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Family Focus Ten Great Things You Can Do For Your Children

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occasionally skipping pages while reading to your young child at bedtime). On the other hand, be sure to reserve time for yourself and your other interests and relationships to avoid feeling burdened or resentful about sharing time with your child.

6- Take good physical and emotional care of your child, but also be sure to do the same for yourself. This is a hard one for parents to find time and energy to do, but it's essential.

7- Have an encouraging, optimistic outlook with your child as much as possible. You don't need to be Mary Poppins, but it's important to keep your worries to yourself or share them with other adults. Hearing about too many serious or worrisome issues, directly or indirectly, can burden and inhibit a child. He may become anxious, withdrawn and clingy, and lack confidence in himself.

8- Avoid excessive behavior - too much spending, cleaning, drinking, anger, working, electronics use, etc. Try to find balance and demonstrate this to your child. Seek help if necessary. I'm currently seeing one mother of three young children to address her compulsive need for neatness and orderliness in her home. She realizes she has sacrificed relaxed quality time with her husband and children by constantly trying to maintain a perfect house. She has been critical and dissatisfied with herself as well. Our children are happiest and feel most secure when we are able to be happy with ourselves and our lives.

9- Provide clear, consistent expectations and consequences. We read this in every child-rearing article - and that's because it's essential! Be sure to implement consequences no matter how convincingly your child pleads his case. Allow increased input about rules and consequences as he gets older. Work together in a cooperative, respectful manner. If your child is not behaving respectfully

The title of this column may be misleading, since this isn't about concrete things to do for your child, such as taking him to Disney World or buying him fabulous toys, electronics, or clothes. Rather, these are actions you can take that will enhance your child's life.

1- Catch your child behaving well. Be sure to notice and comment frequently. Be specific about what you witness him doing or saying.

2- When disciplining your child, make a correction quickly without too much fuss, and then go back to being positive. You want him to think of himself as a good child. For example, if Josh knocks down some cans from the grocery store shelf, ask him to put them back. After he complies, thank him for cooperating.

3- Express affection for your child verbally, physically, and through your actions. Actions can include: taking his preferences into consideration, showing him you enjoy his company, and taking him to see an exhibit of lizards and snakes when you really don't like lizards and snakes.

4- Demonstrate kindness, consideration, and generosity to others. Be the best role model you can be.

5- When you spend time with your child, do so willingly and happily. A child can tell when his parents aren't fully present or if they begrudge giving up their time. (But no need to feel guilty for

toward you, others, or himself, seek outside help promptly. If he is under eighteen, do not give him a choice about seeing a therapist. After all, you don't allow him to decide about going to the dentist or medical doctor. Be firm and loving in your efforts. Often the way to get your child to see someone is to go in as a family, so that he is not singled out as "the one with problems." But if he absolutely refuses to go, as some children do, don't force the issue. Rather, consult regularly with a professional to get the advice and support you will need.

10- Be a good listener. One of the most powerful tools in parenting is being able to provide a calm, reflective, neutral ear for your child. With supportive listening from their parents, children can learn how to make decisions, express their thoughts and feelings, and interact better with others. They develop greater confidence and self-worth. Avoid judging, advising (unless asked), asking questions that have a critical edge, and reacting too emotionally. An excellent guide is *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* by Michael P. Nichols.

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