



CompAct

Strengthening competencies – protecting children

How you can support your child's development

Pamphlet for parents and caregivers of children
between the ages of 3 and 8

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Kinderschutz Schweiz
Schlösslistrasse 9a
3008 Bern
www.kinderschutz.ch

Content collaboration

Daniela Melone, director, Elternbildung CH
Fondazione della Svizzera italiana per l'Aiuto,
il Sostegno e la Protezione dell'Infanzia (ASPI)
Helen Gebert, supervisor & organizational
consultant (bso), faculty PHBern
Maria Teresa Escolar, regional manageress Romandy,
Elternbildung CH

Cultural adaptation

Ron Halbright, NCBI

Illustrations

Marianne Kauer

Design and production

Patrick Linner (design)
www.prinzipien.ch
Funke Lettershop AG (production)
www.funkelettershop.ch

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Contents

How you can support your child's development	5
Your child needs your love	6
Take your child's basic needs seriously	8
Take your child's feelings seriously	10
Support your child's abilities	12
Respect and support your child's boundaries	14
As parents and adults, treat each other with care	16
Give your child clear rules	18
Don't criticize your child, but rather their behavior	22

How you can support your child's development

CompAct is a program of the organization Kinderschutz Schweiz (Swiss Foundation for the Protection of Children). It provides you with tips on dealing with challenging situations with your children (ages 3–8). Kinderschutz Schweiz is an organization dedicated to child welfare in Switzerland. All children should grow up without violence, their rights should be respected, and their privacy should be protected.

As parents,¹ you want your child to be happy and have a promising future. Your children should grow into adults who are in control of their own lives and confident in their dealings with others. That's why you do so much, every day: you are there for your child, and you listen to their needs. You tell your child what is and isn't allowed. All this is important for your child's development.

Life with children can sometimes be a challenge!

Your child brings many beautiful moments to your daily life. However, there are also some exhausting and challenging times, for example, when your child doesn't follow rules, breaks something, doesn't want to tie their own shoelaces, or hits another child.

It's not always easy for parents to keep calm. In such situations, children need attention and support. It's important to remember that parents are not perfect! Parents make mistakes, too. They are their children's role models. If you can admit your mistakes and apologize to your child, your child will learn to do the same.

We have compiled some situations from daily life for you. They show what you can do to give your child the best support possible so that they can find their own way with strength and courage.

¹ We use the term "parents" to include all those who provide regular, long-term care for a child, such as grandparents and childcare providers.

Your child needs your love

Children need something very special: you!

To develop well, your child needs a secure bond with you: the child must know that they can rely on you and that you love them, even when they are doing something that annoys you. If your child has your unconditional love, they will develop trust in themselves. Only in this way will they find strength and develop healthy relationships with others.

What does a child experience when they are punished with silence and withdrawal of affection?

It is very hard for a child when the parents give them the silent treatment after a fight, or treat them as if they were not there. These are forms of psychological violence, which also include when a child is insulted or humiliated.



When a child is punished this way, it is much worse than we as adults can imagine! The child begins to believe that they will only be loved if they are well behaved and make no mistakes. This places great stress on the child. Children who experience this frequently will often have trouble trusting people and forming positive relationships. This rejection also negatively affects their self-esteem.

How you can show your child that you love them

Children need a safe place. As parents, you can provide your children with this safety. You make it possible for your child to discover the world with curiosity. If your child is afraid and seeks safety with you, you can comfort them and hug them. They must know that they can always come to you without fear of punishment even if they have done something stupid or wrong. As parents, you can then demonstrate correct behavior, for example by speaking to them calmly and modeling the desired behavior with them. They must feel that you love and appreciate them just as they are, even when you don't like what they do.

Example: You just spent the last hour ironing and folding all the family laundry and putting it into a laundry basket. You step out of the room for a minute, during which time your child empties the basket and starts to play with it. Explain to your child in a respectful tone: *"That took me a lot of time and I'm annoyed that I have to start again from the beginning. I see that you want to play, and that's great. Please ask me next time you want to use the basket."*



Take your child's basic needs seriously

All humans have basic needs. These include trust, freedom, appreciation, security, and love. As parents, you can help your child satisfy these basic needs. Children often do a lot to get attention: for example, they consider doing things that will anger you. They may do this just to get your attention — even if it's a negative reaction.

What happens to a child whose basic needs are not taken seriously enough?

Unfulfilled basic needs can often be signaled by the child's behavior. Some children react intensely with provocative and attention-seeking behavior, while others withdraw. Our failure to take children's basic needs seriously teaches them that these are not important. They feel abandoned and worthless. The child's health and well-being are limited, and this can lead to serious physical or psychological illnesses.



How to fulfill your child's basic needs

Provocative behavior is hard to ignore and can get on a parent's nerves. Behind every instance of "difficult" behavior, however there is a basic need. It will help you better understand your child's behavior when you understand the basic need behind it. Do they want attention? Do they need security?



Good behavior is often taken as a given. It is helpful for the child when you respond to good behavior as well.

Examples: "Thank you for helping me set the table." or "I see that you put a lot of effort into painting this picture!"

It helps your child if you spend time with just the two of you. Give your child as much attention as you can. It's not the number of hours you spend with your child, but rather the quality that is important. Physical contact helps a child feel noticed and loved. You show your love through your joy and interest in spending time with your child and through your interest in their thoughts and feelings. Experiencing things together with you is very important for your child.

Take your child's feelings seriously

Everyone experiences many different feelings every day. Children, too, can be cheerful, angry, sad, or anxious. More than most adults, many children often show their feelings directly and intensely. Many adults have learned to try to control their feelings. Your child will too, in the course of time. An important prerequisite for this is that children recognize their feelings and believe that they can deal with them. As parents, you must help your child with this.

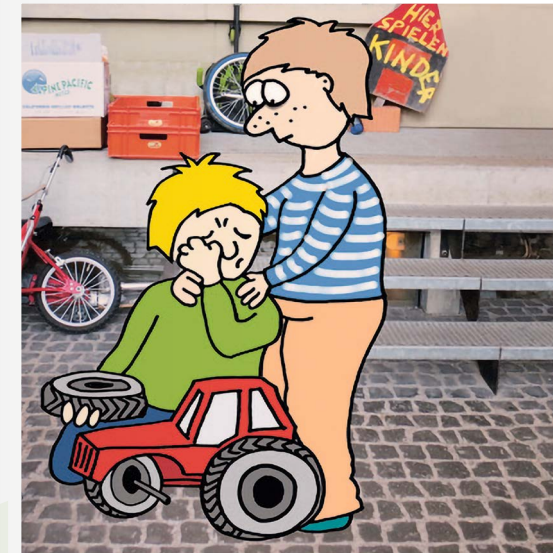
What happens to a child whose feelings are not taken seriously enough?

If the child's feelings are not taken seriously, the child will feel unnoticed and rejected as a person. This will have an impact on how they relate to people and develop relationships in future. When there is no response to the child's feelings, they learn to hide their feelings and not take them seriously. A child who experiences this repeatedly may develop both physical and psychological problems. The child's self-confidence lacks adequate support.



How to support your child in noticing their own feelings

It is important for children to learn that all feelings have their place. The child can be assured that the parents are interested in their feelings and take them seriously, for example, when the child is sad and cries.



If the child falls, you can give them a hug and say, "Oh no, you fell down. That hurts, doesn't it?" Hold your child until they have calmed down, because physical contact will make them feel better. If you say, "That's not so bad, get back up!" the child will feel they are not being taken seriously.

Talk openly about feelings with your family and with friends and acquaintances. All feelings are allowed. As parents, you are the role model for expressing and managing feelings by taking your own feelings seriously as well. For small children who don't yet understand emotions, it helps when, for example, you say, "I'm really happy right now!" or "Today I feel sad." Talk with your family about how you deal with your own feelings and set an example. For example, you can say: "I am angry and so I'm going to take a walk around the block." This will teach your child that it's OK to talk about and show feelings. You can show your child how to deal with intense emotions. It's OK to be angry, but not to break something in anger. They can punch a pillow, for example, to let off steam.

Support your child's abilities

All children are curious and want to learn and know about things. This is the driving force behind their development. Children therefore need the space to be able to make new experiences appropriate to their age. This enables them to practice and develop their abilities. For this to happen, the challenges shouldn't be too hard or too easy. Children develop their abilities in different ways, especially during play or in school. Here, they can practice and be happy when they master something new. This gives them the experience of being able to do things and be effective. This is an important prerequisite for taking on the next challenge.

What happens to a child whose abilities are not supported enough?

As parents, you want the best for your child. They should get good grades so that they can learn a good profession. It is important and correct that you as parents are interested in your child's accomplishments. Your expectations, however, should not be out of your child's reach. If expectations are too high, your child will feel that they



are not good enough. This is bad for their self-confidence and may worsen their performance. Sometimes, children will give up, thinking, "I'll never be able to do it anyway!" If expectations are too low, however, the child will not feel adequately challenged. Children facing low expectations often feel they are not noticed and simply give up at some point.

How to support your child's abilities

Supporting your child's abilities first requires observation: what does your child like to do? What kind of challenges do they prefer? How do they learn well? Your observations will help you get to know your child better. You'll discover where they need support and motivation, and where you should give them time to work things out on their own. You can create opportunities in daily life for your child to master step by step. This will help your child develop confidence in their own abilities. For

example, perhaps your child doesn't know how to open a bottle. Instead of doing it yourself, you can turn the cap a little bit and let them do the rest.

Depending on their age, children learn very well when they have time to play freely and without close adult supervision. Give your child time to discover the world on their own. Be there when your child seeks your closeness and support.



Respect and support your child's boundaries

Children have boundaries just like adults do. These boundaries give them security and protection.

Sometimes, adults overstep a child's boundaries with good intentions. For example, a parent might want to get the child to do something they don't want to do, such as give a relative or someone else a kiss in greeting or force the child to apologize to another child.

Different people have different boundaries, so it's important to pay attention to your child's reactions.

What happens to a child whose boundaries are ignored?

If a child's boundaries are repeatedly ignored or overstepped, this may have serious psychological and physical consequences for the child.



The child learns that they are not in control of themselves and their own body. This results in feelings of shame. The child follows the parents' orders regardless of their own needs. They learn that their own boundaries have no value. They learn to put up with discomfort, even when not necessary, and learn not to defend themselves, even when they need to. This will make the child more vulnerable to abusive behavior by others, including to sexual assault.

How to respect and support your child's boundaries

It is important that you and other adults recognize, support, and protect your child's boundaries. As parents, you can help your child learn what their boundaries are. It can help to speak openly about this topic with your family. Talk about your own boundaries, how you feel when someone crosses them, and insist that they be respected. For example, if your child pulls on your hair or scratches you, explain that this hurts and that you do not want the child to hurt you. Explain that you do not accept this, just as no one has the right to hurt your child.

Talk to your child about boundaries. What kind of touch is pleasant, and what is not OK? Who may touch them, and who must not? How do they want to behave when greeting other people? Don't force your child to do something that they don't want to do. Ask them why they don't want to, and take their answer seriously.

Defending their boundaries takes a lot of courage for a child. For this, they need your support. They are allowed to resist undesired physical contact! In this way, you can help your child stand up for their own boundaries.



Example: A relative or family friend wants to give them a kiss. The child is uncomfortable with this. Talk to your child about how they would like to greet that person. Talk to the person about the child wanting a different kind of greeting — perhaps an air kiss. Accompany your child during the greeting.

As parents and adults, treat each other with care

Children are very good observers, and they notice how adults treat one another. They are very good at picking up the mood in the family. When parents and adults treat each other with love and respect, the children feel safe and secure.

It's normal for parents to have arguments now and then. Even then, one can show respect. The child will carry over what they learn from your behavior into their own behavior towards others. They learn a lot about how they can behave in difficult situations.

What happens to children when they experience parents being violent toward each other?

When parents fight, a lot of anger can come out. Solving your problems through psychological or physical violence makes your child feel helpless and anxious. They often feel that they are to blame for their parents' fighting.

When parents insult, stop speaking to, or use physical violence against each other, this is very disturbing for the child. Experiencing their parents' violent fights is a



form of psychological violence for the child. In most cases, children witness the violence between their parents, even if they are not in the same room. This produces considerable stress. A child may react with depression, agitation, fear, or aggression. Alternatively, they may not react at all out of fear. Experiencing violence between parents may lead to health problems for the child that continue into adulthood.

How to support your child

Your home is where your child seeks safety and security. As parents, you can show your child that it is possible to argue about something and then reconcile, without yelling or hitting. It is also good for your child to experience how the two of you make up after a fight and apologize to each other for your behavior. This gives your child the feeling of security that they need for healthy development. You are your child's role model.



You can seek help for relationship problems at a counselling center in your canton:

➤ <https://www.kinderschutz.ch/de/beratungsstellen.html>

Give your child clear rules

We all live with rules for getting along in life. They give children a sense of security and a safe space to experiment with freedom. They know how they are supposed to behave in certain situations and can take responsibility for their behavior. The rules that a child learns at home are also important outside of their home. The child learns how they should behave with other people.

Well-founded, reasonable and consistently observed rules support the child's development into a competent person and are important for living together in the family. They also help prevent recurring disputes about everyday matters like cleaning up or doing homework. Such disputes take lots of energy and test your patience. Rules also help to keep the child out of danger.

What happens when a child is given no rules?

A child with no rules to follow develops insecurities. They feel overwhelmed by the world and lack direction. They don't know what's expected of them and how they should behave. This may lead to considerable frustration and in turn to aggression, violence, and risky behavior and addiction. If a child can always do what they want, they will have problems getting along with others. They may become indifferent to other people's needs.



How to establish clear rules well

As parents, you already demonstrate many rules in everyday life for your child. They use your actions as a reference: you are a role model for their behavior.

It helps the child when rules are linked to consequences. Consequences show the child that rules are reliable and binding, and this gives them security and direction. There are, however, differences between *natural* and *logical* consequences.

A *natural consequence* happens without your involvement. This means that rules are not needed. The child learns through experience which behaviors lead to which consequences.

Example: It's a chilly fall day, and your child wants to go to the playground. You say that they should put on a warm jacket because it's cold outside. The child doesn't want to wear a jacket. After 15 minutes of play, your child is cold. They cry because they are cold, but also because they want to keep playing and have experienced that they can't do this comfortably without a jacket.

A *logical consequence* is an agreement about rules and consequences made between you and your child. Your child will be more willing to follow rules when they can help decide them. The child will also believe more in their own effectiveness. Consequences should follow in most cases, but you can also exercise some flexibility. This teaches your child that you are reliable but not stubborn. Children are frequently punished by their parents for inappropriate behavior, but they don't always recognize what they did wrong. Consequences make more sense than punishments and should be discussed with the child beforehand, if possible. Consequences are fair, understandable and proportionate (not too severe, not too light). A good consequence helps the child learn from their mistake and change their behavior.

Example: Your child wants to eat a chocolate bar before dinner. You have an agreement that the child may eat one sweet treat each day. If they want to eat chocolate now, that means there will be no dessert later. The child can decide for themselves. If they choose the chocolate now, be consistent and don't offer dessert later.



Because children live in the here and now, the consequence should ideally happen right away and should be connected to the behavior. Even with lots of effort, following jointly agreed upon rules may not succeed immediately. Children must repeat situations and practice. Sometimes, this requires much patience. When your child chooses the consequence, stay with them and give them loving support. It may be sensible to offer the child assistance, for example a reminder that the child will have no dessert later if they eat chocolate now.

Rules should be reconsidered on a regular basis, especially when they are seldom followed. It may be that a rule demands too much of the child or is no longer appropriate for the child's age.

Set up a small number of sensible rules with your child, because children have difficulty following too many rules at once. It makes children happy when parents notice and appreciate even small improvements.

Don't criticize your child, but rather their behavior

Even though you love your child, there are probably times when you don't like what they are doing. It can be aggravating, especially if you have to keep telling your child the same thing over and over again. When they are angry, parents sometimes say things like: "You are so annoying!" or "How can you be so stupid?" or even stronger phrases. Such words are hurtful to everyone, especially to children. Such words undermine their feelings of self-worth. A child needs to know that they are always appreciated and loved unconditionally. This is important for their feelings of self-worth and their self-reliance, and thus for their development.

What happens to a child who is constantly criticized?

If a child frequently hears negative things about themselves from their parents or other important adults, they begin to believe them. Over time, the child will believe that they have no worth. Many parents don't realize how strongly their children are affected by such words. A child who thinks they are stupid or can't do anything right will lose self-confidence. This will then affect their behavior. Some children become anxious and passive, while others become angry and aggressive. They experience a drop in achievement, for example in school. Fewer successes and less recognition lead to even more anxiety and withdrawal or anger and aggression, creating a vicious circle.



How to criticize the behavior and not the child

If you find yourself becoming angry about your child's behavior, first take a few deep breaths. This will help you calm down. It will also win you some time to think about what behavior you'd like to see in your child. It's often easier for us to say what we don't like, but that doesn't help the child enough to change their behavior. Therefore, try to talk about the behavior you want to see.

Example: Your child gets excited while telling a story at dinner and knocks over their drinking glass. Instead of scolding, telling them off or saying how clumsy they are, say: "I know that you're excited. I'll get you something to wipe that up. Next time, place your glass farther away when you want to tell a story."

This will help you give your child something very important to take through life: a strong sense of self-worth. Their belief in themselves and in their abilities will prepare them much better to face the challenges of everyday life. This motivates them to learn and they will not give up so quickly in the face of failure or disappointment.






Kinderschutz Schweiz
Protection de l'enfance Suisse
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**Protecting children.
Strengthening children.**

**We are the strong voice
of children in Switzerland.**

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH 

Kinderschutz Schweiz

Schlösslistrasse 9a | 3008 Bern
Phone +41 31 384 29 29

www.kinderschutz.ch
info@kinderschutz.ch

   /kinderschutzschweiz
 /kinderschutz_ch