

Raising Healthy Children and Teenagers

By: Elizabeth Lozano, M.A. and Dr. Robert Puff

Raising our children is one of the most important things that we will ever do in life. How they turn out, how life goes for them, whether they experience joy and happiness because of their inner strength and resources, or struggle with life because of inadequate coping skills is largely in our hands. Many adults have had hundreds, if not thousands of hours of training for their profession, yet when we become parents there is virtually no training available for what most people agree is one of the most important jobs on the planet: being a parent.

So where do we largely learn our skills in parenting? Most of what we know comes from the way we were raised. If our upbringing was less than ideal, then we do our best to learn from our parent's mistakes and fill in the gaps ourselves. If we had wise parents who did a marvelous job, then we come equipped with some good tools. Still, most of us can think of some things we would like to improve upon.

That is where this article comes in. We, Elizabeth Lozano, M.A. and Dr. Robert Puff would like you to spend about one hour of your time with us to benefit from our professional, psychological training and extensive experience working with families. Perhaps we can pass something on to you that can boost your success as you undertake the challenging and rewarding job of parenting. Between the two of us we have had about 20 years of academic and professional training at some of the top universities and medical training facilities in the world. We have had decades of experience doing therapy, helping parents from varied backgrounds, with many types of difficulties raise

their children. We have taught parents, educators, and professionals preparing to enter the field of mental health at various academic institutions and facilities. We have also been on hundreds of media interviews, including magazines, online magazines, TV and radio talk shows all over the world. Our expertise is sought on a variety of psychological topics including: parenting, relationship issues, depression, healing from past traumas, stress and anger management. If you wish to learn more about us or our credentials, please visit us at www.DoctorPuff.com

We share this information with you because it's nice to know the credentials of a speaker while you are listening; however, the proof is in the pudding. Try the various things we are suggesting to help you raise happy, emotionally successful children. If they don't work, write to us or give us a call. We would love to learn from you too. Usually the problems lie in the fine-tuning, adjusting to your particular child's needs and personality make-up. This article is for all parents and children. Apply the practical techniques and see if you don't see improvements.

There are three main components that we will discuss in this article that are crucial to raising healthy children. With-in each area we will elaborate further as there is much to expand upon. The three main areas that we will be covering are: how you treat your children, what you expose your children to, and what you model for them. These three areas directly affect the over all well being, behavior and mental health of your children as well as pave the way for their future relationships.

[How you treat your children](#)

One of the most important aspects of raising healthy children is your presence in your child's life. Sadly, studies have shown that most parents spend well under 15 minutes per day actually communicating one on one with their children. The benefit of communicating one on one, making eye contact and paying attention to subtleties in your children's body language allows you a view into their world. By doing this you will be aware if they are having problems at school, with friends, family, or peer pressures. If you don't ask, and don't pay attention, whom will your child talk to? They may talk with their friends, and while it is great to have such a support, do you really want a child or teenager giving your child advise about important decisions in their life? Many times it may be these very friends that are pressuring them to do things, or perhaps they may have peers that are jealous of them in some way and may guide them towards a not so healthy decision. While there can be some truly great friends out there that your children may have in their lives, how equipped are they for giving advice on some of the struggles that they themselves have not even faced? There may also be some things in your child's life that they have difficulty bringing up with their friends as well, leaving no one for them to talk with. This amplifies the significance of your communication with them, because if they can't talk to you and are receiving poor advice from friends, they will have to struggle with their feelings on their own, most likely bottling them up and harboring them deep inside. This creates great problems for children that lead to problems in adulthood as well. The great epidemic of children cutting, having eating disorders, and substance abuse as well as a plethora of other addictions have a very strong link with bottled up emotions. Nearly all of these are directly related to an individual (child or adult) having

difficulty expressing their emotions, and if you have nobody to talk to- you will have difficulty expressing your emotions.

Don't be mistaken and think that "spending time" with your children means driving them to and from practice, school or games, or that it means even being at their games and other events (although this is very important too). Spending time with your child means being with them one on one, listening to them and caring about what they have to say. Spend time with the family as a whole as well, this is also very important for your child. Eat dinner and engage in family activities together, this will not only bring your family closer, it will send the message that they are all important not only to you but to each other as well. And remember that it shouldn't always be on your terms, get interested in the things your children enjoy and do these things with them. It takes work and may not be the thing that you are really looking forward to doing on your time off, but we guarantee if you do this you will be much more likely to have happy and healthy children.

It can be truly amazing in therapy that after a few weeks of engaging in activities or games with a child in session and after listening to them talk about the latest drama with friends, they will all of a sudden just open up and tell us what they are feeling and what is troubling them. Some teens have to tell us that they are struggling to have sex with their partner or that they may be pregnant, but can't even tell their parent because they don't feel safe. If they had a good connection and relationship with their parents, they would be able to talk with them and wouldn't need us. The reason children and teens talk with us about these things is that they have learned that we care and they are safe with us as we will not judge or condemn them for their feelings or what predicament they are in.

While we do talk with them about the consequences for their behaviors, they always feel like they can trust us and that we will not abandon or hate them no matter what. Your children need to receive this message from you as well.

Please also make sure that you are truly present when you spend time with them. With cell phones we can be reached at any time and any place. This can be a problem, for if when you are with your child you spend a great deal of time on the phone or text messaging, be aware that your child will get the message that who ever or what ever you are discussing on the phone is more important than them. Have designated time for your child, without interruptions- it matters! Turn off your cell phone or put it on silent, but don't answer it when you are having your one on one time with your child. Whoever and whatever it is can wait! By turning off your cell phone you are sending your child a message that they are a priority, and if they feel like a priority, they will want to spend time with you.

We are aware that with the rate of separation and divorce in this day and age, it may make it much more difficult for both parents to see and spend one on one time with their children. We just really want to remind you that both parents really matter to a child. Unless that parent is abusive towards his or her own child, it is very important for a child to be able to spend time with both parents. And please don't confuse "abusive" with you not liking your ex spouse and thinking he/she is the scum of the earth. While this may have been a bad relationship for you, it is still important that your children have a relationship with that person (as long as they are not physically or emotionally abusing them). The importance of spending time with both parents also rings true for parents that are married, but one parent works a lot and the other stays home with the children.

Please don't think that it is enough for your child or children to have only one parent always there, they need the other parent too. While it is nice that you can provide them with nice things and a nice home, what matters more is your time and your presence with them. On their death bed, most people don't say "I wish I would have spent more time at work", in fact what most people might wish on their death bed is "I wish I would have spent more time with my family." Don't let this be you! This takes sacrifice and may mean that you may not advance as far in your career, or may not be able to live in a large home with lots of "stuff", but these things aren't what really matter, and these "things" don't help your children to be happy and healthy- your presence and love does!

Another important thing is to be honest with your children, while there are some things that children are better off not knowing, don't make up an elaborate story, just tell them that it is a matter that you do not care to discuss with them. Any lie you tell them will come back to haunt you in the end, because as a parent your word is everything and if your child can't trust you, who can they trust? Be prepared for deep anger and resentment if you lie to your child.

It is important to note that you build and create your child's self-esteem and self-image. The words and actions you choose in interacting with them will have long lasting effects on them for the rest of their lives. This may seem like a "no brainer", but the problem that arises is what parents say when they are angry, tired, stressed, and when their child is not listening or obeying. The way you treat your children and the words you use with them matter. Even the things you think about your children matter too, so try to think positive things about them, otherwise they will feel and most likely become the very things you are thinking about. This is called the self-fulfilling prophecy because

although the original thought or prophecy may have been false, a child may start to believe it as true so then their behaviors and reactions ultimately live up to what was expected of them. You have a great influence over the way your children feel about themselves.

We have spoken in great lengths about conditioning in a few of our previous articles, which we encourage you to listen to. Conditioning is what happens when an individual is exposed to certain things, and then in turn acts or feels a certain way because of what they were repeatedly exposed to. For example, if your parents threatened that they didn't love you, or said that they hated you, called you names or put you down when they were angry, you may unconsciously find yourself doing this when you are upset. Perhaps you grew up and vowed never to say those things to your kids or to other people, but do you say them to yourself? The point is, although children are resilient, when they grow up in a home where they are verbally abused and put down, there will be profound negative effects. Sometimes this comes in the form of self-hate, which can then turn into hate and anger towards others. Remember the saying "You can't love anyone else until you love yourself", great wisdom exists in these words.

Be mindful of what you say to your children! If you give them unconditional love and acceptance they will grow and flourish, learning to love themselves and to be able to have faith and trust in others around them- especially you. By supporting your children in this way they will learn that they can trust in you and will more likely come to you when they have a problem. All kids struggle with issues with peers at one time or another. It is important that you be there for your child in a supportive and nonjudgmental manner. Don't you remember what it was like to be a child or teen and how you felt at

times like nobody in the world understood you- especially your parents? Didn't you hate that feeling? Some of the things that children struggle with may seem very trivial, but to them it is their whole world, and their feelings need to be respected. The reason why we are able to help the children and teens we work with is because we really listen and care about what they are saying. If you build this type of relationship with your child it will be easier to talk with them about crucial areas that need to be discussed, such as drugs and sex.

Unfortunately most of what children know about sex is by what the media tells them (i.e. television, magazines, Internet), by what their friends tell them, and by their own experiences. It may seem easy enough to just say "no sex until your married", and while this is a great idea and hope to have for your child, the reality is that many children become sexually active well before marriage. But the truth is, the more you talk with them- really talk with them- about the ins and outs of sex, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, attachment and heartache, they may be less likely to engage in it. Or if they do, they will make better choices about it. This also doesn't mean just sitting down with them one time and talking about it, you need to check in with them from time to time and ask them about their friends and pressures at school or what they have been hearing. Once again, try not to judge. This may be very difficult as you may not like what you hear, but it's better that you know what your child is being exposed to than being left in the dark. This way you can help guide them and give them the support they need to make the right choices. Do not confuse this with having the sole role of "friend" to your child, because although you do need to be your child's friend, your role as parent needs to come first. This is also true for discussions about drugs, you need to talk with

your children about drugs, and please don't wait until it is too late. Teach them while they are young, talk to them about what happens to people when they become addicted to drugs, and talk to them about peer pressure. Give them tools and ideas for how to say "no". And be aware of what your child is doing, pay attention to their mood and behavior and if you learn they are doing drugs, get help. Put your foot down, set limits. It is not okay for your child or teen to be using drugs or alcohol- period. And with this be careful what you are modeling for them. If you don't want them to drink and smoke, it would be wise to not partake in these activities either. Otherwise you will be what your children will correctly call a hypocrite- and nobody wants to listen to a hypocrite. The sad thing is that your words don't mean much if your actions are saying something else.

Now giving your children unconditional love does not mean letting them do what ever they want without consequences. In fact boundaries, limits, and consequences are an essential part to raising healthy children. Although children may complain and become upset- even throw temper tantrums- when limits and boundaries are set, they really are good for them. Children behave much better when there is order and when they know what the rules are and what the consequences (consistently) will be. Can you imagine what our lives would be like if there was not order, boundaries or limits. Can you imagine what life would be like with out consequences? If police and laws did not exist, our world would be even more chaotic than it already is. If there were no consequences to stealing, or killing wouldn't we be in a lot of trouble? What if there were no rules for driving and people could do what ever they wanted when ever they wanted- there would be a lot more accidents! As adults we have and need rules, limits and consequences to live and function in society.

What you teach your children now will help them to be healthy functioning adults when they grow up. Many parents feel guilty about setting boundaries and consequences for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they have made mistakes in the past that have hurt their children, maybe they work a lot and don't spend much time with them or perhaps they have divorced or separated from the other parent and now only have a limited time with their child and feel bad about setting and enforcing rules and consequences. Some parents even fear their children because of outbursts of anger they may have had in the past. But time and time again, when we have seen children behave this way it is usually because there have not been firm and consistent boundaries, rules and consequences in the home, and also because violence and aggression may have been what the child has been exposed to (we will discuss modeling further in this article). This consistency takes work and it is easy to wane from when you are tired and stressed or feel your child has been doing well. Even if your child has been the perfect little angel, they need to have consequences for their behavior- period. If you give your child a warning, it should be only once. There are many consequences a parent can implement that do not have to involve physically hitting your child, because this route can often lead into trouble and will create a sense of fear and anger in your children. It also teaches them that hitting is okay. So if you choose this method, don't be surprised if your child hits others when he or she is upset.

There should be logical consequences for misbehaviors. In other words, the punishment should fit the crime. If your child doesn't clean his room or doesn't pick up his toys after he plays with them, it wouldn't make much sense to take away seeing friends for a month. A more logical consequence would be that he doesn't get to play

with all his toys at once until he can learn to put them away. This may mean that he has to show you he can play with a few toys and clean them up, working his way up to more toys- as long as he puts them away afterwards. There are many variations you could use- be creative. It is also important to implement the consequence as soon as possible, especially for younger children. If you wait too long, they won't know what they are in trouble for. The connection becomes weaker as more time elapses between behavior and consequence. This is also why it is important to implement a consequence that is related to the misbehavior. There will be a stronger connection for the child between what they did, what the consequence was and why they shouldn't do it. If you haven't already realized this, children are like little sponges, they absorb and want to know everything. Explain to them why they can't engage in the behavior (but don't make it an hour long sermon- a few sentences should be enough!) Just as it is important for a child to know what his/her consequence is, it is important for him/her to know how long their consequence is for and what they can do to earn it back. Even inmates in prison know how long they will serve time for, and they also know what it may take to earn the right to be released into society again. It gives them a sense of hope, something to work towards. Although your children are not little inmates- and hopefully they never will be- they need to know the same things.

Perhaps it may be difficult to find a consequence directly related to the misbehavior. In this case, know what your child likes (this is also important to know if you want a good relationship with them). Pay attention to the things that mean the most to him or her. Think of all the toys, games, televisions, cable, cell phones, etc that your children have. These are all privileges that can be taken away at any time. These things

need to be earned, and if a child is frequently misbehaving or disrespecting their parent, it makes no sense for them to have such privileges. It is also important to note that if your children are over 18 years old and you are financially supporting them in any way, be it through housing, education, insurance, car, etcetera, you have a say in their life. So if they don't like what you have to say and wish to continue living their lives in a haphazard and or disrespectful way, than perhaps they need to be 100% financially independent as well. By continuing to support them you are basically saying that their behavior and choices are okay with you. Really think about that!

Most of you have probably heard of "time-out" before and we are mentioning it now because if done correctly, it works, especially for younger children. The purpose of time out is to remove the child from a more reinforcing situation. Doing this weakens the misbehavior so that it occurs less frequently over time. This usually works relatively quickly unless the misbehavior has been previously positively reinforced for some time (i.e. getting what they want when they throw a temper tantrum). Time-out can be used for several reasons: to remove the child from a stimulus they are enjoying because they are misbehaving, to isolate the child for a limited period of time in order to allow the child to calm down, and also to allow time for parents to calm down and decrease their anger towards the child. The child also learns here that if they are angry and behave aggressively or in a bad way, they will be isolated and given time to calm down. This teaches them a crucial skill for life: to calm down before acting out of anger. When using "time-out" there are a few guidelines that are important to follow:

- 1) Do not argue about the time-out, if you have warned your child once, and they did not listen, it is time to implement it.

- 2) Time-out should be in a place where they will not have any stimulation (i.e. sending them to their room where all their toys are is not a good place because they will most likely play with their toys). No TV, friends, siblings, or toys.
- 3) Time-out should be made for a specified amount of time and stick to this time. A timer is often used so the child is aware of how much time has elapsed and how much time they have left. It is often recommended to use the same amount of minutes as your child's age.
- 4) If they get up, talk, yell or argue you must restart the time. You may also choose to have your child sit in isolation until they calm down.

Time-out is especially helpful for toddlers and young children, but it works for older children as well. In fact, removing your child from an escalating situation would be best for all parties involved. This takes some work at first, and you really need to be consistent.

While it is very important to set consistent consequences, and use techniques such as "time-out" when appropriate, it is also very important to reinforce your child in a positive manner as well. In fact, positive reinforcement is one of the most powerful ways to shape (create) desired behaviors. Numerous studies, as well as our own experience in working with children, have shown the powerful effects of positive reinforcement. It is something you have to be proactive and consistent about though. The definition of positive reinforcement is to present something positive or rewarding to an individual after they have engaged in a desired behavior. This positive reward makes the behavior more likely to exist in the future and is one of the most powerful tools for shaping and

changing behavior. In the beginning it is especially important to be consistent, otherwise the child will call your bluff and feel there is no use in doing the desired behavior. This may be frustrating for many parents who feel “why should I reward him/ her for what they should be doing anyway?” Our response to this is “Are they doing it now? How is your method working?” It is amazing that a child will continue to engage in a negative behavior or not engage in a desired behavior even if they are hit or verbally abused for it. And it is even more amazing to see how their behavior changes if they are positively reinforced instead of receiving punishment. An important note here is that kids want attention- negative or positive! So that child who is always getting negative attention through threats, punishments, etc is getting noticed. No one wants to feel invisible, and being bad gets you noticed. But being good, and being rewarded for it feels even better. The sad thing is though that sometimes the children that behave well can become invisible because parents might forget to reward them and praise them, especially if they have to struggle with another child that repeatedly misbehaves. In this action, you are also teaching the child that misbehaves that you only get noticed if you misbehave. Be mindful of how you treat your children. We know it might sound like a lot of work to shape your child’s behavior through positive reinforcement, but think about how much time and energy you spend on yelling at and punishing your child. And in the end you both come out feeling badly.

When your child throws a temper tantrum because they want something and you give in, you are positively reinforcing them for this behavior. Remember what we stated earlier “ it is one of the most powerful tools for shaping and changing behavior.” So if you are tired and stressed and don’t have the energy to say “no” or put your foot down,

remember you have just strengthened this behavior- so please EXPECT TO SEE IT AGAIN!! Take this opportunity now to start rewarding your children for good behavior. Don't buy them a toy "just because"- especially if they misbehaved before you went to the store. Reward them for behaving well, for doing well in school, for cleaning up, for doing what was asked. If you stop to think about it there could be a million reasons to reward your child, you just have to create opportunities for them to earn them. A great idea would be to talk with them and work out a plan together.

Dr. Puff once worked with a family in which the father promised his daughter and expensive car if she maintained a 4.0 grade point average or better. She earned above a 4.0 and he gave her the car. The next semester her grades dropped to a 3.95, and he took the car away and gave her a junky beat up, yet functional, car instead. This may sound harsh, but that brand new expensive car was a privilege that she needed to work for. Funny thing is that by the next semester her grades were above a 4.0 again and she got the car back. Even though it was only a fraction of a point, the rule was a 4.0 or better. This is a great example of consistency, and how powerful a tool it can be. Your children need to appreciate the things they have, and if they don't, be prepared for entitlement and ungratefulness. They will expect things "just because". Not a good mix for having a healthy relationship with your kids is it?

You must also remember that your job as a parent is to raise your children to be healthy and productive members of society, and if you raise them to learn that if they have a fit or treat others poorly when they don't get their way (which is what you teach them when you give in to their tantrums), they are going to have great problems with the people they interact with. Think about the way you have to move through the world and

think about your job. You get paid, promoted, and rewarded for doing a good job at work, not for slacking off and treating your coworkers or employers with disrespect. If you need something and you go into the store and can't find it, you don't start yelling at the sales clerk, in fact this is a sure fire way to get yourself kicked out of the store! It is time to start putting your foot down, setting limits and consequences, and praising and rewarding your children for the good things they do. What if they don't do anything good you ask? Once they learn that all the things they have are privileges and if they want these privileges they have to start behaving in a certain way, you will be surprised to learn how they will eventually take a turn and work for the things they want. Kids really like positive reinforcement, so all we are saying is to put a little spin on things- make them earn it!

What you expose your children to

This is a big one! If you haven't listened to our article "Creating and Maintaining a Healthy Living Environment", now might be a good time to do so. In it we discuss how all the input we receive from our environment effects us, and how it is important to be aware of what we expose ourselves to. Although children are resilient they are also fragile and delicate. We may want to think of them as little adults, but the fact of the matter is that they just aren't as their brains are not as developed as ours. With time, as children age their brain develops and they are able to understand and comprehend more things. While it is true that some children are more developed and more intelligent than others, this isn't to say that children are prepared or equipped to handle the adult world. Ratings exist on movies and games for a reason. When a person is repeatedly exposed to something they become accustom to it, they become numb. This is an area to pay close

attention to, because if a child is repeatedly exposed to violence, be it through television, games, or their family, they will grow up thinking violence is normal. In fact if you were to have the opportunity to speak with most violent criminals, most of them will probably tell you that they grew up in a household or environment where they were abused, put down, neglected and repeatedly exposed to violence. They became numb to it, and it almost became automatic for them because they knew no other way.

Ms. Lozano once worked with a family in Long Beach whose 9 year old son was very aggressive, assaulting his mother and siblings as well as peers at school. This child also used a great deal of profanity as well. When threatened that the police would be called he would often say things like "I don't care, I hate the police and I will kill them". Upon further exploration Ms. Lozano found some very violent games in the home that involved killing people- including police officers, stealing cars, evading the police and a plethora of profanity. The child also listened to music that was about violence and killing, and which also included a great deal of profanity. He had a large poster in his bedroom of a rap artist with various scars and bullet wounds- this was his role model. This child had BB guns that he would shoot other children in the neighborhood with. After speaking with his parents, Ms. Lozano learned that they had not given him the game, music or gun, but his older brother had (who was involved in a gang). Upon further exploration Ms. Lozano learned that it was customary for the gangs in the neighborhood to give children as young as 5 years old these BB guns to shoot at each other with. Why would they do this? Even they knew the powerful numbing effect this has on children, so after years of shooting at other children with these BB guns and creating rivals within the neighborhood, it would not have much of an effect on them to later actually shoot

someone with a real gun. In fact all of his role models through music, television, movies, and video games engaged in these behaviors as well. Needless to say, it was an eye opening experience for Ms. Lozano.

The moral of the story above is that children are affected and influenced by what they are exposed to- period. So pay attention to what they are watching on television, what movies they are watching, what music they are listening to, and what games they are playing. There are ratings for all of these. If you need help in figuring out what the ratings mean ask a clerk at the store, you can even look this up on-line. They have made it pretty clear though, you just have to look. On the front and back of every video game is a rating ranging from “E” for everyone, “T” for Teen, “M” for mature and so on. Don’t let your child be the one who decides what is good for him/her to play or be exposed to- that is your job as a parent.

With technology today it is very difficult to know what your children are doing 100% of the time, which is why we recommend that television, video games, and computers be placed in a common area in the home- not in bedrooms. There are also locks you can get on your computers that either prevent them from logging on with out you there, and/or prevent them from visiting certain sites. But be aware, children are savvy and we have both worked with children who have figured out passwords and who have been looking at things that are extremely inappropriate for children. Televisions can be dangerous in bedrooms because you never know if they are watching them when you are asleep, and late night television can be very risqué. I’m sure we don’t have to tell you what comes on late night on HBO, Showtime and Cinemax. Perhaps you’ve heard the nickname “skin-a-max” for the channel Cinemax because of the pornography that comes

on late at night. The shows are only part of the problem however, because even the commercials can have sexual connotations with ads for phone sex or phone text, “girls gone wild” (movies you can buy about girls getting intoxicated and taking off their clothes among other things). These commercials are on some of the basic cable channels. Be aware. The point is, you can’t always be watching your children all the time, but you can be proactive and take precautionary and responsible measures by limiting these things to public locations in the home. If your child has a laptop, and wants to work on homework or play on the computer in his/her room, make sure you either have blocks on the Internet or have the computer disconnected from the Internet altogether.

This leads us to the discussion of knowing who, what, when, and where. Know whom your children are spending time with (including their parents), what they are doing, when they will be back, and where they are. This rule applies to children and teens at all ages. It is not enough for one of your children’s parents to “be home”. You really need to know who the parents of your friends are, and make sure you are aware of what they allow their children to do. Some parents are actually okay with their children smoking, drinking, using drugs, and having sex in their home. Sadly, some parents even engage in some of these behaviors with them and may even lie to you about this. Listen to your gut instinct, and pay attention to what your child’s friends are like and how they behave- this can tell you a lot. This rule even applies to family members, be clear about what your rules are, and if you know they don’t agree or don’t care if they expose your child to inappropriate things regardless, you need to not leave your child with this person- family member or not. It may sound like we are asking you to be overbearing parents that hover over their children, but what we are really asking you is to be responsible and

proactive parents because later in life your children will thank you. It is important to let your child spend time with friends, play games, etc, just make sure that they are friends and games that will have a positive influence on them.

Spend time with your children! Your presence is the greatest gift you can give them. Many parents work so much they have little time to spend with their children, and believe us when we say that this has long lasting negative effects. You may feel that you are doing this for them, to provide them with a life you didn't have with nice things and a nice house, but we guarantee you that what matters most to your children, more than anything, is you. It may not seem like this, because over time perhaps your children have become rude and nasty towards you, and even ungrateful for the things you give them, expecting more and more from you. But where do you think that behavior comes from? They are trying to tell you something. Things and money can't buy love, spending time with and listening to your children as well as expressing an interest in the things that are important to them is what shows them that you care and love them. This also gives you the chance to expose them to different things, such as classical and cultural music, educational shows, art and travel. Let them know about the world around them instead of limiting their role models to who their friends and the media think are "cool". Consider doing something with your children that you like. You will likely find that they may end up having the same interest as you. Don't force them, but if you show them your enthusiasm and joy of your particular interest, without expecting them to be as good at it as you are, two wonderful things can transpire. First, you will be spending wonderful time with your children. Second, you will enjoy your time with your children, because you are doing your activity. For example, let's say that you love backpacking and being

in nature. Start by exposing your children to nature. When they are very young, get a backpack and carry them in it, exposing them to the wonders of nature. Then, when they are a little older, start going on camping trips with them. And when they reach the age where they can backpack, go on a trip, but a very easy one, so that they will enjoy it. They may complain a bit at first, but if you are patient and your expectations aren't too high, you will find that your children may grow to love your interests, because they are with you and you get to be happy together.

Help your children with their homework, and read with them. But read a little bit above their level so that they can learn new words. Children ask a lot of questions, and it is important for them to do this so that they can learn and be successful in this life. If you don't know the answer, look it up, this tells your child you care and you are interested too! You are also showing them that it is okay if they don't know an answer, but that it is important to keep looking until you find one. This encourages children to learn- how wonderful! If you really invest time in your children you will be surprised to see how they will start to listen to you and be open to the things you want to show them. You will also be creating new possibilities and opportunities for your children to learn, flourish, and grow. But remember, it's a two way street! Listen to what they have to say, and get interested in the things that are important to them as well.

What you model for you children

What you do, the choices you make, your behavior, your words, and your actions all have a huge impact on your children. You are their first and greatest teacher for your children. If you want to be the best parent you can possibly be, take care of yourself first.

You need to be healthy, mentally and physically. If this means you need to get your own help to deal with issues from your past, do it! Money doesn't have to be an issue because there are many free resources out there to help you, such as Dr. Puff's book *Anger Work: How to Express Your Anger and Still Be Kind*. Please download it for free to read or listen to, or attend one of our free talks and get a copy of the unabridged audio CD for free. If you expect your children to use healthy and positive coping skills when he/she is angry, you need to be doing this as well. If you yell, scream, slam doors, storm out, etc, when you are upset why should you expect any different from your children. Where else would they learn any other way to cope with their feelings? If a child grows up in a home where his/her parents exercise, paint, play music, take a shower, journal, or take a time-out when they are angry or upset, what do you think the child will learn to do? It is very important to practice what you preach, model for your children the ways in which you expect them to behave. We have run into parents that prefer to hold a double standard such as "I can use profanity, but they can't" or "I can smoke, but they can't". These double standards don't work, you will only end up with an angry child that resents you and feels you are a liar and (as mentioned earlier) a hypocrite.

The same goes for eating and exercise habits. If you want your children to eat healthy and exercise, you should be doing this too. All members in the family would be in a lot better shape (mentally and physically) if they ate properly and exercised regularly. Exercise is a great way to let off steam, and it is great for stress and depression as well. A great idea is to do these things with your children, but do some of the things they like and it can be fun for both of you, this way not only are you modeling good exercise habits, but you are also spending time with them, and you have already learned

how important that is! In regards to food, what we put into our bodies greatly affects our mood and energy levels. I'm sure you may have noticed the quick lift or energy boost you may get from foods high in sugar and caffeine, but rest assure that as high as you go, you will fall that low too. This is part of what makes these foods so addicting, they keep you up, but also bring you down. Chasing that high after you have crashed is why you find yourself wanting more.

In regards to modeling, another thing you want to pay attention to is the interactions you have with your spouse or partner, as this will have great affects on how your child will both expect to be treated by their significant other and how they will treat their significant other as well. So if you want your son or daughter to grow up to be in a happy and healthy relationship- with out abuse- make sure you are treating your partner with love and respect and don't tolerate abusive behavior from anyone, especially your partner. The reason we started this section with talking about taking care of yourself is because if you really are taking care of yourself you won't tolerate others to abuse you, nor will you abuse others or yourself because you will have healthy outlets for your emotions and stress. In talking about your relationship with your spouse or partner, as mentioned above this relationship needs to be in a good place as well, because what goes on between the two of you will most definitely affect your children. Even if you think your kids don't know or aren't affect by your distance from each other or arguing with each other, you are wrong! Not only are kids very savvy, but they know when things aren't going well and when one or both parents are unhappy. Really work on this, because often times children can get in the middle of marital discord, even if it is to start acting out to take focus off the difficulties in the relationship. If you are contemplating

divorce, get help and do everything you can to try to work it out first because this really is hard on children. And don't stay in an unhappy or abusive situation for your children because this does not benefit them unless you and your partner get help and work through your difficulties. If you do get divorced, please be sure to learn how to be civil with the other parent and NEVER speak badly about the other parent, even if you feel it is the truth and you feel your children might already know this. When you do these things, it has severe psychological and emotional consequences on your children. There is much to discuss in regards to divorced and separated families as well as blended and stepfamilies. Please visit us in the future, as we will be creating an article that discusses these topics further.

When you are unhappy, you cannot fully be there for your children in the way you need to be. If you are stressed and tired you may be much more likely to snap in anger at your child instead of thinking things through. We don't have to tell you that children take work, but we do need to remind you to take care of yourself because more often than not parents think that by working long hours and providing lots of things for their family they are doing a good thing. We aren't saying this isn't good, because it can be, but not when the price you and your family have to pay is little time to spend together or a cranky, tired, stressed, short tempered and unhappy you. One of the best gifts you can give anyone else is to take care of yourself!

In closing, let us remind you again how important you are to your children. What you do, how you behave, how you treat them, what you model for them, and the time you spend with them has a huge impact on the overall well being of your child.

We know that parenting takes a lot of work, and what we have discussed above sounds like a lot to do because it takes consistency. When you start to go down this path of thinking, stop and think about how much time and energy you expend reprimanding and trying to control your child. Think about how angry and hopeless you may feel at times. Our experience in working with children, tells us that if you try the things we have discussed in this article, you will notice a change both in your life and the life of your child. Everything we have discussed here is truly about loving your child and teaching them how to be a happy, healthy and functional member of society.

Final note from Elizabeth Lozano, M.A. and Dr. Robert Puff: We want thank you for reading our article. Our goal in creating this writing is to help improve the overall state of your life and encourage you to live at your highest human potential. We will continue to work together to produce more articles and Podcasts in order to help you improve in various areas of your life. If you haven't had a chance, please listen to and/or read our previous pieces and come back again to see what's new. Everything that we create is free worldwide, so if you like what we are saying, tell someone to visit our web site at www.DoctorPuff.com and download our material. Because we are working together on these new materials, you may see a more rapid production of material. The two of us wish you a blessed life, filled with much peace and joy. Elizabeth Lozano, M.A. and Dr. Robert Puff.