



## Child Development and Parenting Skills

### Introduction

Welcome to the Child Development and Parenting Skills session of the *Living in Balance* program. This session will provide information about the five stages of human development. The session will describe the emotional, intellectual, and social tasks associated with them. It provides ideas and techniques for good parenting, including ways to improve communication with children and help them learn to solve problems. The session is especially useful for parents and individuals who intend to become parents. However, many people will benefit from this session by looking more closely at their own development and how their parents raised them.

### *What is in this session?*

This session has two major parts: (1) Developmental Stages and Tasks and (2) Parenting Skills.

- ✓ After participating in part 1, you will be able to
  - Understand the different stages of development children go through and the emotional, intellectual, and social tasks associated with these stages
  - Understand how parents can help their children progress through each stage
  - Understand some of the particular problems adolescents go through and how parents can help them with these problems



**SESSION 24 HAS  
TWO MAJOR PARTS:**

1. Developmental Stages and Tasks
2. Parenting Skills



### LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 1:

You will

- Understand the different stages of development children go through and the emotional, intellectual, and social tasks associated with these stages
- Understand how parents can help their children progress through each stage
- Understand some of the particular problems adolescents go through and how parents can help them with these problems

- ✓ After participating in part 2, you will be able to
  - Understand the basics of healthy and effective parenting
  - Use techniques that can improve communication, problem solving, and time management for children
  - Create a healthy environment for children that will help them learn and grow

### *What will be asked of you?*

You will be asked to look at your own development through childhood and adolescence. You will be asked to consider if there are unfinished developmental tasks you should work on now that you are in recovery. You will be asked to look at how you interact with children and make changes in order to help children with their developmental tasks. You will be asked to work on activities designed to improve communication with children, and help them with tasks such as problem solving and completing homework. Because these issues are quite personal and relate to the ways in which you parent your children and the ways in which you were parented, the information may be somewhat challenging to you. However, if you work through this session, you can gain important insights about the parenting process. Doing so, you can add an important set of skills to your recovery program.



## **Part 1: Developmental Stages and Tasks**

As people grow from infants to adults, they change in a slow manner, as they grow through several stages. These stages can be described as (1) infancy, (2) early childhood, (3) preadolescence, (4) adolescence, and (5) adulthood.

During each of these stages of development, there are specific tasks that children should accomplish. These tasks can be divided into (1) emotional tasks, (2) social tasks, and (3) intellectual tasks. For example, one of the intellectual tasks for a two- or three-year-old child is learning how to talk well enough to communicate his or her needs clearly.

When children complete one stage of development, they are able to move to the next stage. When individuals are unable to complete a specific task, they may experience problems later on, related to a stage of development that was not completed. For example, children who do not learn the alphabet will have trouble learning to read and write. However, not all tasks need to be completed before a child moves on to others. Indeed, there are some developmental tasks that people may continue working on for many years.

By being aware of their children's developmental stages and tasks, parents and caretakers can help their children to grow and learn.

For people without children, learning about developmental stages and tasks is useful. This information can help people better understand their own development. People may learn that there were important tasks that they did not fully complete, and thus identify areas of development that should be addressed in therapy.



### EXERCISE 1

*Please check the answer(s) that seems most true:*

1. Developmental tasks can be
  - Emotional
  - Social
  - Intellectual
  
2. In regard to developmental tasks and stages,
  - People sometimes do not complete important developmental tasks when they are supposed to, but they can continue to work on them later in life.
  - Not completing one task can affect how well someone completes other tasks.
  - You have to complete all these tasks in order to graduate from high school.
  - Even if you don't have children, it is useful to learn about developmental stages.

**By being aware of their children's developmental stages and tasks, parents and caretakers can help their children to grow and learn.**

## Infancy

Infancy can be described as the developmental stage from birth to about two years of age. During this stage, the infant is helpless and requires nearly constant care.

**Emotional tasks.** The most important emotional task for infants is to bond or become emotionally attached to the mother or primary caretaker. As infants bond, they are motivated to explore, learn, and develop. Yet, throughout this process, they will sometimes have a fear of separation. This is a healthy, self-protective instinct for an infant, although it may be a problem for an older child.

**Social tasks.** The most important social task for infants is learning to trust. When infants' basic needs are met regularly and reliably, they develop a sense of trust. They learn to trust their caretakers and the world in general. But when their basic needs are not met, and when they are neglected and do not receive enough attention, infants learn not to trust others. They will see the world as unpredictable and unfriendly.

**Intellectual tasks.** The intellectual tasks of infants have to do with exploring the world around them and learning to speak. Infants explore the world by touching and tasting objects around them. By the end of infancy, they will have learned enough words to communicate many of their needs and desires.

**Parents' tasks.** Parents and other caretakers can help infants with their developmental tasks by giving them attention and meeting their basic needs, thereby enabling them to trust and to create emotional bonds. However, the infant should also be allowed to explore, which may mean providing toys and safe objects to discover and play with. Also, parents help by encouraging the infant to communicate with words rather than simply crying and throwing tantrums.



**Parents and other caretakers can help infants with their developmental tasks by giving them attention and meeting their basic needs.**



**EXERCISE 2**

*Please answer the following questions:*

- 1. In what ways are the developmental tasks of infants similar to the developmental tasks of adults who are in recovery?

---



---



---



---



---



---

- 2. If the primary emotional and social tasks for infants are to bond and trust, what do you think happens to adults who did not learn to bond and trust during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this developmental task?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



**Primary emotional and social tasks for infants are to bond and trust.**



**Parents can also help children better understand their experiences.**

## **Early Childhood**

The developmental stage of early childhood is roughly from two to six years of age. During this stage, toilet training is a major developmental issue.

***Emotional tasks.*** At this age, children learn to understand different feelings and how to express those feelings. They will have a strong need to communicate how they feel to others.

***Social tasks.*** An important social task for children is to learn how to form relationships with others outside of the immediate family, such as day care workers, sitters, members of their extended family, and other children.

***Intellectual tasks.*** Perhaps the most important intellectual task of early childhood is the drive to explore, discover, and satisfy a sense of curiosity. Young children can also begin to reason and understand the relationship between cause and effect. For example, they can learn that when they pull a cat's tail, the cat will scratch them. Also, children learn how to express their anxieties and fears through symbolic play.

***Parents' tasks.*** Parents and other caretakers can help children with their exploration of the world by not ignoring their questions and by providing them with ways of learning. For instance, educational videos and television shows, books, and trips to museums can all help satisfy some of their curiosity and help them learn. Parents should allow children to express their feelings, anxieties, and fears. Parents can also help children better understand their experiences. Children should be encouraged to socialize, perhaps by joining parent-child groups or attending preschool. Parents should be protective at this stage, but allow their children to make mistakes, since that is a necessary part of learning.



**EXERCISE 3**

*Please answer the following questions:*

- 1. What are some other ways parents can help children meet their developmental tasks?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- 2. If the primary emotional and social tasks for early childhood are to understand and express feelings and form relationships with others, what do you think happens to adults who do not learn to do so during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this developmental task?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **Preadolescence**

The stage of preadolescence is roughly from age seven to eleven. During these early school years, children build upon and further develop skills they learned in early childhood. During these elementary school years, children encounter both the promise and the demands of schoolwork. By succeeding in school, children learn the basics of succeeding as an adult. If they don't do well in school, however, children may feel a sense of inferiority, which can carry into adulthood. For this reason, it is important that parents praise effort and not just success on the child's part.

***Emotional tasks.*** During preadolescence, a child begins to develop an image of himself or herself as someone able to succeed or someone who fails. Thus, one of the emotional tasks for pre-adolescent children is to identify areas where they can succeed and strengthen areas of weakness.

***Social tasks.*** At this stage, a child's social life becomes even more important. Social tasks involve the development of honest and healthy relationships with peers and adults.

***Intellectual tasks.*** At this stage, children can develop their own sense of morality (a sense of right and wrong), rather than simply doing (or not doing) as they are told. They can also learn to have real conversations in which they communicate with others as equals, rather than simply "talking."

***Parents' tasks.*** Most children will experience periods of success and failure at school. By providing a home atmosphere of support and concern, parents can help children through occasional setbacks at school. This may involve reminding children of their strengths when they feel a sense of failure. A nonsupportive environment will make success less likely. Parents can help children meet their social tasks by supporting their involvement in social activities, such as clubs and sports.

**Parents can help children meet their social tasks by supporting their involvement in social activities, such as clubs and sports.**



**EXERCISE 4**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What are some other important events and developmental tasks in the lives of preadolescents?

---



---



---



---



---



---

2. What are some other ways that parents can help preadolescents with their developmental tasks?

---



---



---



---



---



---

3. If the primary emotional task for preadolescents is to develop a self-image as someone who can succeed, what do you think happens to adults who do not learn to do so during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this developmental task?

---



---



---



---

*(more writing space on next page)*



**During the teen years,  
adolescents are often  
very moody.**

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Adolescence**

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood, and it usually lasts from about age twelve to age seventeen. It is a time of quick and dramatic physical, emotional, and social change.

Puberty, which describes the physical changes during adolescence, usually occurs between the ages of ten and fifteen—earlier for girls than boys. It is begun by the release of certain hormones. In boys, these hormones stimulate the testes to increase secretion of testosterone. In girls, these hormones stimulate the ovaries to increase secretion of estrogen hormones.

Puberty is accompanied by a big spurt in growth and an increase in weight. For girls, pubic hair and breasts begin to grow, the menstrual cycle begins, and the hips begin to widen. For boys, facial and pubic hair start to grow, sex organs become larger, the shoulders widen, and the voice deepens.

***Emotional tasks.*** During the teen years, adolescents are often very moody. One moment they are happy, the next they are anxious, depressed, or angry. Something that seems very important one day may seem unimportant the next.

***Social tasks.*** A major task during the transition to adulthood is the struggle for one's own identity. As adolescents become more independent from their parents, they begin to have strong opinions about their likes and dislikes, such as clothes, hair-styles, and music.

**Intellectual tasks.** Adolescents are nearly adults. They are beginning to think like adults and may have interests in sophisticated subjects such as politics and science.

**Parents' tasks.** While adolescence is a time of major ups and downs, long and intense periods of anxiety, depression, or anger may be evidence of a more serious problem that needs professional attention. Parents should try to communicate with their adolescent children about what is going on in their lives, while still giving them space to make their own decisions about many things.



### EXERCISE 5

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What are some other important events and developmental tasks in the lives of adolescents?

---



---



---



---



---



---

2. What developmental tasks did you struggle with the most as an adolescent?

---



---



---



---



---



---

**Parents should try to communicate with their adolescent children about what is going on in their lives, while still giving them space to make their own decisions about many things.**

3. If a primary social task for adolescence is to struggle for self-identity, what do you think happens to adults who did not learn to do so during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this developmental task?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Adolescent Task: Gaining Independence and a Sense of Oneself**

Infants view their parents as all-powerful and perfect. In early childhood, children realize that their parents have certain limitations. But during adolescence, children often begin to distance themselves from their parents. They often see great imperfections in their parents, and they may greatly dislike their parents' clothes, music, politics, and opinions.

Adolescents first show their independence by making their own goals, then taking responsibility to meet these goals. Adolescents will often go through a period of testing the limits of parents, challenging authority, and contesting the values and attitudes of the family and family members—this is usually a healthy and necessary process.

A related task in adolescence is the discovery of oneself. Adolescents go through a period of recognizing who they are and what is unique about themselves. Throughout this process, they become more and more aware of the differences between themselves and their family members. If adolescents don't develop a sense of independence and their own uniqueness, they may feel hopeless and perhaps depressed.



### EXERCISE 6

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What are some ways in which parents can help adolescents be more independent?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

2. What are some ways in which parents can help adolescents understand their own uniqueness?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

3. If an important task for adolescence is to make and reach goals, what do you think happens to adults who did not learn to do so during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this problem?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Adolescent Task: Morals, Meaning, and Values**

An important task in adolescence is the development of a sense of meaning about one's life. Adolescents may ask: "Why am I here? What am I supposed to do? What is right and wrong? Why do bad things happen?" Parents should encourage adolescents to face these issues and develop their own sense of morals and values.

As part of this process, adolescents may challenge the values and morals of others. While this is sometimes necessary, what is more important is that they can understand and take on values for themselves.

Adolescence is also the time when some people may begin to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. If alcohol and other drugs become an important part of an adolescent's life, addiction may develop.

An important part of the development of a personal belief system is the need for a spiritual dimension to life. Failure to find meaning and failure to develop personal morals and values can make an adolescent feel inferior and result in a lack of integrity. It can also lead to bad decisions in other areas.

**If alcohol and other drugs become an important part of an adolescent's life, addiction may develop.**



**EXERCISE 7**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. As an adolescent, did you struggle with the basic questions of life, death, and meaning?

- Yes
- No

Have you seen other adolescents do so?

- Yes
- No

With what results?

---



---



---



---



---



---

2. What are some ways in which your recovery has influenced your own perception of values and meaning for life?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

- 3. If an important task for adolescence is to develop a sense of meaning about one's life, what do you think happens to adults who did not learn to do so during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this problem?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Adolescent Task: Intimacy and Interpersonal Relationships**

Adolescence is a time for examining and experiencing different types of personal relationships, including intimate relationships. During adolescence, developing new relationships with friends, adults, and potential sexual partners becomes very important. Adolescents frequently experiment with self-disclosure and intimacy.

These relationships have a very important role in fulfilling adolescents' needs for acceptance, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. Adolescence is also a period of exploring personal sexuality issues and developing attitudes about sexual relationships.

Positive experiences with other people may result in feelings of safety and trust. Poor experiences, or the inability to have these experiences, may cause feelings of distrust and a need for protection. If an adolescent's attempts at building relationships and creating intimacy have poor results, he or she may develop a sense of insecurity and a lack of connection with other people.



**Adolescence is a time for examining and experiencing different types of personal relationships.**



**EXERCISE 8**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. If you're a parent, do you have a hard time accepting an adolescent child's search for intimacy?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain why.)*

---



---



---



---



---

2. What are some of the ways you can help an adolescent develop personal relationships?

---



---



---



---



---

3. If an important task for adolescence is to experiment with disclosure and intimacy, what do you think happens to adults who did not learn to do so during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this problem?

---



---



---



---

*(more writing space on next page)*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Triggers for Childhood Problems**

***Unmet developmental tasks.*** It is natural for some children to do better with certain developmental tasks than others. Some children may be unable to complete many developmental tasks. These children may have an identity crisis, and they may not understand who they are, what they are doing, where they are going, or why. They may express this identity crisis through drug use, sexual promiscuity, or criminal behavior. They may be impulsive, destructive, distrustful, and irresponsible. They may turn to drug use to reduce anxiety and tension, to increase self-esteem, or to feel more a part of a group.

***Parent-child relationship.*** Parent-child relationships that are not balanced can cause a number of childhood problems. Parental rejection, excessively strict parenting, excessively lenient and negligent parenting, inconsistent parenting, and parental over-protection can all lead to serious problems.

***Peer relationships.*** As children try new behaviors and experiences, they will adopt new beliefs and values, often ones held by their friends. Adopting these new values and beliefs can promote a conflict between their parents' beliefs and the beliefs of their peers. These new values are often associated with choices in music, language, clothing, role models, and goals. These new values may include alcohol and other drug use.

***Chronic medical and psychiatric problems.*** During childhood or adolescence, psychiatric and medical problems may emerge. Anxiety disorders, mood disorders, personality problems, and chronic medical problems can put considerable stress on both the parent and the child. These can also be triggers for adolescent drug use.

***Family crises.*** It is normal for families to have problems. But some families have very serious problems that can be called crises. When family problems are poorly handled, they may become crises. These may include medical emergencies, parental separation or divorce, parental substance abuse or recovery, job loss, or housing problems. During family crises, communication may become intense and explosive and be followed by feelings of guilt and remorse. Children may feel guilt for things they didn't do or had no control over. Or they may remain angry at their parents for things their parents could not control.



### EXERCISE 9

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What factors affected you in your decision to start using alcohol and other drugs? Was it the influence of friends? Were you depressed or bored? Did you feel inadequate?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

2. As a child, did you ever feel guilty about things over which you had no control? Did you blame others, such as your parents, for things that they couldn't control? Is this something that still affects you today?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



**LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 2:**

You will

- Understand the basics of healthy and effective parenting
- Use techniques that can improve communication, problem solving, and time management for children
- Create a healthy environment for children that will help them learn and grow



**Part 2: Parenting Skills**

**A Healthy Foundation**

When people purchase a VCR, they get a set of instructions that tells them how to operate it, how to take care of it, how to avoid having problems, and what to do if something goes wrong. Unfortunately, children do not come with a set of written instructions. Raising children is often trial and error. The following section will provide suggestions and tips that can be used by parents and others who interact with children.

No matter what approach to parenting you use, there are a few basics that will help to form the foundation for healthy children. These include expressing love, setting rules, and showing sensitivity.

**Expressing love.** Children have a strong need to know that their parents and caretakers love them. But it is easy for parents to forget this. Children whose parents express their love, warmth, and acceptance are more likely to be well behaved and have high self-esteem. It is important for parents to give children a lot of praise and attention—to show them that they are loved and appreciated.

**Setting rules.** Well-behaved children usually have parents who establish clear and unchanging rules. Clear rules are ones that are simple enough for a child to understand. It is also important that rules, once established, don't keep changing. Everybody in the family should have a clear understanding of the rules of the house. Although there should always be some flexibility, overall, rules should be firmly enforced. Parents should rarely give in to whining, crying, or demanding behavior.

**Showing sensitivity.** Successful parents are also sensitive to the rights and needs of children, encouraging independence and listening to their children's points of view. Although children should be expected to follow rules, it is very important that they be allowed to express their feelings about the rules.



### EXERCISE 10

Please answer the following questions:

1. What does it mean to you to express love to your children?  
How do you (or how would you) do this?

---



---



---



---



---



---



**Children whose parents express their love are more likely to be well behaved and have high self-esteem.**

2. Do you feel that you were loved as a child?

Yes     No

In what ways would you like to have been loved?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. If it is important for parents to express love, set rules, and show sensitivity, what do you think happens to adults who did not experience this during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this problem?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Children are more likely to have problems and use drugs if their parents were very strict, were very harsh in their punishment, were very lenient, or provided inconsistent rules.**

**Parental Strictness: A Matter of Balance**

Researchers have found that children are more likely to have problems and use drugs if their parents were very strict, were very harsh in their punishment, were very lenient, or provided inconsistent rules. To raise a healthy child, there should be a balance between enforced rules and flexibility.

**Too strict.** Parents who are very strict and bossy often don't allow their children to speak up, and they may use severe punishments, such as spankings or beatings. As a result, their children are either very shy or very aggressive, and often unhappy.

**Too harsh.** Similarly, parents who are not necessarily strict but do have outbursts in which they scream at, embarrass, or harshly criticize their children do not create a healthy relationship with their children. This stifling atmosphere can take away a child's self-esteem, making him or her feel worthless or a failure.

**Too lenient.** Parents who constantly give in to their children and don't have any clear and consistent rules end up with children who are poorly behaved. The relationship between any parent and child is unequal. The parent is the adult who is expected to guide and protect the child, and at times this means taking control of the child.

**Too inconsistent.** Parents who are very inconsistent about family rules can make children feel confused about what is right and what is wrong, and about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. When rules are inconsistently enforced, children tend to not follow them and believe they are unimportant.



### EXERCISE 11

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. If you have children, do you have a tendency to be too strict, too severe, or too lenient with them? Are you consistent in the enforcement of rules? Please explain.

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

2. What might happen if you are too strict or too lenient with a child?

---

---

---

---

---

3. If it is important for parents not to be too strict, too harsh, or too lenient with their children, what do you think happens to adults who experienced one of these situations during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this problem?

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Use punishment and praise properly in order to teach children in a healthy manner.**

**Punishment and Praise**

It is important to use punishment and praise properly in order to teach children in a healthy manner.

***Punishment.*** Researchers have found that physical punishment is an especially poor way to get children to behave in a positive and healthy way. In fact, physical punishment generally promotes fear, anxiety, depression, emotional turmoil, and behavioral problems.

***Appropriate consequences.*** Some types of punishment can be effective, however, when appropriate consequences are consistently applied in response to negative behavior. Appropriate consequences are ones that can be understood by and make sense to a child of



a given age. For example, a two-year-old might have to be held and reassured if he or she keeps getting out of bed; a five-year-old might have to stay in his or her room for five minutes for fighting; a ten-year-old might not be allowed to watch TV if he or she doesn't do homework; and a fifteen-year-old might be grounded for a week for staying out too late.

**Praise.** Researchers have found that the best way to encourage appropriate and healthy behavior is to praise good behavior. This is more effective than just criticizing bad behavior. When children are rowdy and loud, it is easy to become angry and lose one's temper, but it is easy to forget to say something positive when children are being quiet and good. For these reasons, parents and caretakers may need to change their own behavior in order to change their children's behavior. Parents need to make a special effort to praise children when their behaviors are good and healthy.

**Praise efforts, not just successes.** Because children are young and are still learning, they will make many mistakes. They will not always reach the goals set for them or the goals they set for themselves. Thus, parents should praise children's efforts, not just their successes. Praising sincere efforts increases the likelihood that children will try again and eventually achieve their goals.



## EXERCISE 12

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What are some appropriate consequences to use for your child's negative behavior?

---



---



---



---



---



---

**Parents and caretakers may need to change their own behavior in order to change their children's behavior.**

2. What are some times when you could praise a child for a good effort?

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. Recall some situations in which you received praise or criticism as a child that made you feel really good or really bad.

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Listening is an important part of good communication.**

### **Improving Communication Skills**

Effective parenting requires communication between parent and child. It is not that the parent and the child are equals, but they do need to communicate in an open and honest manner.

**Listening.** Parents are the primary source of their children’s education during the children’s early years. Before children learn to talk, parents will talk *to* them, not *with* them. As children learn to talk, however, parents need to learn to listen, not just talk. Listening is an important part of good communication — it shows that the parent respects the child and cares about what he or she thinks.

**Invitations to speak.** In order to enhance communication with their children, parents should create an environment in which children feel they can communicate in an open and honest way. Because family life can be busy and hectic, parents can establish special times during the day or week during which children can openly speak about anything without fear.

**Active listening.** Active listening means that you paraphrase or reword what you are hearing to make sure that you understand it correctly. It is a different process from simply interpreting because you repeat back to the child what you think you heard. In this way, children are able to know that their parent really did understand what they said, or, if not, they can try to clarify it for the parent.



### EXERCISE 13

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What are your strengths in communicating with children?

---



---



---



---



---



---

2. In what ways could your communication with children be better? How could you incorporate this into your recovery program?

---



---



---



---

*(more writing space on next page)*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. Did your parents listen to what you had to say as a child? Did they ask you to talk with them? How do you feel as a result?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Roadblocks to Effective Listening**

Effective listening involves more than just hearing the words someone speaks. It means that you create an environment in which someone is willing and able to speak openly and honestly. There are a number of ways that effective listening can be shut down if parents respond to their children in the wrong way.

***Not letting the child talk.*** Perhaps the most obvious roadblock to effective listening is simply not letting children speak. Even when they are angry or feel impatient, parents should let children say what is on their mind. It is important for them to know that the parent is interested in what they think, feel, and know.

***Focusing on blame.*** When problems occur, it is natural to want to know how the problem started and who started it. However, focusing on the blame stops children from finding a solution to the problem. It is much more helpful to focus on how the child would resolve the problem.

***Using shame.*** Parents are typically larger and smarter than children. Thus, it is easy for them to laugh at their children when they make a mistake or say something that is wrong or silly. This is a bad strategy for helping children to learn. It humiliates and embarrasses children and makes them feel shame. Parents should remember that the children are, after all, children, and will make mistakes. After children have made a mistake, parents should help them feel comfortable trying again.

***Giving long lectures.*** When children make mistakes, they may feel bad, embarrassed, and possibly angry and hopeless. Lecturing children, rather than talking with them, can make them feel even worse. Instead, parents should help children figure out what went wrong, help them solve the immediate problem, and help them find ways to avoid the problem in the future.

***Using overgeneralizations.*** When children have problems, it is easy for parents to think, “Well, here we go again.” Parents may think about similar problems in the past and overgeneralize the problems by saying, “You always have this problem,” or “You just can’t get this straight, can you?” This is not a helpful response, and it is more likely to make children feel like they’ll never be able to do something right than it is to help them understand how they can do it right.

***Not allowing disagreements.*** Disagreement is a natural part of life. Parents who do not let their children disagree with them are not allowing the children to learn how to think independently. Although it may be uncomfortable, a disagreement among family members symbolizes the genuine differences among them.

**Disagreement is a natural part of life.**



**EXERCISE 14**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. As a child, did your parents use any of the roadblocks to effective listening described on the previous pages?

Yes     No

If so, how did that make you feel?

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. Many of these ineffective ways of communicating with children come naturally, without parents thinking about what they are doing. How can a parent learn to stop responding in one of these ways, if he or she does so by instinct?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. If it is important for parents not to use roadblocks to communication, what do you think happens to adults who experienced this during their youth? In what ways can a recovery program help to address this problem?

---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Solve Problems, Don't Focus on Fault**

Nobody likes to have problems. But for many people, when problems occur, it seems necessary to identify who caused the problem and then blame them for it. That is generally a poor way to deal with problems. It doesn't find a solution, and it can have negative effects on a child.

When children have problems at school, such as bad grades or fights, things generally get worse when parents lecture them or blame them for what happened. That will only make children frustrated, angry, anxious, and depressed. They will probably end up feeling like a failure and have poor self-esteem.

When children get into trouble, it is best to try to solve the problem instead of trying to figure out who is to blame. What was the cause of the problem? What bad things have resulted from the original problem? How can they be fixed? What should happen to prevent this problem from happening again?

The most effective way to help a child with his or her problem is to solve the problem *with* the child, not *for* the child. Together, the parent and the child should (1) define the problem, (2) go over possible solutions, (3) decide together on a solution, and (4) set into motion that solution. In this way, the child learns that problems are a natural part of living, and that it is possible to solve problems.

**Try to solve the problem instead of trying to figure out who is to blame.**



**EXERCISE 15**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Give an example of a situation in which finding fault really did no good at all. How could the situation have been handled in a better way?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. Why is it sometimes easier to try to find who's to blame rather than to work on solving the problem?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. During your recovery, it is likely that you will be blamed for having hurt someone or having done something unhealthy while using. In what ways can problem solving be a healthier component of your recovery than blame?

---

---

---

---

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Creating a Healthy and Structured Environment**

Without thinking about it, most adults create some sort of a structure in their lives, like waking up at a certain time in order to get to work on time. However, children are not able to see how other family members organize their time. In part, this is because the schedule that parents have and its importance to them are not explained to children.

***Have a schedule.*** Without schedules, schools and businesses could not operate. The same is true for families. Each family should have a written, regular schedule that is placed where all can see. The schedule should include times for waking up and going to bed, and times for meals, homework, and play. If there is a written schedule, children will know what is expected of them and what others are expected to do as well—it will help them understand the importance and value of organizing their time.

***Schedule family talk time.*** Families should set aside some time each day for family discussion. Select a period of at least fifteen minutes when family members can informally unwind and talk about what is going on with them. This can be done during breakfast, dinner, or shortly before bedtime. This should not be a time for arguments, but for sharing and reflection.

***Be consistent.*** Whatever family rules parents establish, it is very important that they be enforced consistently. Family rules should be fair and reasonable. If it is unlikely that specific family rules will be kept, the rules should be changed.



**Families should set aside some time each day for family discussion.**

**Parents should create an environment that encourages everyone to follow the rules.**

***Create rules that make sense and are easy to follow.*** Parents should create an environment that encourages everyone to follow the rules. For instance, if children are expected to do their homework during a certain time period, it should be understood that the television and radio are not turned on. Rules should also not be very complicated. If children don't understand what they are supposed to do, when they are supposed to do it, and why, then the rules aren't working.



**EXERCISE 16**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. How would it help you and your family to create a family schedule?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. How can developing a schedule help your recovery program?  
How can it help your family support your recovery?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. How can scheduling family talk time help your recovery program? How can it help your family support your recovery?

---



---



---



---



---



---

### **Give Encouragement, Not Criticism**

Children of all ages have a natural desire to be successful and get things done. They want to show off, and they want their parents to be proud of them. Parents should help this process by encouraging their children to try new tasks.

#### ***Challenge children, but don't set them up for failure.***

However, parents should not encourage children to perform tasks that are beyond the ability of the children. It is better to encourage children to do tasks that may be difficult, but are achievable.

***Motivate and encourage children, rather than making them feel ashamed.*** Parents should not blame and criticize children when they fail to accomplish a task. When children fail at a task, they feel bad already. What they need is encouragement and motivation to try again. Parents should take steps to make children feel safe enough to try again and risk another failure or possibly succeed.

***Ask for effort, not perfection.*** Parents should not demand perfection. Children should be rewarded for making the effort, even if the effort was not completely successful. The purpose of praising children for their strong efforts is to let them know that you are aware of the hard work and efforts that they have undertaken, and that you are proud of them.



**EXERCISE 17**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Why should there be an emphasis on praising efforts, not finishing things perfectly?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. What are some specific ways that parents can motivate their children to accomplish difficult tasks?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. In what ways can a focus on encouragement rather than criticism help your recovery?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Child Care: What Works

Most parents and other caregivers love their children and try very hard to provide guidance. Most want to have loving, well-behaved children who stay out of trouble, have self-confidence, and work hard in school. Researchers have studied well-behaved children to discover how they got that way. They found that acceptance and guidance create well-behaved children, while rejection and permissiveness create children who don't behave.

**Researchers have found that acceptance and guidance create well-behaved children.**

### *The accepting caregiver*

- Is satisfied with the child
- Seeks out and enjoys the child
- Gives a lot of praise and many positive messages
- Listens to children and notices their needs

### *The rejecting caregiver*

- Is critical of the child
- Doesn't seek out or enjoy the child
- Gives little praise and is not positive
- Ignores the child's views and needs

### *The guiding caregiver*

- States rules clearly and makes sure something happens if children violate them
- Enforces rules firmly and consistently, but seldom uses physical punishment such as spankings
- Rarely gives in to whining, crying, angry demands, or temper tantrums

### *The permissive caregiver*

- Does not state rules clearly, seldom does anything when rules are broken
- Does not firmly or consistently enforce the rules
- Gives in when children whine, cry, make angry demands, or have temper tantrums



**EXERCISE 18**

*Please check true or false for the following statements:*

1. An accepting caregiver is one who enjoys spending time with a child.  
 True     False
  
2. A guiding caregiver is one who lets children have their way if they are crying or unhappy.  
 True     False
  
3. In what ways can the principles on the previous page help your recovery?

---

---

---

---

---

---



**Parents can help children learn good study habits.**

**Helping with Homework**

During elementary and high school experiences, most children learn the basic skills that they will need for further education and for work, but some do not. While children are ultimately responsible for doing well in school and completing their homework, parents can help children learn good study habits.

***Help children remember homework assignments.*** When children have poor grades, it may be because they have difficulty remembering the assignments given to them by their teacher. Children may forget to do certain homework assignments, do the wrong assignments, or not do them in time. They may forget to bring home the book they need to do the homework assignment.

If they have these problems, they may feel a sense of shame or hopelessness when other children hand in their homework.

Often, children can benefit from a simple system that helps them to remember their homework. Children may benefit from having a notebook that includes only their homework assignments. In the assignment notebook, they can write down the assignments, noting what textbook they will need to do the homework. The assignment notebook can be checked by the child before leaving school and later checked by parents at home.

***Negotiate a homework contract.*** Especially in situations where children are having trouble managing their time for homework, parents and children should negotiate a “homework contract.” This simple agreement puts down in writing what the parent expects and what the child expects, and what each will do to make sure the homework gets done. When both parent and child have a say in preparing the contract, both feel a sense of control, and both are aware of what is expected of them. Homework contracts can be used during times when grades are low but can be stopped when the grades go up. (A sample homework contract is provided on the next page.)



### EXERCISE 19

*Please answer the following question:*

What are some other ways in which you could help a child complete homework assignments?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

## Sample Homework Contract

### *John agrees to the following:*

1. To write down all homework assignments in his assignment notebook.
2. To look at the assignment notebook before leaving school, and to bring home all of the required textbooks.
3. To begin doing the homework at the following time:  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A.M.) (P.M.).
4. To continue with the homework until the following time:  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A.M.) (P.M.) or until the work is done.

### *Mom agrees to the following:*

1. To make sure that there is no loud noise while John is doing his homework.
2. To review John's homework at the following time:  
\_\_\_\_\_ (A.M.) (P.M.).
3. To let John play with his friends for one hour after doing his homework, at: \_\_\_\_\_ (A.M.) (P.M.).





### **Session 24 Summary**

In this session you have learned about the five stages of human development and the emotional, intellectual, and social tasks associated with four of them. Because of your alcohol and other drug use, or because of other problems, you may have missed some of the important tasks that most people complete at an early age, but it is still possible to learn these as an adult. Parents, to whom this session is primarily addressed, also learned some basic techniques for good parenting, including ways to improve communication with children and to help them learn to solve problems.

Because these issues are quite personal and relate to the ways in which you parent your children and the ways in which you were parented, you may have found the information somewhat challenging. However, by working through this session, you gained important insights about the parenting process. Doing so, you now have another important set of skills for your recovery program.