

Parenting 21 Series

Nurturing Virtues and Values in Children III (For 4 to 6 years old)



Online Version



Department of Health

The ability of thinking in another person's shoes is only sufficiently developed at around the age of four. By this time, your child is more able to learn values that require him to **consider other's needs and observe rules and regulations**. When he gets older, more reasoning may be introduced. He may be guided to anticipate consequence of his actions. Remember that **children learn through different means at different developmental stages**. Always take into account the child's intellectual ability when teaching children values.



This leaflet will focus on some of the virtues and values that older preschoolers from around four years old onwards will be more able to practise:

Self- control – To control one's impulses

Self-discipline – To control oneself to behave in a particular way regularly without needing others to tell him/her what to do

Responsibility – To be accountable for one's actions

Social responsibility – To be considerate for the welfare of the community and follow the public regulations



Do you agree that the above virtues are important for your child?

If you agree that they are important, the following passages will illustrate ways to foster these in your child, or you may use the '6R10' strategies explained in Part I (Parenting Series 19) to foster other values of your choice.

Developing Self – Control in Your Child

Preschoolers often have difficulty controlling their impulses and easily lose their temper. You can help your child develop self-control by using the following strategies:



Modeling self-control

In everyday life, let your child know that you are planning to leave your pleasures until later e.g. you are going to watch TV only after you have finished the laundry. Show her how you enjoy the relaxed moment and your satisfaction when you have achieved the target.

Show your child how to stop and relax when facing frustration

Young children usually have warning signs that appear before their emotional behaviour. The signs may include clenching of fists, frowning, or eyes reddened as if they are going to cry. It would be more effective if you could detect these signs as soon as they appear and **guide her to relax before her emotions get out of her control.**



- ★ Guide your child to say 'Stop!' to herself to restrain her emotional impulses.
- ★ Then help her calm down by reflecting on her feelings, 'I can see you are getting irritated by not getting what you want. Please first relax and we shall see what we can do.'
- ★ Teaching her how to relax by taking deep breaths while you slowly count out loud for her.

Ask your child to wait for what she wants

Let young children **learn how to wait** for what they want in everyday life, e.g., ask the child to wait for the juice she wants until you have finished vacuuming the floor.



- ★ Suggest her to engage herself in some interesting activity while waiting.
- ★ Be mindful of the duration the child is asked to wait. This varies depending on the age and ability of self-control of the child.
- ★ Praise her for waiting patiently.

Teach self talk

Young children need self talk to tell themselves what is not right and what ought to be done **help themselves move to the next step**.

- ★ Teach your child to talk to herself to remind herself what to do in specific situations, e.g., 'Mummy says leave the ice cream till after dinner', 'No hitting' or 'Shake hands and make friends.'

Anticipate consequences of their actions*

- ★ Talk about rules and limits with her to **show her what are acceptable and what are not**.
- ★ Guide your child when necessary by **asking her to stop** and by **reminding** her of the rules and limits.

- ★ Explain what she has done that was unacceptable and the **reason for the consequence** you give her. For example, 'You did not do your homework within the agreed time. You are now late in completing your homework. So you cannot watch your favourite TV show this evening.'
- ★ **Praise** her for compliance and appropriate behaviours. She will gradually learn the social standards in different contexts.

Encouraging Self Discipline

Developing **self control sets the basis** for self discipline.

- ★ Be a **good role model** in having some regular routines yourself.
- ★ Help your child establish **regular daily routines** such as setting time for study, play, meals and bed to breed good habits in him.
- ★ Guide him step by step through the routines, e.g. stop playing and wash hands before dinner, finish dinner before leaving the table to watch TV.
- ★ Remember to praise him for compliance to routines. Using a star chart will be helpful. He will gradually learn to stop or defer other activities and follow the routines.



Teaching Your Child about Responsibility

Give your child opportunities to take up responsibility. That will help her learn about **participation**, **cooperation** and **commitment**.

★ Talk with her about how everyone in the family has their part to contribute and the family belongs to all in it. Discuss with her what tasks she is able to take up and **assign** to her **daily chores** like clearing up the dinner table, watering the plants or feeding the pet.

★ Performing **independent living skills** is another type of responsibility. Let her take care of her own belongings such as packing up her things after class or hanging up the uniform after school. You may find that your child needs reminders together with encouragement to establish each new skill or responsible behaviour gradually.



Once you have decided to cultivate responsibility in your child, do not fall into the trap of giving her help too soon such as taking things to school for her when she has forgotten to pack them in her school bag. If so, she will only learn to depend on you. She will learn more effectively to be responsible through **experiencing the consequence of her own actions**.

★ Show her what commitment is by demonstrating how to **do one's best** (e.g. learning to bake a cake), and **completing what one has started** (e.g. finishing knitting a jumper). Remember to set realistic expectations on what she could do. Give her guidance if needed and, most of all, encouragement and praise.

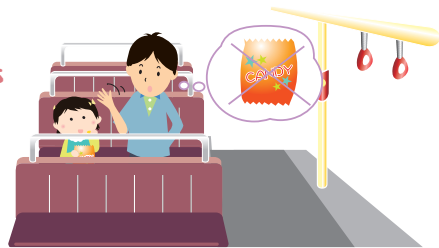
- ★ Show her how to be responsible for her own behaviour by encouraging her to admit her mistakes and to do something to **compensate for her wrongdoings**. For example, she may apologize and redo it in the correct way.

Cultivate Social Responsibility

Guide him to take up social responsibility in terms of following public regulations and caring for the community.

- ★ Teach him to **follow public regulations** such as paying the right amount of fares for his age, no eating and drinking in public transport.

- ★ Model for him **civic ethics** including not taking advantage of others (e.g. not jumping queues); not taking more than



what one needs (e.g. using only just enough paper towels for drying hands); and not intruding on other people's privacy and rights (e.g. turning on the music too loud).

- ★ Show him how to **love the environment**. Apart from placing trash in the bin and not taking anything away from country parks, one has to cherish limited resources on earth by sticking to the 4R principles: **reduce** (e.g. think carefully before buying anything new), **reuse** (e.g. write on both sides of paper), **recycle** (e.g. put old clothes and waste paper into recycling banks) and **replace** (e.g. bring own shopping bag instead of using plastic carriers).



Think:

What values do you want to cultivate in your child?

You and your child are starving so you go to a fast food shop. Your child dashes to the front of the queue and starts ordering, yelling for you to come up to pay. What would you do? After you have taken the tray of food to find a seat, your child takes a thick pile of napkins, numerous sachets of sauce and sugar. How would you react?

You are your child's first teacher. Your child will show the values and virtues that reflect your own beliefs and values. If you can live up to your own values yourself, your child will be able to model after you more easily. He will surely benefit from your nurturing and effective parenting and the virtues you cherish will be passed on from generation to generation.

* Leaflet 15 and 16 in this Parenting series explain positive parenting strategies in more details.