

Eight Ideals for School Aged Children

1. Become knowledgeable about your child's developmental and cognitive levels

- Learn about the normal stages of human development and the different kinds of temperament children have. For instance, the Gesell Institute of Human Development has a variety of parent-friendly books like *Your Five-Year Old*, *Your Six-Year Old*, etc.
- Develop an understanding of your child's learning style (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, etc.). Howard Gardner's book, *Multiple Intelligences*, is a good resource.
- Keep expectations appropriate to the developmental level of your child.
- Investigate all the educational options available that will best suit your child and family's needs.
- Be an advocate for your child and monitor their schooling experience.
- Nurture your child's natural desire to learn by helping your child develop their interests.

2. Stay emotionally responsive

- Respect and acknowledge your child's emotions and feelings.
- See the world through the eyes of your child. Children do not perceive situations or think the way adults do, so try to keep your expectations appropriate to the developmental level of your child.
- Reflect back what your child may be feeling: "It sounds like you're feeling angry because you want to play and it's time for us to go."
- Create an environment where your child feels safe to express their feelings. Listening and not over-reacting will help facilitate this.
- Keep the lines of communication open regardless of your child's behavior. Staying connected with your child is the most important thing you can do to help get through the tough times. If you have difficulty handling your child's behavior, it may be helpful to seek the expertise of a professional.
- Children whose parents are empathic and emotionally responsive are better able to be empathic and responsive to others.

3. Strive for optimum physical health

- Establish and maintain nutritious eating habits. Start nutritious foods early and children will be less resistant to these foods later. You can find healthy alternatives to junk food in most health food stores and general grocery stores.
- Change your own eating habits if necessary; you are your child's role model.

- Research all aspects of health care for your child, including immunizations, vitamins, and/or any recommendations made by health care providers to help you make informed decisions.

- Model good exercise habits, and make sure your child has plenty of opportunities for physical activities.

4. Maintain a high-touch relationship

- Warm, nurturing human touch is important no matter what the age of the child.

- Be demonstrative of your love with hugs and kisses.

- As boys get older they may tend to resist affection, but they may not mind a pat on the back, a head massage or a shoulder rub.

5. Develop and maintain positive sleep routines

- Older children may still enjoy a brief snuggle time with their parents before bed.

- Long before bedtime, establish routines for quieting down like having a bath, reading younger children a story while lying in their bed, or having a quiet conversation about their day.

- Try to maintain regular bedtime hours, especially during the school year.

6. Be present and available for your children

- Children still desire, enjoy, and need the presence and availability of their parents.

- Being available makes children feel safe, cared for, and secure. Parents, remember that being physically present is not enough. Active listening, making eye contact, and knowing your children's friends will help keep the lines of communication open.

- Avoid the 'latch-key' temptation and find appropriate adult supervision for children after school. Even teenagers need supervision – most teenage pregnancies occur between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.

7. Use positive discipline

- Emotionally connected children trust and love their parents and are generally easier to discipline.

- Connected children are internally motivated to please their parents most of the time.

- Be an active listener.

- Using natural or logical consequences for actions teaches your child more effectively than punishment.

- Children often communicate their feelings through their behavior. Try to understand what your child's behavior is telling you. By looking at the world through their eyes you model the first lessons of empathy. Helping your child think about and understand what others are feeling will also foster empathy.

- Remember that the ultimate goal of discipline is to help children develop inner self-control and self-discipline.

8. Maintain balance in your family life

- Don't overdo extra-curricular activities.
- Allow your child some free time. Avoid scheduling every minute of your child's time. Children love to have time to hang around the house, read, have their friends over, talk, play games or be creative.
- Have regular family meals together. This is an important time that helps families reconnect after a busy day.
- Emphasize to your children the importance of family time and family traditions, regardless of the type of family you may have. If parents act as if family time isn't important, the children won't value it either.
- Individual children need individual time with one or both parents. Make a 'date' on a regular basis with each of your children for special time together.
- Create special family nights, like 'game night', 'movie night', or 'music night'. Most young children look forward to special times like these.
- Parents need to nurture themselves and their relationship. As children get older and develop trusting relationships with friends and family outside of the immediate family, parents can find more opportunities to have time alone together. Parents can also develop their own hobbies, interests, or do volunteer work they may have put 'on hold' when their children were younger. Set an example for your children, and include them if possible.