

General Strategies for Caregivers

- **Messages:** Healthy communication of feelings with I-messages avoids putdowns, judgements, and assigning of blame. The format is - I feel (emotion) when (the behaviour). For example- “I feel frustrated when you are not listening to me”. It is very important to practice daily using I-messages with children so that they learn how to use them and safely express emotions.
- **Before Everything, Empathy:** Empathize first with your child’s feelings before problem solving and reinstating expectations. If safety is a concern, that is a priority. Try to think about the emotions and needs children are showing behind their behaviors before responding.
- **Find Time to Connect:** Children need to be seen, heard, and valued. One of the best ways to satisfy this need is to spend 15-20 minutes of dedicated, one-on-one time doing what they want to do: treat the topic as interesting, valuable, and important. Homework or other “have to” tasks are not ideal.
- **Do it Yourself First:** If you want your children to behave in a specific way, start by doing it yourself first. Children are always observing and learning from their caregivers.
- **Emotional Regulation is Key:** Emotional regulation is when we are not overwhelmed by how we are feeling. This is not necessarily calm, it is when someone is angry and able to express that with words. At times of really big emotions, our child’s thinking brains are offline and unable to listen to rules and problem solve. It is so important that everyone knows ways to regulate their minds/bodies, which can be done with physical activity, such as deep breaths.
- **Everyone is a Superhero:** Allow your children to care about both their parents and avoid putting them in the middle of parental conflict. Even if there are parental conflicts, children still see both of their parents as superheroes.
- **Seeking Support:** Encourage your children to ask you for help and then do your best to compassionately respond as soon as possible so that they try again in the future.
- **Positives over Negatives:** Focusing on your child’s strengths can boost their opinion of themselves and change the outlook of everyone involved. Praise the behavior that you want to encourage can help to reduce the frequency of the problem behavior.
- **Focus on the Small Successes:** Celebrating the everyday successes motivates, recognizes, and encourages children to continue working towards a specific goal and just in general.
- **Change Takes Time:** Change can occur with periods of improvement and then backsliding to old behaviors; the important thing is to remember that change is still happening.