



# ADVENTURES IN PARENTING



How  
**RESPONDING,**  
**PREVENTING,**  
**MONITORING,**  
**MENTORING,**

and  
**MODELING**  
Can Help  
You Be a  
Successful  
Parent

U.S. Department of Health  
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*Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National  
Institute of Child Health and  
Human Development

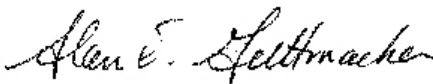
Dear Fellow Parent,

As parents, we have the most important job in the world. There is nothing we do in our lifetimes that is more significant than how we raise our children. It's a challenging, full-time job that lasts throughout our lives, no matter how old our children get. While parenting presents us with struggles and trials, it also offers us many rewards. Those rewards, too, can last through our lives.

This booklet addresses certain struggles and trials of parenting and highlights some of its many rewards. The information is based on decades of research on parenting, as well as the experiences of actual parents and experts in parenting. The booklet is designed for parents of every background, from first-time parents to grandparents, so that any one who interacts with children can benefit from this valuable information.

Parenting is not only vital to our present, but also to our future, as our children themselves become parents. Raising children is an adventure, full of surprises and changes. I hope that this information helps you to shape your own parenting practices and beliefs, as you embark on your own parenting adventure.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan E. Guttmacher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Alan E. Guttmacher, M.D.**

Director

*Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of  
Child Health and Human Development

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# Adventures in parenting

## Have you heard the latest advice about parenting?

Of course you have. From experts to other parents, people are always ready to give you parenting advice. Parenting tips, parents' survival guides, dos, don'ts, shoulds, and shouldn'ts—new ones come out every day.

But with so much information available, how can anyone figure out what *really* works? How do you know whose advice to follow? Isn't parenting just common sense anyway? How can the experts know what it's like to be a parent in a *real* house?

## What's a parent to do?

Try RPM3—a no-frills approach to parenting from the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

For over 30 years, the NICHD has conducted and supported research in parenting and child development. We've talked to experts, parents, and children. We've collected statistics, identified myths, and tested suggestions. The result is RPM3.

Parents  
do  
matter.

The RPM3 guidelines aren't meant to be just another parenting “how to,” telling you what to do. Instead, RPM3 separates the useful information from the not-so-useful so that you can make your own decisions about parenting. RPM3 does more than tell stories about what people *think* about parenting, it incorporates 30 years of NICHD research to tell you what really works.

RPM3 confirms something that you already know: parents *do* matter. *You* matter. Read on to find out just how much...

The first section of this booklet explains each item in RPM3, **responding, preventing, monitoring, mentoring,** and **modeling**, in more detail. These lessons describe how RPM3 can help you make daily decisions about parenting. The remaining sections of the booklet give examples of how some parents have used the lessons of RPM3 with their own children.

As you read, you will notice numbers, like <sup>1</sup> or <sup>7</sup> next to certain words. These numbers relate to the research that supports an idea or concept, listed on the **References** page. These references give you more information about NICHD parenting research.

### So where do we start?

The first thing you need to know is that there are no perfect parents. Parenting isn't all-or-nothing. Successes *and* mistakes are part of being a parent. Start to think about the type of parent you want to be. RPM3 offers research-based guidelines for being:

- **An effective parent**

Your words and actions influence your child the way you want them to.

- **A consistent parent**

You follow similar principles or practices in your words and actions.

- **An active parent**

You participate in your child's life.

- **An attentive parent**

You pay attention to your child's life and observe what goes on.

## RPM3

stands for:

**Responding** to your child in an appropriate manner.

**Preventing** risky behavior or problems before they arise.

**Monitoring** your child's contact with his or her surrounding world.

**Mentoring** your child to support and encourage desired behaviors.

**Modeling** your own behavior to provide a consistent, positive example for your child.

By including responding, preventing, monitoring, mentoring, and modeling in your day-to-day parenting activities, you can become a more effective, consistent, active, and attentive parent.

Once you have learned about each RPM3 guideline, go to the section that describes your child's age to see how some parents use these guidelines in their everyday parenting. Think about steps you can take to use these guidelines and ideas in your own day-to-day parenting.

Being a more effective, consistent, active, and attentive parent is a choice that only you can make.

### **Keep in mind...**

As you learn about the RPM3 guidelines and read the examples, remember that responding, preventing, monitoring, mentoring, and modeling have their place in parenting every child—including those children with special or different needs.

All children—be they mentally challenged, mentally gifted, physically challenged, physically gifted, or some combination of these—can benefit from the guidelines in RPM3. The children described in the booklet's examples might be in wheelchairs; they could have leukemia or asthma; they may take college level courses; or they might be in special classes for kids with attention deficit disorder.

The stories don't specifically mention these traits because all kids need day-to-day parenting, including those in special situations. The guidelines presented in RPM3 focus on how to handle day-to-day parenting choices, in which a child's abilities or disabilities are not the most important factors. The booklet's examples also apply to families of any culture, religion, living arrangement, economic status, and size. They address situations that all families experience, even if the specific family details are slightly different.

Let's begin by learning the lessons that RPM3 has to teach, starting with the **R — Responding to your child in an appropriate manner.**

# R

## Responding to your child in an appropriate manner

This guideline may seem obvious, but responding is more than just giving your child attention. The words are actually saying two different things:

**1)** make sure you're *responding* to your child, not reacting; and **2)** make sure your response is *appropriate*, not overblown or out-of-proportion, too casual or minimal, or too late.

### Are you reacting or responding to your child?

Many parents *react* to their children. That is, they answer with the first word, feeling, or action that comes to mind. It's a normal thing to do, especially with all the other things people do every day.

When you react, you aren't making a decision about what outcome you want from an event or action. Even more than that, if you react, you can't *choose* the best way to reach the outcome you want.

*Responding* to your child means that you take a moment to think about what is really going on before you speak, feel, or act.

Responding is much harder than reacting because it takes more time and effort.

The time that you take between looking at the event and acting, speaking, or feeling is vital to your relationship with your child.

That time, whether it be a few seconds, five minutes, or a day or two, allows you to see things more clearly, in terms of what is happening right now and what you want to happen in the long-run.

The time that you take between looking at the event and acting, speaking, or feeling is vital to your relationship with your child.



## What is an appropriate response?

An appropriate response is one that fits the situation. Both your child's age and the specific facts of the occasion are important in deciding what a fitting response is. For example, a fitting response for a baby who is crying differs from a fitting response for a four-year-old or a 10-year-old who is crying. A fitting response for an instance in which a child is running depends on whether that child is running into a busy street or running to the swing set on the playground. Your child's physical or emotional needs may also shape your decision about a fitting response.



### Did you know...?

#### Parents do matter!

Of all the things that influence your child's growth and development, one of the most important is the reliable, responsive, and sensitive care your child gets from you. You play a key role in your child's development, along with your child's intelligence, temperament, outside stresses, and social environment.

### Responding to your child in an appropriate manner allows you to:

- **Think about all the options before you make a decision.**

This will help you choose the best way to get from the current situation to the outcome that you want. By taking time to see a problem from many sides, for instance, you are more likely to choose the most fitting response. For situations that happen often, your well-thought-out response can become almost automatic, like picking up a crying baby.

- **Answer some basic questions:**

Do your words get across what you are trying to say? Do your actions match your words? Are your emotions getting in the way of your decision-making? Do you know the reasons for your child's actions or behavior?

- **Consider previous, similar events and recall how you handled them.**

You can remind your child of these other times and their outcomes, to show that you are really thinking about your decision. You can use your past experiences to judge the current situation, decide the outcome you want, and figure out how to reach that outcome.

- **Be a more consistent parent.**

Your child will know that you are not making decisions based on whim, especially if you explain how you made your choice. Your child will be more likely to come to you with questions or problems if he or she has some idea of what to expect from you. Warm, concerned, and sensitive responses will also increase the likelihood of your child coming to you with questions or problems. Remember that consistent parenting does not mean inflexible parenting.

- **Offer an example of how to make thoughtful decisions.**

As your child gets older, he or she will know your decision-making process and will appreciate the time you take. Your child might even pattern him or herself after you.

- **Build a solid but flexible bond of trust between you and your child.**

A solid bond holds up to tough situations; a flexible bond survives the changes in your child and in your relationship with your child that are certain to occur.



### Did you know...?

**Parents have a profound influence on children from the beginning of their children's lives.<sup>2</sup>**

As a parent, you can have close contact with your child from the time he or she is small. That type of contact builds trust; with trust comes commitment. Parents who are committed to their child's well being can have a very positive effect on their child.

Now you can either go to the examples, or read on to learn the **P** in RPM3.

# P

## Preventing risky behavior or problems before they arise

Seems easy enough. You “childproof” your house to make sure your crawling baby or toddler can’t get into the cleaning products or electrical outlets. You catch your eight-year-old jumping on the bed and make her stop. You make your 12-year old wear his helmet when he rides his bike, no matter how “dumb” he thinks it makes him look.

But prevention goes beyond just saying “no” or “stop.” There are two parts to prevention: **1)** Spotting possible problems; and **2)** Knowing how to work through the problem. Let’s look at each one a little closer.

### Spotting possible problems

Consider these methods for spotting problems before they turn into full-blown crises:

- **Be actively involved in your child’s life.**

This is important for all parents, no matter what the living arrangements. Knowing how your child usually thinks, feels, and acts will help you to notice when things begin to change. Some changes are part of your child’s growing up, but others could be signs of trouble.

- **Set realistic limits and enforce them consistently.**

Be selective with your limits, by putting boundaries on the most important behaviors your child is engaged in. Make sure you and your child can “see” a limit clearly. If your child goes beyond the limit, deal with him or her in similar ways for similar situations. If you decide to punish your child, use the most effective methods, like restriction or time-outs. You could also make your child correct or make up for



the outcome of his or her actions; make sure the harshness of the punishment fits your child's "crime." As your child learns how limits work and what happens when he or she goes past those limits, he or she will trust you to be fair.

- **Create healthy ways for your child to express emotions.**

Much "acting out" stems from children not knowing how to handle their emotions. Feelings can be so intense that usual methods of expressing them don't work. Or, because feelings like anger or sadness are viewed as "bad," your child may not want to express them openly. Encourage your child to express emotions in a healthy and positive way; let your child see you doing things to deal with your own emotions. Once these feelings are less powerful, talk to your child about how he or she feels and why. Make sure your child knows that all emotions are part of the person that he or she is, not just the "good" or happy ones. Once your child knows his or her range of emotions, he or she can start to learn how to handle them.



### Did you know...?

**All parents should maintain positive relationships with their children.<sup>3</sup>**

One parent, two parents, grandparents, foster parents, weekend parents, stepparents. Regardless of whether or not you live with your child, it's important that you maintain a positive relationship with him or her. A positive relationship gives your child a stable environment in which to grow, so that you are one of the people your child learns to depend on.

## Knowing how to work through the problem

Because problems are quite different, how you solve them also differs. To solve tough problems, you may need more complex methods. Keep these things in mind when trying to solve a problem:

- **Know that you are not alone.**

Talk to other parents or a trusted friend or relative. Some of them might be dealing with or have dealt with similar things. They may have ideas on how to solve a problem in a way you haven't thought of. Or, they might share your feelings, which can also be a comfort.

- **Admit when a problem is bigger than you can handle alone or requires special expertise.**

No one expects you to solve every problem your family has by yourself. Some problems are just too big to handle alone, not because you're a "bad" parent, but simply because of the nature of the problem. Be realistic about what you can and can't do on your own.

- **Get outside help, if needed.**

There will be times when you just won't know how to help your child; other times, you truly won't be able to help your child. That's okay; someone else may know how to help. Use all the resources you have to solve a problem, including getting outside help when you need it. Remember that it's not important how a problem is solved, just that it is.

### Where can I go for parenting help?

- Other parents
- Family members and relatives
- Friends
- Pediatricians
- School nurses and counselors
- Social workers and agencies
- Psychologists and psychiatrists
- Pastors, priests, rabbis, and ministers
- Community groups
- Support and self-help groups



If you'd like, turn to the section that matches your child's age to read more about how some parents have included **preventing** in their daily parenting routine. Or you can read on to learn about the **M3** in **RPM3**.

The **M3** in RPM3 describes three complex, but central principles of parenting: **monitoring**, **mentoring**, and **modeling**. Many people are confused by these words because they seem similar, but they are really very different. It might be easier to understand these ideas if you think of them this way:

- **Being a monitor** means that you pay careful attention to your child and his or her surroundings, especially his or her groups of friends and peers and in getting used to school.
- **Being a mentor** means that you actively help your child learn more about him or herself, how the world works, and his or her role in that world. As a mentor, you will also support your child as he or she learns.
- **Being a model** means that you use your own words and actions as examples that show your beliefs, values, and attitudes in action for your child on a daily basis.

Now let's look at each one more closely. **Monitoring** your child seems straightforward, so let's start there.

# M

## Monitoring your child's contact with his or her surrounding world

Do you need to be a superhero with x-ray vision and eyes in the back of your head to be a careful monitor? Of course not. You don't need to be with your child every minute of every day, either. Being a careful monitor combines asking questions and paying attention, with making decisions, setting limits, and encouraging your child's positive choices when you aren't there.

When your child is young, monitoring seems easy because you are the one making most of the decisions. You decide who cares for your child; you decide what your child watches or listens to; you decide who your child plays with. If something or someone comes in contact with your child, you're usually one of the first to know.

Being a careful monitor combines asking questions and paying attention, with making decisions and setting limits.

Things may change as your child gets older, especially after school begins and into the pre-teen and teen years. As kids begin to learn about their own personalities, they sometimes clash with their parents' personalities. A parent's ability to actively monitor is often one of the first things to suffer from this clash.

Parents need to monitor their children's comings and goings through every age and stage of growth.

Being an active monitor can be as simple as answering some basic questions:

- **Who** is your child with?
- **What** do you know about the person(s) your child is with?
- **Where** is your child?
- **What** is your child doing?
- **When** will your child be home/leaving?
- **How** is your child getting there/home?

You won't always have detailed answers to these questions, but it's important to know most of the answers, most of the time.

You may also want to keep these things in mind when being an active monitor:

- **Open the lines of communication when your child is young and keep those lines open.**

It seems obvious, but honest communication is crucial. When your child is young, talk openly about things you do when you aren't with your child; then ask your child what he or she does during those times. As your child gets older, keep up this type of communication. Both you and your child have to take part in open, two-way communication.

- **Tell your child what thoughts and ideals you value and why.**

For instance, if being respectful to adults is an ideal you want your child to have, tell him or her; even more importantly, tell him or her *why* you think it's important. Don't assume that your child knows your reasons for valuing one practice or way of behaving over another.



With a little effort from you, your child might surround him or herself with friends whose values, interests, and behaviors will be “pluses” in your child’s life.

- **Know what your child is watching, reading, playing, or listening to.**

Because TV, movies, video games, the Internet, and music are such a large part of many of our lives, they can have a huge influence on kids. Be sure you know what your child’s influences are. You can’t help your child make positive choices if you don’t know what web sites he or she visits or what he or she reads, listens to, watches, or plays.

- **Know the people your child spends time with.**

Because you can’t be with your child all the time, you should know who is with your child when you’re not. Friends have a big influence on your child, from pre-school well into adulthood. Much of the time, this influence is positive, but not always. With a little effort from you, your child might surround him or herself with friends whose values, interests, and behaviors will be “pluses” in your child’s life. Your child also spends

a lot of time with his or her teachers. Teachers play a vital role in your child’s development and overall well-being, so get to know your child’s teachers, too.

- **Give direction without being rigid.**

In some cases, *not* being allowed to do something only makes your child want to do it more. Is the answer just plain “no” or does it depend on the circumstances? “Yes, but only if…” is a useful option when making decisions.

To find out how some parents use **monitoring** in their daily parenting practices, turn to the section of this booklet that relates to your child’s age. Or you can read on to learn about **mentoring**.

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