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General Strategies for Caregivers

- **I- 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:** Kids 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 kids to behave in a specific way, start by doing it yourself first. Kids 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 kid’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. *See our guide on managing big emotions.*
- **Everyone is a Superhero:** Allow your kids to care about both their parents and avoid putting them in the middle of parental conflict. Even if there are parental conflicts, kids still see both of their parents as superheroes.
- **Seeking Support:** Encourage your kids 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 kid’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 kids 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.



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Creating Safety for Children and Youth

- **Discuss the Difference between Anger and Abuse:** It is okay to be angry, it is not okay to abuse others. The rules of anger are that you are not allowed to hurt 1) others, 2) yourself, and 3) things/property.
- **Sibling Abuse:** Siblings may fight, but it is important to recognize when siblings are being abusive to one another and to set consequences for this behavior. It can send mixed messages to children when you do not allow them to hit others at school, but at home they are being hit by their sibling(s).
- **Try to Model Emotional Regulation:** If you are feeling frustrated with your children, take a moment before you react. If you react right away with yelling, name calling, or spanking you are reinforcing that it is okay to use abusive behaviours when you are upset. Instead, try to breath, try to take some time for yourself, call someone you trust for support, and get some support through local caregiver groups. For further information on available caregiver groups go to [childand youth.com](http://childandyouth.com)
- **Use the Correct Words for Body Parts:** It may be uncomfortable, but using the correct words for body parts with children can help to keep them safe. This way, children are able to identify and verbalize if one of their body parts have been touched in an inappropriate way. If this is too uncomfortable for you to discuss with your children, you can always use books.
- **Talk and Listen:** Children and youth need to be heard. It may seem like they don't want to hear what you have to say or share what is going on for them, but knowing you care enough to ask and keep asking, can have a profound effect when they feel they have nowhere to turn. Encouraging them to access safe others they may feel comfortable talking to (family member, teacher, mentor, counsellor) is another way to show you care.
- **Try Not to Judge:** Young people need to feel accepted. If they are worried you will judge choices they've made or situations they've encountered, they won't feel comfortable coming to you and the problem(s) may escalate. Letting your children know you love them no matter what is imperative to building an appropriate relational attachment and enhancing their self-esteem, which in turn helps to keep them safe.



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Supporting Children and Youth who have Experienced Violence

- **Discuss What Happened:** Help them to understand what they experienced and tell them that it was not their fault and that violence is not okay.
- **Make the Unknown Known:** Be clear on what they can expect from you, and at home. Having a routine is helpful after kids have experienced trauma.
- **Provide Extra Comfort:** This looks different depending on the age of the child and is true for toddlers to teenagers.
- **Safe Place for Emotions:** Encourage them to be open with you about their feelings and thoughts and consider using a feelings chart to help them identify their emotions.
- **Be Your Child's Cheerleader:** Tell them what you love about them.
- **Teach Healthy Anger:** Teach them other ways to express anger: Exercise, talking, writing/drawing about their feelings, skipping, scribbling on paper then tearing it up.
- **Non-Violent Discipline:** Use non-violent methods of discipline, such as time-outs, star charts, and giving consequences that avoid exposing children to hurtful punishment that can confuse children about the use of violence.
- **Safety Plan:** Help create a safety plan for your kids and yourself, such as where to go, who to talk to, and code words. Create a Safe Emotions Plan- what to do if they need to let out big emotions.
- **Name Their Feelings:** Try saying, "You are really angry," and tell them that there are others ways to let out our anger that is not hurtful to others. Refer to their Safe Emotions Plan or model ways to let out feelings ex) deep breaths.
- **Problem Solve when Calm:** Know that trauma can make it even harder for kids to regulate their emotions. When they are calm, problem-solve with them about other ways to handle the issue.

Source: Adapted from BC Children's Hospital. (2005).
Helping My Child: A guide to supporting children exposed to domestic violence.

Source: Promising Futures (2016). The Magic of Everyday Gestures: 8 Ways Parents and Caregivers Can Support Children Healing from Trauma. Retrieved from: <http://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/files/2012/08/Everyday-Gestures-Brochure.pdf>



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Sibling Relationships

- **Allow children their feelings:** Give children the permission to have whatever feelings they have towards siblings. Let them know you understand it can be unpleasant living with older/younger siblings. Try and understand where they are coming from.
- **Set rules around behavior:** All feelings are okay, but NOT all actions are. Explain to your children, that it is okay to feel about their sibling, but it is NOT okay to hurt them in any way.
- **Share how you felt:** Children appreciate when you share your own personal experiences and challenges with them. Use this opportunity to share a story with them about your experience with your own siblings, whether positive or negative.
- **Help them Problem Solve:** Try to actively listen to what is happening between the children, and help them work it out on their own. Empower children to look for their own solutions.
- **Understand your biases:** Be aware of your own dynamics with siblings. It's helpful to try and understand what our own issues are around competition and rivalry, and how they intersect with our parenting.
- **Build on strengths of each child:** Help children recognize their own strengths.
- **Allow them time together:** Siblings can fight all day then want to sleep together at night. Allow them time to be together.
- **Be prepared:** Try to plan ahead, anticipating situations where your children may need distractions. If you are going to a place where there will be long waits, take along books or drawing materials, so that sibling warfare doesn't become the entertainment.
- **Separate them:** If children are at risk of hurting themselves or each other physically, separate them until they are able to calm down and work things out.
- **Declare "off limits":** Allow children to own their favourite things/space/time that are "off limits" to their siblings.

Source: Adapted from an article in Today's Parent Magazine, February