

Leaflet for parents

Being a parent

Are you anxious, frustrated, angry, overwhelmed and helpless about your child's behaviour? Do you feel that you have tried everything to get it right, but things are not improving?

Being a parent is one of the most difficult jobs in the world. When things aren't going right it can help to stop and think with someone else, like a health visitor, about the situation.

Parenting involves a unique relationship between parents and children. Parents provide a window on the world for the child and through this, children can begin to learn about themselves, their environment and others. Parents are vital in establishing a secure base to help the healthy physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of each of us. We are helped to grow and progress from total dependence towards independence and relationships with others.

Everyone brings their own personality, life experience and expectations to their role as a parent. All of us have been parented. That first unique relationship with our parents, how we experienced them and how they experienced us, affects the way we go on to parent our own children. As children we all responded and behaved differently and our parents dealt with our responses and behaviours in different ways, depending on their personalities, life experiences, circumstances and feelings at that time. By understanding more about how you felt when you were growing up with your own parents, you can then begin to see things from your child's point of view.

It can help to stop and think about some issues. This leaflet describes issues that sometimes affect how you feel about your child and how they react to you.

Expectations

As a parent-to-be, you will have thoughts and feelings about the pregnancy and these will all play a part in how you see your new baby. These can include: the pregnancy is unplanned, you would like a girl, you would like a boy, you are worried about whether the baby will have something wrong with her, you are worried about whether the baby will be sick, you are not sure who the father is, you wanted the pregnancy to be terminated, you are worried about your relationship, you have your own mental health problems at the moment. You may have other thoughts. It can be helpful to talk about them with somebody, such as your health visitor or midwife. Everyone has different thoughts and worries about their new baby.

Personality

Every child is different. Each one has their own personality. Even at birth, babies already have different personalities. If you have more than one child you will already have proof of this. Some children are easier to manage than others. Some children need more patience or firmness. Your child's behaviour is a mix of their personality, your parenting of them and the different things that have happened to them in their lives.

Life events

Where and how you live can affect how you care for your child. Redundancy, your partner leaving you, housing problems or money worries all make it hard for you to concentrate on your baby or child. It is important for you to get as much support as possible in these difficult times, for your own sake and for that of your children.

Everyday life, such as moving home, starting nursery and school, accidents and illnesses will all affect your child. You may remember from your own childhood your feelings about ordinary events like these. You can help your child by explaining what is happening. This will help him feel less out of control and less anxious.

Family crises also affect your child. When you were growing up you may remember how you felt when there were crises in your family. Separation, divorce, illness, domestic violence and bereavement are all difficult times for children. They are also difficult times for you, so just when your children need you to help them cope is also the time when life is hard for you. You may need more support.

Environment

Every child is born into a particular family and your family will, of course, affect how your baby sees the world.

You will know from your own experience that your position in the family makes a difference, for example, whether you are the oldest or the youngest. Sometimes it can make quite a big difference.

Your relationship

There are times when you find it really helpful having a partner to share in bringing up the children. However, it can be also be very difficult to work together. You may disagree with each other about what to do in different situations, for instance, about bedtimes. You may find it hard to cope with your children when they play one of you off against the other.

Sometimes you may be angry with each other, but your anger comes out as disagreeing with each other about managing your children's behaviour. You end up arguing about the children.

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If there are a lot of disagreements between you and your partner, you may find that your well-behaved child starts to behave 'badly'. You may remember what you felt when your parents were going through difficult times together. Children are very sensitive to how their parents feel. Sometimes they worry about what might happen. They react in different ways. For example, some children react by trying to be in charge of everyone and everything, to make themselves feel less anxious.

All children need to have an experience of parents willing to work together, even if they are separated or divorced.

Your own parents

Our own experiences of being parented can help or hinder us as parents. We may want to alter radically the way we parent our children because of our experiences, or repeat what we felt worked for us.

We may enter parenting determined not to make the same mistakes that we feel our parents may have made. If your father was very strict with you, you may want to be different with your children. However, if you go too far the other way and are not firm enough with your child, that is not helpful either.

These are just a few of the things that affect us as parents. There is no such thing as a 'perfect parent', even though we may wish to be one. At times it can be a struggle. Being a parent isn't easy, but it can be enjoyable and rewarding. To be a 'good enough' parent can take a great deal of determination, thoughtfulness and support.