisfies each party's concerns, as oftentimes in family problem-solving discussions family members have inconsistent views of what the problem is.

3

Build empathy and understanding

Next mediators build empathy and understanding between the disputants. This is an integral step because mutual understanding rarely occurs naturally during conflict, and a lack of such understanding makes conflict resolution difficult, usually leaving one party unsatisfied or bitter. Acknowledging and understanding how the sibling felt during the dispute can allow both children to move forward towards more conciliatory resolution. In mediation parents ask each child to restate what the other has said in order to build such understanding.

4

Propose and choose solutions

Lastly, the disputants are encouraged to propose possible solutions and then choose one that is mutually acceptable and attainable, thus focusing attention on the future and the realization of both parties' goals.

Guiding children during their conflicts has been proven effective, provided that it is done in the right manner. **The aim of the process is not to dictate how children should solve their problem, but help them figure out a solution on their own.**

You play an important role in supporting the development of your child's social skills. Children between the ages of 3 and 10 need to have positive give and take social interactions. They need mini-lessons on how to cultivate positive interactions between themselves and others in their social networks. During the development of the before-mentioned phases, think about the exemplary role you have as a parent, and the attitude you are reflecting on the arguing children.

²⁴ <https://www.waldenu.edu/online-masters-programs/ms-in-education/resource/msed-course-insight-parent-mediation-for-sibling-conflict-resolution>



| Key points to consider while mediating between children in disputes ²⁵ | |
|---|--|
| | → Physical contact: In some cases, it is important to hold the children. You may rub their backs during the interaction, depending on the intensity of the conflict, situation and children's ages. Try to ask your children beforehand if they would like that. |
| | → Make sure all voices are heard: Ask, "What happened here?" Make sure each child is given uninterrupted time to explain their view of the situation, within boundaries. |
| | → It's all about the children: Accept and reinforce the solution agreed on by the children. It may not make sense to you, but try to put yourself in your children's shoes and imagine why their solution might work for them. Of course if there is a threat to the children's health or mental wellbeing, their solution should be not accepted by you as a parent. |
| | → Keep calm: Remain calm at all times during the process. Use simple, concrete language. Paraphrase any language that is hurtful. |
| | → Ask open questions: End with an open-ended question. Example: "Neither one of you are getting what you want. What can we do to solve this problem?" Give the children lots of time to form their thoughts and speak. A question that can be answered with yes or no is not an open-ended question. |



Additional resources:

- Teaching kids how to deal with conflicts: <https://childmind.org/article/teaching-kids-how-to-deal-with-conflict/>
- Kids conflict resolutions: <https://www.counselorkeri.com/2019/03/04/teach-kids-conflict-resolution/>
- Simple mediation methods: <https://www.mediate.com/articles/langM2.cfm>
- Why parents should mediate: <https://www.eurekaalert.org/news-releases/519019>

²⁵ <https://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g2014.pdf>



The connection between parent and child

Sometimes, parents end up in a downward spiral during every day parenting, where (it seems) they cannot get out. This downward spiral has a negative impact on parents' self-confidence regarding problem-solving and parenting in general. The atmosphere is getting worse and it looks like the same story is repeating every day. Here, the theory of Alice van der Pas can be applied.



Alice van der Pas
(1934 – 2017)

Dr. Alice van der Pas (1934-2017) worked for thirty years as a Dutch parent counsellor and family therapist in the AGGZ for young people, including three years in the United States. From 1992, she was a full-time author and editor.

*In 2003, she obtained her doctorate with a study of the scientific literature on parenting: **A serious case of neglect: the parental experience of child rearing.***

Picture: <https://www.swpbook.com/auteur/4/alice-van-der-pas>

It would be great for parents to know what are the foundations of this theory, so the problem can be tackled by its core. So, let's explain the basic principles of parenting, according to the so-called "Parenting Theory" of Alice van der Pas, which can be used as a great corner stone in mediation processes; There is also another theory that can come in handy, which is the "Good Enough Theory", which you can read about in the **PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**.

Feeling comfortable in parenthood is important for the healthy and safe growth of children and when mediating in their conflicts. By parenthood we mean:

- **The well-being of the parent**
As parents, you know you are responsible and in the core, you always want the best for your children.
- **The confidence of the parent**
Parenting could make you insecure and vulnerable.
- **The parental experience**
You have to deal with parenting, in good and bad times. It is a job for life.



Source: Parents play game with kids from [Unsplash](#)

So... how to feel comfortable in parenthood?

The first quote which pops up is: **“A happy parent, is a happy kid”**! And there is a reason for that! If you feel comfortable and calm, you can handle almost every situation, also the conflicts of your children. Try to create the perfect circumstances where you can easily switch from one side to another. Ask your friends for help, enable your neighbors to support you whenever they can, make sure your work-life balance is in control, fix and solve personal problems before you turn to your children. It makes that you can breathe more easily and have the time to open up to your children. Try to reconnect with them and bring positive influences to their lives. Listen to them, talk to them and try to figure out what it is that they really want.

Additionally, **try not to project your own feelings and mood on your children**. Remember, if you just had a very stressful day at work and you have to pick up your children from school or daycare, buy groceries, make dinner and simultaneously expect your children to behave and obey without any resistance... you expect the impossible. Your children had a long day too and are tired just like you, when they are back home. Empathy is the keyword here. Try to take a step back, breathe, replace yourself into your children's situations and make the best out of your day!



Source: Mother and daughter arguing
[Karolina Grabowska](#) - [Pexels](#)

Talk to others! Start conversations with friends who have children too. Ask how they are holding up and figure out the same stuff you are going through. You might experience that



you are not doing as bad as you thought and other parents are struggling too! Keep talking to them and ask them for advice – you can learn a lot from each other.



Source: Monkey Business Images. (n.d.). *Mother Talking With Teenage Daughter on Sofa* [digital image]. www.canva.com

If you are ending up in that downward spiral and you cannot find your way out... think of all the positive experiences in the past related to your parenting methods. The many times you enjoyed the presence of your children, that you have played games and had a laugh about their silly jokes. Try to pick up these positive experiences, build on to this and find your way back to a **positive parenthood** again.

For more about the above, you can find in **EMPOWERMENT SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**.



Additional resources:

- Academic research on parent-child conflicts:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236833642_Resolution_of_parent-child_conflicts_in_the_adolescence
- 9 steps on how to stop arguing with your child:
<https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/how-to-stop-arguing-with-your-child/>
- Stop fighting with your child: <https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-child-do-you-feel-like-the-enemy/>



Mediating siblings in conflict

Angela has two children, Bella, who is four years old and Fin, who is two. Bella wants to have the building blocks, which Fin is playing with in order to complete her little village. Angela intervenes by telling her daughter that she can play with the blocks, but only when Fin is finished with them, but Bella gets really furious. When she calms down, she offers Fin a deal: swapping toys, which Fin accepts. But after 10 minutes, Bella wants more blocks and offers her little brother a swap again, but now Fin does not want to swap his blocks. Bella bursts into tears and shouts that Fin is the meanest brother ever, after which Fin also has to cry.



Source: vitapix by Getty Images. (n.d.). *Siblings fighting in the bedroom* [digital image]. Retrieved from [Canva](https://www.canva.com/)

The described situation above, is probably recognised by quite some parents and it is often very tempting to say to Bella not to speak like that to her little brother. However, this would most probably only add fuel to her resentment towards Fin and will lead to more conflicts, whether it is now or in the future. This is because most children will interpret this intervention not positively, like you only care about her brother. There are other ways to make sure your child

accepts the solution you propose. You could propose both of your children to take turns and to time their turns, so that it is and feels fair for both of your children. Of course a clever bribe or threat, so that your toddler shares, is also a way, but do you want to encourage that in your children in their futures? Another way to solve the matter above, is to ask Bella to forgive, forget and to say sorry, but also ask Fin to share nicely with his sister.






These are examples to solve the conflict for the short term, but when looking at the long term, it will be more complex to solve all conflicts, with these proposed measures.

What does work on the long term? **Empathy** is the key word here. In this case, you could say:

"It looks like you are really frustrated, you really wanted those blocks, didn't you?"

Empathy helps the children to feel acknowledged. This shows that you have understood the problem and this will invite your, at first frustrated child, to share more. Receiving empathy is something that makes the children want to give empathy. Of course with a disclaimer, that they should not be fully overloaded with their frustration at the moment. This would require a more immediate action. ²⁶

There will be situations when empathy will not solve the conflict, then the five steps of problem solving from the **PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE** including conversation starters might come handy. Still calling upon your empathy, here is what a resolution step by step could look like:

| FIVE STEPS OF PROBLEM SOLVING | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>→ Analyse the scene and define the problem. <i>“Could you tell me what are you unhappy about?”</i></p> |
|  | <p>→ Clarify what each wants and brainstorm for solutions. <i>“What is your ideal solution?”</i> <i>“How can we solve this for both of you?”</i></p> |
|  | <p>→ Evaluate solutions and choose one. <i>“Let’s check what solutions would work for you both and choose the winner solution for you.”</i></p> |
|  | <p>→ Choose one solution together and try it. Slightly adjust a proposed solution if necessary. <i>“Let’s try to solve this problem together this way. Don’t worry, if it will not work, it can always be adapted.”</i></p> |
|  | <p>→ Review solution. Give feedback. <i>“This worked well, right?”</i> <i>“Does this solution work well for you both?”</i></p> |

²⁶ Simperingham, G. (2021). The peaceful parenting approach to kid’s conflicts. Retrieved on 10th of September 2021, from <https://www.peacefulparent.com/the-peaceful-parenting-approach-to-kids-conflicts/>



Mediating conflicts between your children and their peers

Another scenario where parental mediation can be applied, is that of Julie (13) and Alice (14). Alice lent her book to Julie, which is damaged when Julie returns it to Alice. Alice is not amused to say the least and wants Julie to buy a new book for her. Julie refuses to buy a new book for Alice, as the damaged book ended that way by accident. Both girls are mad at each other and fight all the time about the issue.

Of course, when your child is fighting with their peers, it is not a pleasant situation. You as a parent can mediate during such situations too using the tips and advice you have seen here. There are a couple of actions you can undertake to do so through some steps:

1. Make sure **both your child and their friend/peers remain calm**. You can suggest for them to take a long breath or to count to 10.
2. Focus on both **your child and their peer(s) being able to express their feelings, but also to listen to each other's** feelings. Often when the children are tired or upset, trying to talk about the issue will not work (well). Most of the time, it is best to wait until your child and their friend(s) are calm.
3. Propose to **both children to come up with possible solutions** fit for everyone. Emphasise that there are no silly or stupid ideas to solve the conflict.
4. When nothing else works you can always teach your child to walk away and to turn to you (or other trusted adults) when they feel that the issue cannot be solved.²⁷



Source: Fernandez, O. (2020.). *Teens fighting* [digital image]. Retrieved from [Unsplash](#)

When looking from the perspective of Alice van der Pas' Parenting Theory, do not forget here to not project your own feelings of frustration and bad mood on your child if you are experiencing those. If you will be the role model for your children and their peers in this matter, you will be building on to your parental experience. This means that you will gain experience in parenting also regarding the conflicts that your children have with their friends.

²⁷ Burnett, C. (2021). 8 Tips for Helping Your Child Resolve Conflict and Be A Good Friend. Retrieved on 8th of November 2021, from <https://childhood101.com/8-tips-for-helping-your-child-resolve-conflict-and-be-a-good-friend/>



Key tips for parents

DEALING WITH NON-STOP ARGUING CHILDREN

- ✓ **Think before you act.** Which can be applied in both situations if arguing with your children or stopping the dispute between your children. Stop acting from your first hunch, think and break your 'normal' habits.
- ✓ **Reflect on your own behaviour.** You are a role model to your children. Be the grown up and show how it works.
- ✓ **Be aware of your pitfalls.** Start evaluating where it goes wrong and you start yelling to your children. Is it the stress you had from work all day? Are you feeling sad because of other family matters?
- ✓ **Teach your children how to deal with disputes.** Show and tell them they need to remain calm and start talking. Follow the steps on mediating between your children.
- ✓ **Connection is the key!** Make sure there is a positive connection with your children. It will lighten up your day! How? Read the "Parenting Theory" from Alice van der Pas.
- ✓ **Empathy will not kill anyone.** Replace yourself into your children's shoes. Did they have a rough day? How do they feel? Are they tired? Talk to them!
- ✓ **Take care of yourself first.** It will help to take care of others too!
- ✓ **Do not decide for your children.** Let them fail whenever they can. It will make them grow!
- ✓ **Feel comfortable in parenthood.** Take care of your own well-being, try to reflect your parenting style and figure out how it can be fun. Talk about your positive experiences, which will boost your new, good intentions.
- ✓ **Talk to others!** They are probably also struggling or have struggled with the same issues.



Source: Dinner with friends, from www.canva.com



SELF-ASSESSMENT

When it comes to children's disputes, parents can play a much more impactful role: mediator.

- a) True
- b) False

Mediation can be used as a beneficial parenting tool with children as young as:

- a) 5 years of age
- b) 10 years of age
- c) 15 years of age
- d) All of the above

Setting a variety of rules is one of the phases of mediation.

- a) True
- b) False

What is one of the rules for setting boundaries?

- a) Listen without interrupting
- b) Write down all your boundaries
- c) Focus on a specific situation when setting boundaries
- d) Tell about your boundaries to as much people as possible

What are Alice van der Pas' three elements to feel comfortable in parenthood?

- a) The well-being of the parent, the good financial situation of the parent and the parental experience
- b) The well-being of the parent, the confidence of the parent and the parental experience
- c) A good relationship with the partner, the confidence of the parent and the parental experience
- d) The well-being of the parent, the confidence of the parent and a good career

What works on the long term when your children are having a conflict?

- a) Empathy
- b) Clear rules and boundaries
- c) Giving turns to each child to have/do what they want and time them for it to be fair
- d) Telling your children not to be mean to each other



What is the first step when mediating in a conflict between your child and his/her peers?

- a) Ask the peers about their family situation
- b) Make sure both your child and their friend/peers remain calm
- c) Take everyone apart to talk about their point of view
- d) Propose for all children to come up with possible solutions

What is one of the effective actions when dealing with non-stop arguing children?

- a) Bring your children to own room(s) when the conflict gets too heated
- b) Call an adult educator for advice
- c) Make clear what the consequences will be if the children will not end arguing
- d) Make a positive connection with your children

The aim of the process is not to dictate how children should solve their problem, but help them figure out a solution on their own.

- a) True
- b) False

While mediating between children in disputes, it is important to keep calm.

- a) True
- b) False

Solutions can be found in the Annex



PROBLEM SOLVING & GOAL SETTING

Learning Package 4



Learning content

Introduction

- Overview of the learning package contents, target audience and learning outcomes.

Scene setter

- Family as a team: setting goals and dealing with problems together.

Concrete applications

- Setting goals: A key skill for happy families.
- The battle between parents and children: How to navigate it?
- Problem solving: what is it and how to do it?

Final key tips for parents

- Printable material to use as conversation starters with your children and other family members.

Self-assessment

- Quiz to test learning outcomes of the package.

INTRODUCTION

This **Problem Solving and Goal Setting Skills learning package** has been created for parents who would like to develop and improve their knowledge on **Problem solving, goal setting in everyday life situations**. Through this package parents will be able to identify and recognise the phases and situations of problem solving, apply solutions according to this approach and deal with everyday life conflicts using an alternative and functional structure of communication.

As parents, managing problems, setting goals for daily-life issues is essential for a good and healthy family life and it affects your children and your relationship with them. That's why managing problems positively and constructively helps you and your children to develop in the best way possible. Moreover, making your problem-solving strategies and goal setting skills visible will **help your child to cope with their own real-life issues** because they have a positive model to follow and copy. It can teach them important skills for life. Moreover, it can give you some confidence in **confronting issues instead of avoiding** them, while you can guide the members of your family into a proper form of communication.

| Learning outcomes | Knowledge | Skills |
|-------------------|--|--|
| | <p>After going through the learning package, parents will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the concept of Problem solving and goal setting; - List the phases of problem solving ; - Define the terms related to the topic ; - List the different types of problem solving. | <p>After the learning package, the parent should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify a problem-situation; - Apply solutions according to the problem solving approach; - Create strong commitment with their relatives; - Recognise and prevent problems; - Feel like they are working as a team. |



SCENE SETTER

Family as a team: setting goals and dealing with problems together.

Scientific literature and research show us that alternative approaches (targeted parent training programmes to develop problem solving skills for example) to manage children's disruptive behaviour or other problems they can face such as bullying, conflict with friends etc, results in better cooperation from the children's side, they are more responsive. Setting goals, problem solving strategies, setting clear expectations and limits²⁸ are examples of some of the skills learned in these programmes that can have a beneficial effect on children's responses and on the whole family.²⁹

On the specific question of **problem solving**³⁰, there are already proven examples of **efficient parenting approaches**. Some of them rely on emotion regulation, some place emphasis on underlying cognitive skills necessary for problem-solving, while others consider parent and child factors that can lead to functional or dysfunctional parent-child interactions and **compliant or non-compliant behaviour** in children. In this learning package we will focus on the interactions between parents and children. It is therefore relevant to have a good overview of the various situations that a parent can use to apply these skills in different everyday life situations.

Regarding **setting goals**, people who pursue goal approaches, meaning who set a desired outcome to be achieved, are more likely to achieve their goals than people who pursue avoidance goals, meaning people who focus on **undesired outcomes to be prevented**.³¹

However, when it comes to parenting, studies have also shown that setting goals is not always enough to achieve the desired outcome and this sometimes needs to be reinforced and combined with problem solving skills to ensure the best outcome possible and a good child-parent relationship. Hence, treating both goals setting and problem solving in this package!

Some studies in recent years have focused on how families deal with setting boundaries (for further information see the **MEDIATION SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**) and setting rules and problem-solving approaches for young family members show some differences between

“

Sometimes parenting doesn't evolve the way you had envisioned, however, the child will always be connected to their parents. It means that parents have to find their way in good parenting, taking decisions and accepting the vulnerability that comes with it.

- Adult educator (S4P focus group)

²⁸ Scahill, L., Sukhodolsky, D.G., Bearss, K., Findley, D., Hamrin, V., Carroll, D.H., & Rains, A.L. (2006). Randomized trial of parent management training in children with tic disorders and disruptive behavior. *Journal of Child Neurology*, 21(8), 650-656

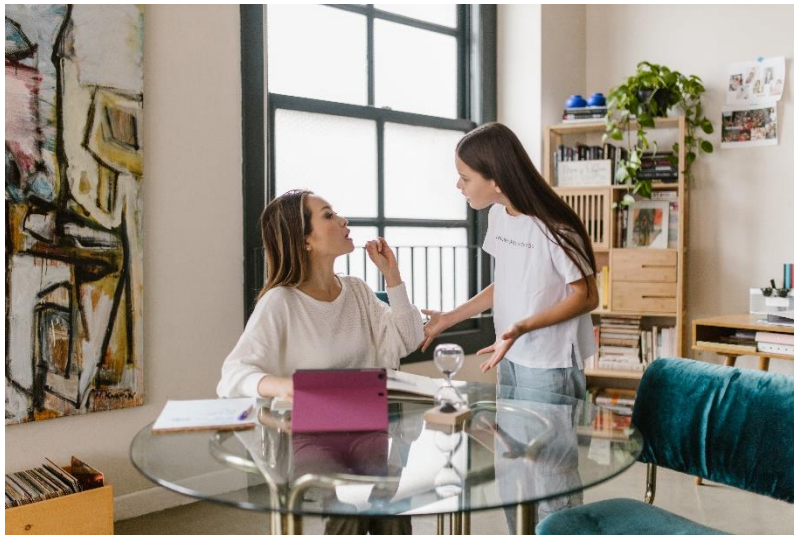
²⁹ Oliver, P. H., Guerin, D. W., & Coffman, J. K. (2009). Big five parental personality traits, parenting behaviors, and adolescent behavior problems: A mediation model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 47(6), 631-636.

³⁰ Epstein, T., & Saltzman-Benaiah, J. (2010). Parenting children with disruptive behaviours: Evaluation of a collaborative problem solving pilot program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology Practice*, 1(1), 27-40.

³¹ Van Aar, J., Leijten, P., Overbeek, G., Thomaes, S., & Rothman, A. J. (2021). Does Setting Goals Enhance Parenting Intervention Effects? A Field Experiment. *Behavior Therapy*, 52(2), 418-429.



parents who embraced an **authoritative parenting** style vs. **authoritarian**.³² But whatever type of parent you are, research suggests that parents are more successful in problem solving and goal setting when they themselves have expanded their basic skills on the matter, are willing to negotiate (on the use of Internet for example, for some advice on this have a look at the **DIGITAL SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE**), and are aware of how gender stereotypes can influence parenting approaches. (For example, parents tend to give to their sons less restrictions when going out at night or expect their daughters to show more feelings and emotion than boys.)



Source: Photo by [RODNAE Productions](#) from [Pexels](#)

Even being aware of all this and trained on parenting skills does not guarantee that there will be no mistakes, we are all human! This is what Winicott explains in his “good enough parenting” theory.³³ He states that it is unhelpful and unrealistic to demand perfection of parents, and rather defines parenting as a process that adequately meets the child’s needs, according to variable cultural standards and parent’s skills. What he was trying to say is that it is normal to make mistakes, and that they do not necessarily lead to irreversible traumas. It is impossible to be accessible, assertive and empathic all the time. In fact, it is fine to be “good enough” most of the time. This awareness will actually help to engage and strengthen the relationship between you and your children!



Goal setting or problem solving only is not always enough to pursue the desired outcome, especially in parenting. Therefore, a mixed and combined approach between problem solving strategies and goal setting is always a good practice to ensure the best outcome and a good parent-child interaction.

³² Kesten, J. M., Sebire, S. J., Turner, K. M., Stewart-Brown, S., Bentley, G., & Jago, R. (2015). Associations between rule-based parenting practices and child screen viewing: a cross-sectional study. *Preventive medicine reports*, 2, 84-89.

³³Hoghugh, M., & Speight, A. N. P. (1998). Good enough parenting for all children—a strategy for a healthier society. *Archives of disease in childhood*, 78(4), 293-296.



Glossary:

Problem solving is the act of defining a problem; determining the causes of the problem; identifying solutions, prioritising, selecting alternatives and implementing a solution. This means it is not only a single action, it's a step by step procedure that involves several actions.

Compliant: Willing to do whatever you are asked or ordered to do. Agreeing with a set of rules, standards, or requirements. Non-compliant is the opposite.

Authoritative parenting style vs. authoritarian parents: These two parenting styles in psychology both imply authority. Authoritarian style implies a lack of positive reinforcement and encouragement. Authoritarian parenting strategies involve strict rules and high expectations, while an authoritative parenting style includes sensitivity, positive reinforcement, and transparency. It involves explaining the reasoning behind decisions and rules. It utilises open communication and encourages discussion.

Goal setting involves the development of an action plan designed in order to motivate and guide a person or group toward a goal. This means that in order to reach a goal, you need to design a step by step procedure that leads to the desired outcome.



Source : Photo [olia danilevich](#) from [Pexels](#)



CONCRETE APPLICATIONS

Setting goals: A key skill for happy families

Knowing how to set goals is an important personal skill but can be also extremely valuable to parents. To make your family work as a team, it is good to have objectives and goals that can motivate and engage different individuals. Here you will learn about the general goal setting theory but also see through a concrete example how it can be applied to family life:

| FIVE STEPS OF GOAL SETTING | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | → Frame the current situation and set the expectations | |
| 2 | → Decide on the goal you wish to set | |
| 3 | → Process the goals: the things we must do well in order to perform well | |
| 4 | → Identify evidence and sustainability check | |
| 5 | → Feedback , identify and remove blockages | |



Case study: When children do not help at home

The following story is a first example of an every-day life situation that any family could face. You will have concrete actions to take, examples of good behaviour to adopt and age-appropriate conversation starters. This will help **you to improve your goal setting skills**. Remember that you and your children are problem solvers and that there can be different ways of solving problems. Take this into account while reading the case study.



Rossi family's story

Sylvia and Francesca are divorced and they have four children: three boys (Andrea aged 5 , Antonio aged 6, Albert aged 11) and a girl (Anna aged 9). The children live with Sylvia in an appropriate but quite small flat in the centre of a small town. Francesca visits often to co-manage the family care and life (dinner, lunch, bringing children to school etc.) but the household is left entirely to Sylvia, who is a teacher and not always at home. The problem is the children do not participate to the household chores, which makes it impossible to keep the house clean and efficient.

1

Frame the current situation and set the expectations



The first step towards achieving success is through **creating the best environment** for it through rightful thinking. Everything in this world is created twice, first in the mind and then through action.³⁴

Gathering all of the family members' opinions, trying to evaluate every statement and giving feedbacks about what is reported.

First of all, Sylvia could bring all children (and possibly also Francesca) together and start a discussion about household tasks, asking what they think about the actual state of play and what would be their ideal situation. This could give a good starting point and understand **the perspective of every family member**: for example they could say:

"So, how do you feel about the house and the cleaning in this house? Is there more to do? Do you think the state of the kitchen is ok?"

"Well, well... I feel that it is time for us to talk about our beautiful house, don't you think? It should be treated well because we live here and because it's nice to come home to a clean home. What do you think?"

2

Decide on the goal you wish to set



This may sound clear but **deciding explicitly about which goals to follow** (and which not) **acts as a push factor** and all the energy will be channeled towards the desired outcomes and not other goals not agreed together.

³⁴ Schwartz, A. (2001). Goal Setting: Target Your Achievement. Waverly: Schwartz & Associates.



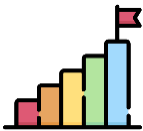
Communicate clearly with your family about what you want and be prepared to reinforce what they say. After deciding what is actually feasible, make sure everyone has agreed on it and make sure you are excited by your goal. This changing of the mindset helps in achieving the goals you set. Make also sure that everyone knows HOW to implement the goals:

“Ok, you told me what you wish for the house. Which goal do we agree to set?”

“I see that we have a lot of possibilities to improve our household. What should we focus on first?”

3

Process the goals: the things we must do in order to perform well



Be prepared to give away some control for this. In fact, one of the key actions to succeed in goal setting is not deciding on your own but making a common decision and agreement. This ensures a good motivation and sets the basis for achievement. A good strategy is to document your goals and the steps to achieve them.

The process of **documenting your goal** does a number of very positive things for you. It ensures you focus on exactly what your goal is, not just a general feeling of what it is and is a permanent record of your goal so that you are consistently pursuing the one goal. You have a future record against which to measure your progress. The process of converting your goal from thought to words engages more of your brain and clarifies the instructions you give to your unconscious mind.

“Anna is always awake early. Maybe she is the best to set the table in the morning. What do you think?”

“We could try to draw a weekly calendar for the household chores. Andrea could you draw for us a calendar on which we write who does what activity?”

“What are the things to do? Where can we write it down in order to remember them?”



4

Identify evidence and sustainability check



Ensure that achieving your goal fits into your life and the cost of achieving your goal is not too great for the benefit you achieve. Moreover, make sure to have markers to show somehow when your goal is achieved. This is a crucial step for ensuring achievement. If expectations and reality do not fit, it will be impossible to achieve your goals. Like: every day the house will be fully vacuumed and all the surfaces bleached.

The entire family decides on the solution that best suits everyone's needs, they can adjust and mix the suggested solutions to create it.

"Now that we know what we have to do and the division of tasks, wouldn't it be great to set how we know that everything is going fine?"

"Is everyone fine with this set of tasks? Can you manage to wake up in time to make your bed and arrive at school on time?"

5

Feedback, identify and remove blockages



After some time, it is important to reinforce all positive outcomes of the goal setting and work out whatever did not work well. **Do not blame anyone for failing to reach certain goals, but rather try reasoning and brainstorming to understand why something did not work out.**

Also, a good trick is to establish a **captain** (see characteristics of a good leader in the next section), to monitor progress and work them. A powerful captain can inspire a team to punch well above its weight and can give you important feedbacks about what is going on.

Of course as said in the introduction sometimes even with the best goals and follow-up plans possible, conflict and problems are unavoidable. In the next chapter you will see how to navigate the situation when the relation with your children gets tense and how to solve conflict when they arise.



Source : Photo by [fauxels](#) from [Pexels](#)



Further reading :

- Some hints for parent goal setting that [makes Better Parents \(reallifecounseling.us\)](https://reallifecounseling.us)
- [8 Effective Parenting Goals To Make Your Life Easier \(messymotherhood.com\)](https://messymotherhood.com)
- [How to Set \(and Achieve!\) Your Parenting Goals \(imperfectfamilies.com\)](https://imperfectfamilies.com)
- [The Importance of Setting Parenting Goals \(vbpsychology.com\)](https://vbpsychology.com)
- [Parenting Goals You Should Be Pursuing and How to Measure Them Well \(mamaduck.com\)](https://mamaduck.com)

The battle between parents and children: How to navigate it?

Let's try to be concrete: Does it seem like you have a war going on in your family—with you/your partner/grandparent on one side, and your children on the other? Many parents feel like they live in the middle of a battle zone and that at any given moment they might step on a landmine. Maybe you have a teen who is disrespectful and says rude and insulting things to family members. Maybe your preteen insists on having the final word on everything and puts your family member down all the time.

*Parents have started to feel
"bulldozed" by their own kids.*

-Debbie Pincus

Here are a few tips for you to find a way out of this challenge and toward a problem-solving approach within your own family:

- 1 Shine a light on yourself, rather than on your child**
Keep in mind that even at times of high stress, no matter how obnoxious your child's behavior is, you must remain a calm, steady leader. Focus on your strengths, not on blaming your child.
- 2 Give your child the freedom to make their own mistakes and learn from them**
As long as there is not a health, safety or other dangerous risk involved, let your child make their own mistakes—and then let them face the natural and logical consequences for their actions. Staying out of their way allows them to grow.
- 3 Stay on your child's team**
Remember that you are on your child's team, not on the opposing side. Do not become their adversary. You are their coach and limit setter, not someone who needs the adults to "win" a battle to prove you are in control. Most of the time you prove the opposite (that you are not in control).



Characteristics of a strong leader *Strong leaders focus on the preservation of their own integrity. They have a willingness to take responsibility for their own emotional wellbeing and do not try to “make” other people happy by changing their character. Being a strong leader is a quality that will actually help your child want to be led by you, rather than to battle you.*

So, what are the important things to remember when you want to step in an argument of your partner/parents/other family members with your children?

Obviously, both arguing parties are allowed to express their own feelings and arguments. But by arguing, we mean the continuous process of endless arguing with your child, without any prospect of improvement or learning. These disputes become a ‘normal’ way of communication if they want something to happen in their favour. How can you break these habits, and bring back a peaceful environment at home?

The nine steps indicated below can help you to change things around the house. These are the steps that you can talk through with another adult who argues with your child(ren) in order to minimise the conflicts now and in the future.



However conflicts and problems cannot always be avoided it is why it is important to develop problem solving skills as parents.



Problem solving: what is it and how to do it?

Obviously **not everyone is the same** and each of us have individual ways of managing situations. So, every situation is not only black or white and every person can relate more to one or the other approach according to their own character or situation. So **not only you have a tendency** to a specific problem-solving style, **but your child also**. There is a major subdivision when talking about problem solving personalities or styles: internal and conquerors on the one side and external and venters on the other side.

| Internal/Conquerors | External/Venters |
|---|---|
| <p>They prefer to solve problems on their own and tend to avoid speaking about their feelings. Maybe you can tell something is bothering them, but they do not want to talk about it.</p> | <p>They prefer to talk to someone about their problems and need support. Their need is often to get a reality-check. They are usually perfectly capable of solving the problem, but just find it helpful to get support.</p> |
| <p>Possible strategies if your child is an internal/conqueror problem solver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Just let them know you are there should they want to talk about it. ✓ Discuss their feelings long enough to show empathy and make sure there is no denial or avoidance. ✓ If they tend to overthink, try offering suggestions they can use on their own. Writing in a journal or list of possible solutions and the pros/cons for each. | <p>Possible strategies if your child is an external/venter problem solver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Treat them as they are capable of solving the problem and avoid giving advice. ✓ Do not try to solve the problem for them. Listen carefully and ask explanations about the reasoning of the proposed solutions. ✓ If as a parent you are a venter, try asking to the listener to take time to listen your concern. |

Regardless of the style, the problem-solving strategies are the same and it is still a good idea to go through every step of the problem-solving process, the steps are:



FIVE STEPS OF PROBLEM SOLVING

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | → Analyse the scene and define the problem. | |
| 2 | → Clarify what each wants and brainstorm for solutions. | |
| 3 | → Evaluate the solutions and select one. | |
| 4 | → Try out the selected option. Slightly adjust it if necessary. | |
| 5 | → Review the solution. Give feedback. | |



Case study: When children do not call when late

The following story is an **every-day life** situation that you and your family could be faced with. You will discover what are the signs that you should be looking for to assess the situation and what is at stake for children in this situation. Moreover, you will have concrete actions to take that follow the steps explained, examples of behaviour to adopt and age-appropriate conversation starters. This will help you to improve your problem-solving and boundary setting skills. Remember that **you and your children are problem solvers** and that both could have different ways of solving problems. Take this into account while reading the case study and the story of Sam and his son Dante, for each step we will suggest a way for Sam to handle the situation and what he should avoid.

Sam's Story

Sam has a child, Dante aged 14. He is a teenager, not talking to his parents, rather introverted and not willing to follow rules. Lately, he started going out with friends but came home late without warning his father, who is concerned because he does not know where his son goes and when he is going to come home.



1

Analyse the scene and define the problem.

Avoid: acting before knowing, as for instance scolding him, raise your voice, ignore the situation etc...



Possible solutions: Sam observes the routine and the Dante's behaviour before and after he goes out. Sam tries to get a clear image of the situation, trying to focus not only on his concern, but also on other factors that could involve the teenager. For a clearer understanding he could ask:

"I see that you are going out in these past weeks. Can you tell me more about it?"

"I feel that here is something going on with us. Could you tell me what do you think?"

Dante reacts as usual and avoids the questions, not explaining why he is always late and not saying where he goes. But says also that he felt that something between him and his dad was at odd lately and that he likes to stay out with friends.

2

Clarify what each wants and brainstorm for solutions

Avoid: propose solutions, solve the problem on your own, exclude the children in the problem solving.



Possible solutions: Sam changes the setting of the situation, maybe asks Dante to sit on the bed or change room and go on the sofa. Sam should try to create a neutral and positive environment and should hold out for any signals of hostility and try to avoid an escalation of bad feelings. Then Sam could reply:

"Ok I see. I would like to understand with you how we can best manage this situation."

"It would be great if we could define together how to manage the situation because I need to know where you are and when you come back. Let's try to find a solution together. What could we do?"

Dante tries to list the possible solutions that he would like to apply to the situation, for instance sending messages because he is old enough and can stay out all night, a curfew that respects the wishes of the parent and also his necessity to stay out. However, this is not a universal technique and all children are different. If your child is not cooperative, check



the techniques and tips from the other learning packages and try to apply some communication or mediation strategies from the other learning packages that

3

Evaluate possible solutions and select one



Avoid: excluding from the start certain solutions based on *a priori* or judging the solutions.

Possible solutions: Sam helps to summarise the options provided by rephrasing the proposals, and encourages other proposals from Dante. Sam could say:

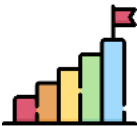
"You have made plenty of suggestions. Tell me what works best for you and I will share my suggestions too."

"Do you remember our family rules? Is there some other way we could solve this problem?"

Dante and Sam evaluate all the options together. Maybe he proposes an option that the parents have not thought about. They could do a pros and cons list, or define a priority list, in which the most liked is moved to the top of the list and the less liked on the bottom.

4

Try out the selected options. Slightly adjust if necessary.



Avoid: adding other solutions, rejecting solutions alone or without discussion.

Possible solutions: Sam can support decisions and keep track of the excluded or approved solutions. He could say:

"Good, let's try one of your proposals." "What shall we do then?"

"OK, I see that you like/don't like this option. Let's try one of the others"

Dante and Sam choose the solution that best suits each other's needs. They could also adjust the proposed solution, if necessary, i.e. Dante proposes to send a message when he is coming back and Sam adapts the solution to sending a message at a certain time.



5

Review the solution and give feedback



Avoid: Ignoring the follow-up, since situations evolve constantly. By committing to give time for feedback you make sure to have the most suitable solution for your family in place.

Possible solutions: After a while, Sam can come back to Dante and assess if the situation is changed and if that problem has been solved. He checks if the child is satisfied with the solution they adopted. Sam could say:

"I am very happy that we could find a solution, what do you think?"

"I'm not sure that what we decided is really working smoothly. Could we rediscuss it?"

With more conscious efforts, **everyone can apply the problem-solving approach** into practice in their daily life. Ask yourself: How did we reach this decision? What kind of problem-solver am I and what kind is my child? Positive problem-solving can **create happier, healthier and stronger family relationships**. This approach is effective for parents to dialogue with the children to understand their feelings, find out what is happening and ask relevant questions to facilitate problem solving processes. This is an important skill for their life-long development both inside and outside the family.

Furthermore, the problem-solving approach does not only fit for parent-child relationships. Sometimes you and your partner may disagree on some topics, maybe regarding the way to raise your child. It is important to show your child that **you are a team**. Therefore, use your communication and problem-solving skills to identify the strategy that best suits all of your point of views in order to be on the same line when it comes to confront problem solving with your child. **Teamwork will make parenting easier** and will avoid misleading messages to your child.

So now, even if you do not know everything, you have done something worthwhile: you have expanded your knowledge.



Source: Photo [Vlada Karpovich](#) from [Pexels](#)



Further reading :

- [Problem-solving for better parenting | Raising Children Network](#)
- If you want to deepen your problem solving knowledge:
[Problem Solving In Parenting – article for parenting \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- If you want to improve your parenting strategies:
[How Do You Teach Children To Responsibly Solve Their Own Problems?](#)
- If you want to improve your problem-solving strategies:
[10 simple Ways To Improve Your Problem Solving Skills | CMOE](#)
- If you want some strategies to copy with your child's behaviour
- [The Obnoxious Child: When an Audience Makes Behaviour Worse](#)
- If you want to deepen your knowledge of the nine steps of solving a fight
[How to Stop Arguing With Your Child: 9 Steps to Take Today](#)



Practice your problem solving and goal setting through activities!

- **Role play:** a game that consists of experimenting with or experiencing a situation or viewpoint by playing a role, improving confidence and experimenting scenarios.
- **Escape rooms:** improving logic, intuition, collaboration, and communication.
- **Dance:** it has a positive impact on neural processing and neural pathways.
- **Puzzles, logic games** and other brain activating games: improving logic.
- **The Idea Journal:** improving creativity and brainstorming.

Check this example: [Why the Most Successful People Keep an Idea Journal](#)

- **Use Mind Maps** to improve Visualizing the Problem
Check this example for inspiration: [MindMup](#)
- **Any kind of communication/decision-making/adaptability/collaborative games**
Check the desert island example. This exercise challenges you to prioritise. You are stranded on an island and must decide what order to perform survival steps. It can even be turned into role play 😊



Desert Island Survival Game

All group members must agree on the order of the steps to ensure survival. You should explain the reasoning for the order of each step while ranking the actions.

Actions: Rest

- Find food
- Find water
- Set up shelter
- Explore the island
- Try to signal for help
- Make weapons for self-defense
- Build a raft to escape the island
- Start a fire
- Choose a group leader
- Search for other survivors
- Look for a cat



Source: Photo [Fabian Wiktor](#) from [Pexels](#)

After this activity, ask yourself:

- How did we reach this decision?
- What kind of problem – solving did we use?
- Was the decision unanimous?
- What are our priorities?
- Can we find a common ground?

There are no wrong or right answers here but this game can help to strengthen decision making and goal setting as a group!

FINAL KEY TIPS FOR PARENTS

Here are tips and pointers you can print and use in your daily life, to reflect on and to use as suggestions and reminders during everyday life issues:

And? How is it going?



Follow-up! Try to have a feedback discussion. This helps for a strong commitment.

Get a commitment.

Ask When, how and who questions.

"What will you do?"



Children with a problem can be upset, angry, hurt. This is not the time to solve problems. They need to be calm to think clearly

Help me chill down



I agree to disagree



Find compromises and agreements. Sometimes, also agreeing to disagree is enough.

Often, there is more than one problem. You must be able to **SEPARATE** them and confront them individually.

Separate the Issues



Let's grow together



Use daily challenges as opportunities to practice problem solving **WITH** your children



practice makes perfect



Practice what to say and even role play, if necessary.

Allow your child to come up with solutions. Some might seem reasonable, others silly.

let me try



Give me a minute



Sometimes, it is good to stop the conversation and take a moment to elaborate.

Avoid giving advice or your opinions. Always ask permission before offering your opinion or advice when someone else has the problem.

May I say something?



let's try!



You can use problem solving to resolve problems in any relationship, just take into account the person's style and skills.

Identify whose problem it is. The person with the problem is the person responsible for the solution.

I would like to...





SELF-ASSESSMENT

A good enough parenting is:

- a) Perfection of parents for good enough children
- b) Children that can cope with every situation
- c) A way of living in which children should respect the rules
- d) Being aware that mistakes happens and that doing as much as we can is enough

What can influence parenting approaches:

- a) Gender stereotypes
- b) Animals at home
- c) Life Insurance
- d) Number of electronic devices at home

When we talk about goal setting, is it true that “feedback” is a crucial step for a successful approach?

- a) True
- b) False

An authoritative parenting style includes:

- a) Give strict rules
- b) Buying presents
- c) Being transparent
- d) High expectations

Will an external venter problem solver:

- a) Discuss their feelings
- b) Listen carefully and ask explanations
- c) Try offering suggestions they can use as solutions
- d) All of the above

The five steps of problem solving are:

- a) Analyse, clarify, evaluate, try out, review
- b) Clarify, evaluate, analyse, review, try out
- c) Analyse, evaluate, reject options, practice, change
- d) None of the above

Solutions can be found in the Annex



DIGITAL SKILLS

Learning Package 5



Learning content

Introduction

- Overview of the learning package contents, target audience and learning outcomes.

Scene setter

Concrete applications

- Article: Parenting in the Digital Era.
- Excessive screen time use: effects and what can be done to manage and mitigate them.
- The benefits of technology on families' and children's lives.
- Accessibility & digital technologies.
- Ways in which quality screen use can benefit children.
- The importance of Online Safety.

Self-assessment

- Quiz to test learning outcomes of the package.



INTRODUCTION

The **Digital Skills learning package** is for parents who wish to enrich their knowledge on **Digital Parenting, Screen Time Excessive Exposure/Management, Accessible Technologies and Cyber security**. Through this package parents will be able to identify signs of excessive screen use and receive tips on how to mitigate its effect, while also learning to harness the full potential of digital technologies for their family. In addition, they will learn how to recognise and prevent cyber-attacks for all the family.

| Learning outcomes | Knowledge | Skills |
|-------------------|--|---|
| | <p>After going through the learning package, parents will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe the concept of Digital Parenting; - List the signs and effects of excessive screen time use; - Describe the benefits that technology can have on families; - Become aware of the ways that assistive technology can benefit the lives of children with disabilities and learning difficulties; - Define the terms Cyber security, Malware and Phishing and list the different types of malware. | <p>After the learning package, the parent should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify if their child is being exposed to excessive screen use; - Apply solutions on how to manage their child’s screen time; - Use technology to improve their child’s development ; - Create strong passwords; - Recognise and prevent cyber security attacks. |



SCENE SETTER

Parenting in the Digital Era

Stop for a second and look away from this screen right now. Take a look at the people around you. Whether you are at a restaurant, on a bus, at home or in a park. The chances are that most of the people you can see are staring at a screen on some kind of device.

With the fast development of information and communication technology the number of internet and digital devices users is increasing by the minute. According to the Digital 2020 April Global Statshot Report³⁵, between April 2019 and April 2020, internet users around the world increased by 301 million and social media users increased by 304 million. This means that in April 2020 there were **4.57 billion internet users** and **3.81 billion social media users** globally. There is no doubt that these numbers have risen since the beginning of the pandemic (COVID-19) and will continue to increase in the future. As a result, the age that our children are being introduced to the Internet and digital devices is getting lower and lower.

“

Sometimes my children prefer to spend time on technology instead of sitting down with me to have a talk.

- Parent (S4P focus group)

Children born in the 21st century are considered “**digital natives**” and are able to adapt to the digital world, shortly after their birth, and grow up considering the internet and digital devices as vital elements of their lives. The use of **Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** can bring about many benefits for a child’s development, however, parents need to be aware of the various physiological and psychological risks that come with excessive and uncontrolled technology exposure. Excessive and constant exposure to technology from an early age, can

“

We kind of immerse children in technology, starting at about four months of age typically in the United States, and for a variety of reasons young children are especially vulnerable to the lure and the addictive properties of touch-screen devices

-Dimitri Christakis, director of the Centre for Child Health, Behaviour and Development, Seattle Children's Research Institute

lead to health problems such as vision and posture issues, as well as mental/behavioural issues like screen dependence, depression and isolation. The necessity of protecting children from such risks has developed the concept of **Digital Parenting**.

So what is Digital Parenting essentially? Digital parenting requires parents to be able to use information technologies and the Internet proficiently, to be aware of

³⁵ Digital 2020 April Global Statshot Report. (2020). <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/04/digitalaround-the-world-in-april-2020>



the risks and challenges of ICT and to provide a safe and healthy cyber environment for their children by maintaining constant communication with them.³⁶ It is crucial for parents to be aware that their children are likely to reproduce what they are doing in terms of ICT use and habits as children tend to imitate them especially during their early development years. As mentioned in the UNICEF report *The State of the World Children: Children in a Digital World* (2017), parents of the 21st century should be responsible and respectful ICT users themselves and not only be more proficient and aware of risks in ICT use than their children, but also stay up-to-date with new tools and trends in order to prevent the development of a **digital divide** between parent and child.

“

We, as parents, are not able to monitor what our children are watching, or with whom they have communication through social media, or what they read on the internet.

- Parent (S4P focus group)



Source: Photo by [Ketut Subiyanto](#) from [Pexels](#)

It is important to have in mind that during the Covid-19 pandemic, over 1.5 billion children had to use the Internet and their digital devices a lot more as digital education became the new reality and outdoor activities were very limited. This has put children at higher risk of screen dependence, **online exploitation** and **cyberbullying**. Taking this into account, it is crystal clear that improving parents' digital skills has become essential and digital parenting should be considered a life-long effort.

“

Parents are aware that technology can be dangerous, but they do not know what the dangers are.

- Adult educator (S4P focus group)

³⁶ Tosun, N., & Mihci, C. (2020). An Examination of Digital Parenting Behavior in Parents with Preschool Children in the Context of Lifelong Learning. *Sustainability*, 12(18), 7654. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187654>



Further reading:

- Online gaming addiction in children and adolescents: A review of empirical research : <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26166826/>
- Digital Parenting: Raising and Protecting Children in Media World: <https://www.intechopen.com/books/parenting-studies-by-an-ecocultural-and-transactional-perspective/digital-parenting-raising-and-protecting-children-in-media-world>



Glossary:

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): *refers to all communication technologies, including the internet, wireless networks, cell phones, computers, software, middleware, video-conferencing, social networking, and other media applications and services enabling users to access, retrieve, store, transmit, and manipulate information in a digital form.*

Digital natives: *A digital native is an individual who was born after the widespread adoption of digital technology. Their exposure to technology in the early years is believed to give digital natives a greater familiarity with understanding of technology than people who were born before it was widespread.*

Digital Parenting: *Digital parenting describes parental efforts and practices for comprehending, supporting, and regulating children's activities in digital environments.*

Digital Divide: *The digital divide refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern information and communications technology and those that don't.*

Online exploitation: *Online exploitation is when someone online uses their power to make a child do sexual or criminal things, either online or offline.*

Cyberbullying: *The act of harassing someone online by sending or posting mean messages, usually anonymously.*



CONCRETE APPLICATIONS

Excessive screen time use: Effects and what can be done to manage and mitigate them



Nikita's story:

Nikita is a digital marketer and has been working from home since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Being in front of a screen for so long has caused her sleeping problems and reoccurring headaches. She is a single mother of a 9-year-old boy and a 14-year-old teenage girl. She constantly finds herself policing her children's screen time "Put down your phone", "Turn off your laptop", "Enough video-games for today". Her children are always trying to explain themselves "I am doing my homework online", "I am talking to my friends", "This is how I like to relax after school", "You are overreacting". It is not so easy for her children to listen to her since she also spends a lot of time on her phone either doing work or organising family activities, as well as to unwind and connect with friends. Lately she has noticed that her teenage daughter has isolated herself by spending hours alone in her room using her laptop. Her son's teacher has told her that he has no interest in developing relationships with his peers. The family is exhausted with continuously negotiating screen time. Nikita just wants to do her best at raising her children and wants them to have a balanced screen use.

There is no doubt that many of us can identify with Nikita's story. We all know the feeling of staring at the screen and not being able to stop. Our digital screen devices are literally becoming an extension of our bodies as they dictate how we do business, how we interact with each other and how we manage each aspect of our lives online.

Screen time is a term used for the time spent and activities done in front of a screen, such as watching TV, working on a computer, playing video games, watching videos on a tablet, browsing social media on your smartphone or chatting and playing online games.³⁷



Source: Photo by [Amina Filkins](#) from [Pexels](#)

³⁷ Screen time and children. (2021). U.S. National Library of Medicine. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000355.htm>



Parents are worried about the amount of time that their children spend on the internet and in front of a screen especially because they have great difficulty keeping them away from them just like Nikita. Well, they are right to worry since research has shown that **on average children aged 8-12 years old in the USA spend 4-6 hours a day in front of a screen, whereas, teens spend an alarming 9 hours a day.**³⁸ Many of these children, and especially teens, are experiencing difficulties in stopping themselves from using their devices even for short periods of time. This dependent behaviour can be described as **Screen Time Addiction**.

Going back to Nikita's situation we can see that technology and especially excessive screen time can negatively affect both adults and children's mental and physical wellbeing. Have a look at the following signs that might help you identify if your child is using screens excessively:



³⁸ The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2020, February). Screen Time and Children.
https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx



How can I tell if my child is suffering from excessive screen time use?



Behavioral Signs³⁹

- Inability to control screen use.
- Loss of interest in the world beyond screen engagement. The only thing that motivates your child is spending time on a laptop or a tablet.
- Increased social isolation due to spending time on the internet and digital devices.
- Excessive changes in behaviour like irritability and agitation especially during “screen-free” times.
- Using screen devices as a mood booster. If your child is upset and needs a TV show, an online game or any other screen type engagement to feel better or offer an escape.
- Euphoria when using digital devices and the Internet
- Lying about screen use. E.g. Sneaking a tablet into bed at night or lying about how long they’ve been playing a video game
- Inability to maintain schedules
- Decline in academic performance due to screen use
- Underdeveloped interpersonal skills. When a child has difficulty or is not interested in socialising with peers and family members.



Physical Signs⁴⁰

- Headaches
- Back pain
- Changes in body weight (weight gain or loss)
- Blurry/strained vision
- Sleep problems
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome








Source: [Pixabay](#)

³⁹ Computer/Internet Addiction Symptoms, Causes and Effects. (2021). PsychGuides.Com. <https://www.psychguides.com/behavioral-disorders/computer-internet-addiction/>

⁴⁰ Idem



| Long term effects of excessive Screen Time on children's lives: | |
|---|---|
|  | <p>→ Obesity⁴³: spending too much time playing video games or watching TV, can be a risk factor for obesity. Heart health is also impacted and can lead to a higher risk of diabetes, increased blood pressure or cholesterol.</p> <p>✓ Tip: To minimise this risk you can try and provide your children with healthy snacks, instead of sweets or junk food, while they are using screens.</p> |
|  | <p>→ Loss of cognitive ability⁴¹: Too much screen time can shrink the grey matter in children's brain. This results in poorer concentration, weaker memory, slower information processing and weaker impulse control.</p> |
|  | <p>→ Impaired socializing skills⁴³: Using digital devices does not include real-life interactions. Excessive screen use can lead to anti-social behaviour and feelings of withdrawal. Ultimately, this will make it hard for children to form personal relationships in the future.</p> |
|  | <p>→ Depression and anxiety⁴²: All the time spent in front of screens can negatively affect children's mental and emotional wellbeing. As the time children spend online increases, so does the risk of them being victims of cyberbullying. There is also a higher risk of them developing self-image issues and insecurities as social media presents them with unrealistic standards and makes them feel that they are not enough.</p> |
|  | <p>→ Weakened emotional judgement⁴³: Too much screen time also affects children's ability to register and process emotions. Being exposed to violent media content can increase aggression levels, especially in younger children and teenagers.</p> |

⁴¹ Screen Addiction Affects Physical and Mental Health. (2019, December 5). Premier Health. <https://www.premierhealth.com/your-health/articles/health-topics/screen-addiction-affects-physical-and-mental-health>

⁴² The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2020, February). Screen Time and Children. https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx

⁴³ Mosley, A. (2021, July 12). The Negative Effects of Screen Time for Adults and Children. Blog - Valleywise Health. <https://blog.valleywisehealth.org/negative-effect-of-screen-time-adults-children/>



Key tips for parents:⁴⁴

Screen-Time Management Tips⁴⁵

- ✓ **Use parental controls:** There are various tools you can use to filter or block unwanted content from getting to your children. You can also set daily screen time limits that can lock your children out of apps after they have reached a certain amount of time.
- ✓ **Set screen-free zones:** remove TVs and laptops from your children's bedrooms and establish an agreement with your children to not use any kind of digital device in their bedrooms. You can also apply the same rule during meals or homework time.
- ✓ **Encourage other activities** that do not require a screen such as playing outside, reading a book or playing a board game. Take time to unplug from tech as a family. Scroll down to the next section to get some activity ideas.
- ✓ **Use technology to decrease your family's screen time.** Look for apps that encourage and complement physical activity. There are productivity apps like Forest that help you and your family minimise your screen use. The purpose of the app is to keep you from using your phone. By not using your phone you can grow virtual trees and gain credits. With the credits you can pay to plant real trees all over the world, this can be a fun challenge to take on!
- ✓ **Use night settings:** some phones have blue light filters to help reduce the amount of blue light given off by the screen during night-time hours which may help children sleep.
- ✓ **Switch off notifications** on your child's phone to decrease the distraction while doing other activities.
- ✓ **Turn off autoplay** on the platforms they use to help them self-regulate how long they spend on certain apps.
- ✓ **Create your own family media use plan** based on your family values and parenting style to achieve a good balance of technology and screen use. Set digital rules as a family to maintain a healthy and appropriate use of media without missing out on face-to-face and outdoor activities.
- ✓ **Treat digital environments as you would any other environment in your child's life.** Get to know your child's online friends, what platforms, websites and apps they use and why they enjoy spending time online.
- ✓ **Make screen time a family activity.** Engage with your children when they are using screens. Play an online game together, watch their favourite YouTuber, or ask them about their latest post.

⁴⁴ MediaSmarts. (2017). Digital Citizenship Guide for Parents. <https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/guides/digital-citizenship-guide.pdf>

⁴⁵ Mosley, A. (2021, July 12). The Negative Effects of Screen Time for Adults and Children. Blog - Valleywise Health. <https://blog.valleywisehealth.org/negative-effect-of-screen-time-adults-children/>
<https://blog.valleywisehealth.org/negative-effect-of-screen-time-adults-children/>



- ✓ **Do not use screens as an emotional pacifier.** It is very tempting to use technology to keep your child quiet and entertained, however, keep in mind that this can lead to excessive screen use which can have serious effects on your child’s health and behaviour.
- ✓ **Model healthy screen use:** Children tend to do what their parents do and not what they say. As we saw in Nikita’s story, she was doing the same thing as her children so it was hard for them to listen to her and stop using their devices. Parents should be conscious that children tend to copy their behaviour in term of screen use. So start to model the behaviour that you would like to see in them. The next time you binge-watch your favourite Netflix series, remember that you are setting an example for your children. Check the article (in the additional resources below) on conversations to have with your children on screen time.



Source: Photo by [Jessica Lynn Lewis](#) from [Pexels](#).

Have a look at the following table developed by The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry regarding the ideal amount of screen time by age. It is important to keep in mind that the **following information is indicative** and you should not automatically worry if your child exceeds the suggested amount of screen time. **Also, keep in mind that it is not always about quantity, it is also about quality and that technology can bring about many benefits to your child’s development if used appropriately.**⁴⁶ However, it is a good idea to use these guidelines for reference while trying to keep a balance of healthy screen time to avoid negative long term effects of excessive screen use, for example when developing a family media plan.

| Ideal amount of screen time by age | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Age | Time |
| Up to 18 months old | No screen time (except for video chatting) |
| 18 months to 24 months | Little or no screen time (less than 1 hour) |
| 3 to 5 years old | Up to 1 hour per day |
| 6 to 10 years old | 1.5 hours per day |
| 11-13 years old | 2 hours per day |

⁴⁶ Joint digital family activities can create a strong sense of ‘we-ness’ among family members which promotes family cohesion. See DigiGen 2020 Working Paper Children’s ICT use and its impact on family life. www.digigen.eu



Non-Screen Activities you can do as a family:

Suggestion: You can use these activities and try to think of more with your children. Then you can print and cut up the activities and place them in an **activity jar**. Each time you run out of inspiration of ways to spend your screen-free time you can pick an idea from the jar and do the activity with your family.

| | |
|--|--|
| → Make paper airplanes | → Work on a puzzle |
| → Take a walk around the neighbourhood with the dog(s) or a friend | → Play "I Spy" - Describe something in the house so the other players can guess what it is |
| → Organise a scavenger hunt | → Alphabet Game - Name animals, foods or athletes starting with the letter A, then B and so on |
| → Pick card games like Uno | → Bingo - You will find free printable bingo sheets online |
| → Play board games | → Look through photo albums |
| → Play Sudoku | → Cook dinner together or bake cookies |
| → Browse your local library for a good book | → Sing karaoke or have a dance party |
| → Set up a home laboratory and create some science experiments | → Make slime |
| → Go bowling | → Try rock climbing |
| → Go swimming | → Volunteer at an animal shelter |
| → Go paintballing | → Go for a picnic |
| → Dance-create your own choreography | → Go to a sports game |



Additional resources:

- Tool for creating your own family media plan: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx#wizard>
- Calculate how much time you spend on your devices with this Media time calculator: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx#wizard>
- Step-by-step guides of how to activate Parental Control tools on various devices: <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>
- Forest App: <https://www.forestapp.cc/>



- StayFree App: Screen time tracker & Limit app usage: <https://stayfreeapps.com/>
- Article: 25 Conversations to Have with Kids about Screens:
<https://www.screenfreeparenting.com/25-conversations-kids-screens/>
- Parenting Apps: <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/resources/parenting-apps>

- ▶ Video: How to Turn Off Autoplay On Your Favorite Platforms:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGG_HkO9w-U
- ▶ Video on how Social Media affects the brain:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HffWFd_6bJ0
- ▶ Video: What happens when you give your kids unlimited screen time?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkiWS0fmnt0>
- ▶ Video : Why Screen Time For Kids Needs To Be Controlled :
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnFHY16KJXY>
- ▶ Video: Consequences for kids' of endless screen time:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bCCDGZyCOI>



Glossary:

Screen time addiction: *The compulsive use of screen devices, such as laptops, tablets, smartphones and videogames, to the point of not having the ability to stop. Although, screen addiction has not been listed as an official condition yet, some experts explain that the prolonged use of screens can act as a digital drug to humans' brains. When using a screen, dopamine is released in the brain which can have a negative effect on our impulse control. Similar to drugs, screen time sets off a pleasure/reward cycle by affecting the frontal cortex of our brain which is highly addictive and can impose a number of negative effects in our and our children's lives.*

Dopamine: *A chemical produced in our brains that makes us feel pleasure.*

Frontal cortex: *The part of the brain that helps people set and achieve goals. It is responsible for decision making, personality expression and social behaviour.*

Interpersonal skills: *The skills that help you communicate or interact well with other people*

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: *A condition that causes numbness, tingling, or weakness in your hand. It is caused by repetitive motions, like typing, or any wrist movements that you do over and over.*

Grey matter: *The greyish tissue of the brain that enables people to control movement, memory, and emotions.*



The benefits of technology on families' and children's lives

During the previous section we have explored the dangers that may rise from excessive screen use. However, it is **crucial to stress that technology and screen use can bring about many benefits to both adults and children's lives if used moderately and appropriately.** Undoubtedly, the Internet has provided families with options and opportunities that did not exist a decade ago. For instance, family communication has significantly improved as the Internet allows for people to get in touch at any time and any place.

Read Liam's case to look at some examples of how technology can benefit families.



Liam's story:

Liam has a 14-year-old and 10-year-old who attend a school that uses e-mail and ICT tools that help him keep them on track even though he works from 9 to 5, six days a week. Through the school website he gets informed about their homework, important events at school, and even the choices of food served each day. When his children are sick and have to stay at home, he communicates with their teachers to help them stay on top of their work. All their assignments are uploaded online on the school platform together with a short recording of the teacher explaining what they need to do. Last year they had to travel abroad to visit an ill family member for a week and the children had the chance to participate in the school classes online.. If digital technology did not exist, this would not have been possible!



More benefits of technology that digital families can experience:

- **Work-Life balance:** For some people, work used to mean hours and hours of commuting. With digital technology more and more parents are starting to work from home which allows them to spend more time with their children and save time as well as huge amounts of money a year on transportation and childcare costs.
- **Household management:** Improvement of household management by using the Internet for banking, shopping, and paying bills. You can also use mobile apps to help track budgets and manage family schedules.
(<https://famisafe.wondershare.com/family/best-family-organizer-apps.html>)
- **Reinforce family ties:** Families can use technology to strengthen and maintain relationships with grandparents and other relatives who may live far away or abroad. Parents and children can keep each other updated instantly through email and various social media networks.
- **Connecting with your child's world:** You are struggling to get your child/teen to open up about their lives, social media accounts can give you an insight into their friends, places, music or even events that they like, and technology can be used for leisure time together such as video making or gaming.
- **Education:** Through online teaching and learning, students can receive personal attention from their teachers, and parents get the opportunity to track the progress



of their children as we saw in Liam’s case. Additionally, distance learning provides working parents with the opportunity to pursue college degrees.

Accessibility & Technology

Technology has contributed to removing some barriers that people with disabilities face in regard to communication. **Adaptive and assistive technology** enables people with hearing, speech, vision and mobility impairments to better communicate with family members, go to school and work.

Assan’s story:

Assan is an 8-year-old boy who is obsessed with films. Although he is almost blind, he uses a TV with image recognition software which produces audio descriptions of his favourite movies. Therefore, he is able to watch any movie he likes. Assan’s grandma loves to watch movies with him. She has a hearing impairment as she is in her late eighties. To watch TV, she turns on the automatic real time transcription feature which places subtitles of what is said on the screen. Last weekend Assan stayed over at his grandma’s house and they decided to watch the movie “Lord of the Rings”. They searched for the movie on the TV’s streaming service, got comfortable on the couch, grandma watched the movie by reading the transcripts and Malcom used his Bluetooth earpiece to listen the audio description.

Although Assan and his grandma have 2 different types of disabilities, thanks to technology, they were able to watch the same film simultaneously.

Be My Eyes App⁴⁷: uses video chat to connect blind individuals to sighted volunteers through their mobile devices. If a blind person needs help with a particular task, they can connect with a seeing person to ask for help. For example, if they need to know the expiration date on a milk carton, they can connect with a seeing person through live video chat to help them read the date.



Assistive Technology in Action - Meet Brody

⁴⁷ <https://www.bemyeyes.com/>

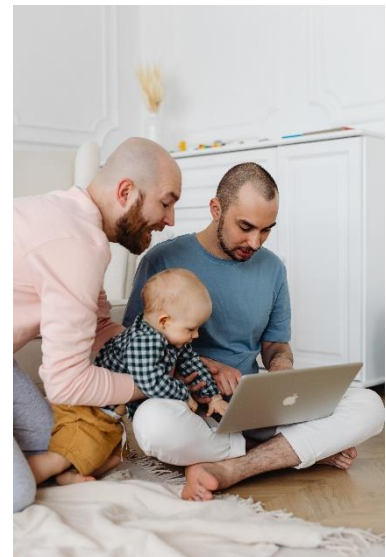


- ▶ Watch this video to get an insight in how assistive technology helps Brody with his learning disabilities: Video: Assistive Technology in Action - Meet Brody: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6i5CtPoGh0>

Ways in Which Quality Screen Use Can Benefit children

In the previous chapter we explored how excessive screen use can affect your child's mental and social development in a negative way. Now we are going to look at how a **balanced** and **quality use** of screens and ICT can actually contribute to your child's development:

- A number of apps and computer games are available to enhance reading and phonics skills or even help your child learn a second language. (Reading & Writing apps: <https://www.common sense media.org/guide/special-needs/s/reading%20%26%20writing>)
- Video games require different skills and help increase **your child's hand/eye coordination**.
- Various apps and games can help your child learn numbers, shapes, or improve their skills in more advanced mathematics. (Math apps: <https://www.common sense media.org/guide/special-needs/s/math>)
- Blogs, websites, and social media networks can help your child develop social skills by allowing them to communicate easily with family and peers from all different backgrounds and cultures.
- Different apps and games can teach your child skills such as problem-solving, strategy, and critical thinking that are essential to academic success.
- Gaming teaches kids skills such as focusing and paying attention to detail, and also allows them to socialise and make friends with gamers in other countries.
- The majority of games and apps require the user to complete one level before being allowed to move on to the next. This can help teach your child the value of persistence, competition, and motivation.
- Through the internet children may discover an interest in a subject such as languages or geography through an online video or game and go on to do research into the subject. In this way your child may develop unexpected interests and talents that may lead them to their future career.



Source : Photo by [Karolina Grabowska](#) from [Pexel](#)

Of course, there are certain risks involved with constant screen exposure, however, technology and the internet provides families with endless possibilities and opportunities for fun, safe and balanced digital parenting.



Remember: The internet and technologies are here to stay and will continue to become more and more integrated into our lives. By understanding technology and engaging with your children online, you can help them avoid potential pitfalls while enjoying all the advantages that the digital world has to offer.



Additional Resources

- Website containing communication, social interaction organisation, reading & writing, math and motor skills apps for children:
<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/guide/special-needs>
- Website Article: Shared screen time: why it's good for you and your child:
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/play-learning/screen-time-healthy-screen-use/shared-screen-time>
- Website article: Why is accessible technology important:
<https://sopa.tulane.edu/blog/why-accessible-technology-important>
- 7 MUST HAVE APP AND TOOLS FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:
<https://www.thetechedvocate.org/7-must-app-andtools-students-learning-disabilities/>
- Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide: <https://tech.ed.gov/publications/digital-learning-guide/parent-family/>
- Learning apps for families: <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/best-for-learning-lists>
- MediaDiamant (Dutch) website about family media education:
<https://www.mediawijsheid.nl/mediadiamant/>
- Search a database of over 400 assistive and educational technology tools and resources. The products are searchable by content area, grade level, IDEA disability category, and type of instructional support: <https://techmatrix.org/>
- ▶ Assistive technology- Meet Mason:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcUNnnwFm4g>



Glossary:

Accessibility: The "ability to access" and benefit from some system or entity. In other words, making things accessible to all people (whether they have a disability or not).

Assistive technology: Any object or system that increases or maintains the capabilities of people with disabilities.

Adaptive technology: Any object or system that is specifically designed for the purpose of increasing or maintaining the capabilities of people with disabilities



The importance of Online Safety

Nowadays, the internet and digital devices are becoming more present in our lives as families are relying on technology to keep their children educated and entertained. Parents need to be aware that the internet can place them and their children in dangerous situations whether it has to do with finances or exposure of their private lives. For example, they might accidentally expose their families to internet threats by downloading a virus or malware that will give hackers access to bank accounts, photos or any other type of sensitive information. This is why it is crucial for parents to become educated on **cyber security** first, and then transfer their knowledge to their children.



Source: photo by [cottonbro](#) from [Pexels](#)

Cyber security is defined as “the practice of defending computers, servers, mobile devices, electronic systems, networks, and data from malicious attacks.”⁴⁸

So what is the first step you can do to keep your digital devices secure? To prevent anyone from getting into your devices and accounts you should set up a strong password. A good piece of advice is to create different passwords on each of your accounts and devices.

| 5 tips for creating a strong password: |
|--|
| ✓ Make it memorable, but avoid using personal information like names or birthdays. |
| ✓ Use a mix of uppercase letters, lowercase letters, symbols, and numbers. |
| ✓ Make it long. |
| ✓ Do not reuse your password. |
| ✓ R3pl@ce le++ers wit# sYmb0ls & n^mb3rs 1ike Thi\$. |

▶ Watch this video to get more tips on how to create a strong password: RBC Cyber Security - Powerful Passwords: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhIXtBNNuKs>

⁴⁸ Kaspersky. (2021, April 26). What is Cyber Security? Www.Kaspersky.Com. <https://www.kaspersky.com/resource-center/definitions/what-is-cyber-security>



What is Malware?

Malware is one of the most common cyber threats out there. In simple words, it is a type of **software** used by **hackers** to invade other people's computers and steal information or money. This type of software is mainly transferred through unwanted email attachments. Sometimes it can also be disguised as legitimate-looking downloadable software.⁴⁹

Main types of Malware:

- **Virus:** gains access to our system by hiding in downloaded files or portable storage devices, such as flash drives. Once they get into the system, they start to spread. Their purpose is to modify, corrupt or destroy files and to cause your device's systems to break down.



- **Trojan horse:** A malicious software that uses a disguise to hide its true purpose. Hackers trick users into uploading Trojans onto their computer so that they can cause damage or collect data.



- **Spyware:** A malware that secretly records what you do, so that hackers can make use of your financial or personal information. It can be downloaded through pop-up windows or opening an email and an attachment.



- **Adware:** Advertising software (**pop-up advertisements**). Most often they collect data and information in order to target you with customized adverts.



⁴⁹ What is malware? Definition, types, affected industries, protection. (2021, June 21). Myra. <https://www.myrasecurity.com/en/what-is-malware/>



Key tips for parents:

Tips to protect yourself from Malware⁵⁰:

- ✓ **Keep your computer and software updated:** updates often include fixes that can improve the security of your system and prevent malware attacks.
- ✓ **Use antivirus software:** Antivirus software allows you to scan your entire computer for malware. It's a good idea to run regular scans to catch malware early and prevent it from spreading.
- ✓ **Limit your file sharing:** Many sites and applications allow you to easily share files with other users. Keep in mind that such sites and applications offer little protection against malware.
- ✓ **Do not trust pop-up windows that ask you to download software.** Simply close the pop-up window and make sure you do not click inside it.
- ✓ **Think twice before opening email attachments.** Be wary if a random person sends you an unusual email which contains attachments or images. Sometimes, those emails might just be spam, but other times, those emails might secretly contain harmful malware.
- ✓ **Back up your computer** by using an external hard drive, an online backup service, or cloud storage.
- ✓ **Use a strong password**
- ✓ **Use a pop-up blocker** (<https://adblockplus.org/>) An easy way to block ads is via opening your browser -> tap Settings on the right side -> Site Settings -> Pop-ups -> tap disable popups.

⁵⁰ Kaspersky. (2021a, January 13). Learn about malware and how to protect all your devices against it. [www.Kaspersky.Com. https://www.kaspersky.com/resource-center/preemptive-safety/what-is-malware-and-how-to-protect-against-it](https://www.kaspersky.com/resource-center/preemptive-safety/what-is-malware-and-how-to-protect-against-it)



What is Phishing?



Source: [Pixabay](#)


Phishing is a type of threat from emails, texts or calls. A phisher attacker impersonates a legitimate organisation or a person and they try to get the victim to reveal personal information, such as bank details, passwords or credit/debit card numbers. Phishing emails usually come in the form of spam messages and contain email attachments.



A phishing email might include⁵¹:

- Grammar and Spelling Errors
- Inconsistencies in Email Addresses, Links & Domain Names
- Threats or a Sense of Urgency
- Suspicious Attachments
- Unusual Requests (credentials, payment information or other personal details)
- Request to click on a link to make a payment
- A coupon for free products



 Video: What Is Phishing and How to Avoid the Bait:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsOWczwRVuc>

⁵¹ How To Recognize and Avoid Phishing Scams. (2021, July 1). Consumer Information. <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-recognize-and-avoid-phishing-scams>



Key tips for parents

CYBER SECURITY TIPS:

- ✓ **Teach your children about the importance of privacy and the dangers of the internet.** Talk about what information is and is not appropriate to share (home address, passwords, or the school they attend).
- ✓ **Create strong passwords** and encourage your children to do the same.
- ✓ **Make restricting privacy settings a habit.** Ensure that privacy settings are at maximum levels on all devices that your child uses. Turn off GPS or Bluetooth on your devices and disable the microphone and camera on laptops or cover it with tape.
- ✓ **Keep the computer up-to-date with the latest antivirus and antimalware software.** Use browser plugins like Adblock Plus and remind your children to think twice before they click on popup windows and suspicious emails.
- ✓ **Teach your children that what they post on the Internet is not always private.** Remind them to be aware of their digital identity and that what they post can become permanent and affect them in the future.
- ✓ **Open communication is key.** Build a trustful relationship with you children so they feel safe to inform you about suspicious or uncomfortable online interactions.
- ✓ **Reach out for support.** Check out national helplines on the Better Internet for Kids website created by the European Schoolnet (<https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en-GB/>).



Source: Pixabay



Remember: Media and digital devices are a fundamental part of our world today. If used moderately and appropriately, their benefits can enhance both parents and children's daily life.



Additional resources:

- Article: Internet Safety for Kids: How to Protect Your Child from the Top 7 Dangers They Face Online: <https://usa.kaspersky.com/resource-center/threats/top-seven-dangers-children-face-online>
 - Family Online rules & tips: https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/TipSheet_FamilyOnlineRules.pdf
 - Are you web aware? A checklist for parents: <https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/pdfs/tipsheet/Are-you-web-aware-checklist-parents.pdf>
 - NetSmartz : Online safety education program with age-appropriate videos and activities to help teach children be safer online <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/videos>
-
- ▶ Video: How to help children share safety and protect their data | Internet Matters: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rblQ62qPRQ4&t=1s>
 - ▶ Video: How to monitor children data and identity online | Internet Matters: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSaNEmKmln4&t=31s>



Glossary:

Cyber security: *The practice of defending computers, servers, mobile devices, electronic systems, networks, and data from malicious attacks*

Software: *The programmes and other operating information used by a computer*

Malware: (malicious software): *A type of software used by hackers to invade other people's computers and steal information or money. Often transferred through email attachments or downloadable software.*

Hacker: *A person who uses computers to gain unauthorised access to data*

Pop up window: *A type of window that opens without the user selecting "New Window" from a program's File menu.*

External hard drive: *A piece of equipment that can be connected to your computer to increase its storage space.*

Cloud storage: *A cloud computing model that stores data on the Internet through a cloud computing provider who manages and operates data storage as a service.*



SELF-ASSESSMENT

“Digital natives” are able to adapt into the digital world, shortly after their birth, and grow up considering the internet and digital devices as vital elements of their lives.

- a) True
- b) False

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- a) be able to use information technologies and the Internet proficiently
- b) be aware of the risks and challenges of ICT
- c) provide a safe and healthy cyber environment for their children
- d) all of the above

Excessive screen use is a rare phenomenon.

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What is the ideal amount of screen time for children aged up to 18 months old?

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- c) 1.5 hours per day
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Which is the strongest password?

- a) Ilovebananas
- b) 1<3b@n@n@\$
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Select the types of Malware:

- a) Adware
- b) Zeusware
- c) Trojan horse
- d) Virus horse
- e) Spyware
- f) Virus



Which type of malware uses a disguise to hide its true purpose?

- a) Spyware
- b) Adware
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Which type of malware secretly records what you do to make use of your financial or personal information?

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A Phishing email might include:

- a) Grammar and Spelling Errors
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- c) Unusual Requests such as payment information
- d) Request to click on a link to make a payment
- e) All of the above

Parents need to be good role models and rethink their own online activity behaviour and screen use because their kids mimic their behaviour and not what they say.

- a) True
- b) False

Solutions can be found in the Annex



Meet the authors

COFACE Families Europe



COFACE Families Europe brings together a large number of civil society organisations with the aim of giving a voice to all families and representing the issues most important to them at the European level.

With 50+ member organisations in 23 countries of the European Union, COFACE Families Europe monitors closely the implementation of family and social policies in the Member States, and formulates together joint policy objectives at European level.

COFACE Families Europe advocates policies of non-discrimination and equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies and services aimed at increasing equality between women and men, with a special focus on reconciliation policies between work, care and family life.

EACG



EACG is founded in 2010 as a deliverable of the European Funded Project CAREER-EUshop. The purposes of the Association are: to enable information and experience exchange by career guidance counsellors and HR practitioners; to circulate provisions of the Europe Strategies and its updates in academic and professional circles; to support the process of raising education and professional standards and quality in the territory of the European Union; to support and contribute to the European Employment and Vocational Education and Training Policies; to organize training and train-the-trainer courses for the promotion of Life-Long Learning (LLL); to organize seminars and conferences, which will enable direct communication among the Association members and beyond and for the definition of new areas of the Association activities; to prepare proposals within the framework of EU programmes funded by the European Commission; to cooperate as a coordinator or partner in European projects; to produce publications of interest to EACG members and the interested audience.

It organizes the annual European conference CAREER-EU and circulates a frequent newsletter to its members and beyond.



Emphasys Centre



Emphasys Centre, established in 1998, runs an ICT Education and VET Centre approved by the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, as well as an EU Research Centre. It is staffed with a well-rounded team that includes specialists in ICT, Psychology, Sociology, Education, Human Rights...

Emphasys is organized in 4 directorates. The Education Directorate includes validated and accredited IT courses. The ICT Training Directorate includes a fully equipped STEAM Learning Unit and the EU Training Unit. The Research Directorate works with several organisations on EU projects in the field of education and training, while also providing managerial support for EU projects to schools and NGOs. The Software Development Directorate is involved in the design, development, pilot-testing and evaluation of various e-learning tools, platforms, websites, applications and assessment portals, based on the needs of the various projects being implemented by the organization.

Emphasys is a member of the European Digital Learning Network (DLEARN) and part of the consulting group for the Digital Agenda of Cyprus.

Inqubator Leeuwarden



Inqubator Leeuwarden is helping starting companies to firmly establish their business and to help them maximise their growth. To this end, Inqubator offers a shared room facility in which starting entrepreneurs can work on their business plan, can get advice on how they should proceed in the development of their business and follow different kinds of workshops and masterclasses.

Besides this start-up support, Inqubator Leeuwarden is involved in many European projects with a focus on the improvement of education and development of relevant skills. This can be entrepreneurial/soft/leadership skills in general, but also more specifically for example digital skills, financial literacy, creativity and many more.



The European Digital Learning Network



The European Digital Learning Network – DLEARN – aims to embrace the challenges brought by the digital revolution in terms of digital skills mismatch, toward an inclusive digital society. The 47% of Europeans is not properly digitally skilled – yet in the near future 90% of jobs will require some level of digital skills and numerous opportunities in terms of jobs that are going to shape the labour market. Our aims are characterized by 4 key-words: SHARE, CONNECT, MULTIPLY, ENHANCE. DLEARN is a collector of practices and ideas, gathering diverse organizations in Europe to reflect, think and trigger new initiatives, toward the valorisation and the enhancement of digital learning.

The network was born from the initiative of 20 different organizations from all over Europe, active in the field of education and digital learning at various levels.

Parent Association Step-by-Step



Parents' Association "Step by Step" is a non-governmental and non-profit association whose main objective is to promote value of the community focused on children. Such society perceives children as its most valuable treasure and creates a priority for their welfare, development and education.

Association's activities include promotion of children's rights as well as rights of their families to honourable life; cooperation with preschool, school and other institutions which take care of children and families; joint efforts of Association's members before authorities, institutions and local communities; organization of seminars and public lectures; distribution; cooperation with domestic and foreign organizations.



Annex

COMMUNICATION SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE

Which are the three main forms of communication

- a) Writing, Reading, Speaking
- b) Verbal, Non-verbal, Written

Communication is a key life skill

- a) True
- b) False

It is better to use “door closers” to achieve effective communication

- a) True
- b) False

To achieve better communication between family members, it is important to incorporate sensitive topics in everyday family life

- a) True
- b) False

Which of the following is an act of non-verbal communication?

- a) Going for a walk
- b) Playing a board game with your children
- c) Smiling
- d) Nodding
- e) All of the above



EMPOWERMENT SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE

When children exhibit strong feelings, they need:

- a) to go to their room and calm down
- b) to be punished for being too loud
- c) acceptance and support

When listening to your child you should try to:

- a) anticipate what they will say next
- b) check if you understood them correctly
- c) offer them a solution

Setting boundaries:

- a) is good for our mental health
- b) should never be done with close family members
- c) is less important than respecting them

Punishment:

- a) teaches the child a lesson
- b) is never harmful
- c) can have unintended consequences

When disciplining your child, you should always:

- a) raise your voice
- b) explain what is appropriate behaviour
- c) focus on their character, instead of behaviour



MEDIATION SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE

When it comes to children's disputes, parents can play a much more impactful role: mediator.

- a) True
- b) False

Mediation can be used as a beneficial parenting tool with children as young as:

- a) 5 years of age
- b) 10 years of age
- c) 15 years of age
- d) All of the above

Setting a variety of rules is one of the phases of mediation.

- a) True
- b) False

What is one of the rules for setting boundaries?

- a) Listen without interrupting
- b) Write down all your boundaries
- c) Focus on a specific situation when setting boundaries
- d) Tell about your boundaries to as much people as possible

What are Alice van der Pas' three elements to feel comfortable in parenthood?

- a) The well-being of the parent, the good financial situation of the parent and the parental experience
- b) The well-being of the parent, the confidence of the parent and the parental experience
- c) A good relationship with the partner, the confidence of the parent and the parental experience
- d) The well-being of the parent, the confidence of the parent and a good career

What works on the long term when your children are having a conflict?

- a) Empathy
- b) Clear rules and boundaries
- c) Giving turns to each child to have/do what they want and time them for it to be fair
- d) Telling your children not to be mean to each other

What is the first step when mediating in a conflict between your child and his/her peers?

- a) Ask the peers about their family situation
- b) Make sure both your child and their friend/peers remain calm
- c) Take everyone apart to talk about their point of view
- d) Propose for all children to come up with possible solutions



What is one of the effective actions when dealing with non-stop arguing children?

- a) Bring your children to own room(s) when the conflict gets too heated
- b) Call an adult educator for advice
- c) Make clear what the consequences will be if the children will not end arguing
- d) **Make a positive connection with your children**

The aim of the process is not to dictate how children should solve their problem, but help them figure out a solution on their own.

- a) **True**
- b) False

While mediating between children in disputes, it is important to keep calm.

- a) **True**
- b) False



PROBLEM SOLVING AND GOAL SETTING LEARNING PACKAGE

A good enough parenting is:

- a) Perfection of parents for good enough children
- b) Children that can cope with every situation
- c) A way of living in which children should respect the rules
- d) Being aware that mistakes happens and that doing as much as we can is enough

What can influence parenting approaches:

- a) Gender stereotypes
- b) Animals at home
- c) Life Insurance
- d) Number of electronic devices at home

When we talk about goal setting, is it true that “feedback” is a crucial step for a successful approach?

- a) True
- b) False

An authoritative parenting style includes:

- a) Give strict rules
- b) Buying presents
- c) Being transparent
- d) High expectations

Will an External/Venter problem solver:

- a) Discuss their feelings
- b) Listen carefully and ask explanations
- c) Try offering suggestions they can use as solutions
- d) All of the above

The five steps of problem solving are:

- a) Analyse, clarify, evaluate, try out, review
- b) Clarify, evaluate, analyse, review, try out
- c) Analyse, evaluate, reject options, practice, change
- d) None of the above



DIGITAL SKILLS LEARNING PACKAGE

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Skills 4Parents

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