

# HRIC HELPFUL HINTS

**PARENTING:  
HOW TO IMPROVE  
TODDLER  
BEHAVIOR**

The most basic aspects to effective parenting is ensuring the health and safety of children and promoting a nurturing environment. All too often, parents can become fixated on issues that do not matter and spend energy and time on concerns that do not strengthen and improve the child-parent bond. Below you will find a series of questions to help you reflect on the health of your relationship with your child. This exercise is not about finding the right answer, but identifying the areas of your parent-child relationship that might need more help:

- **Is my child getting adequate nutrition?** Nutrition is an important part of healthy development. Is breakfast full of sugary foods that may promote negative behaviors? Are mealtimes a family activity wherein parents can model healthy behaviors? Ensuring adequate nutrition and the appropriate amounts of fruits, vegetables, proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and sugars can help children be at their optimal best.
- **Is my child getting adequate rest?** Bedtimes and routines can be extremely helpful in reducing negative behaviors and helping children better regulate emotions. What stressors could my child be facing? Are they getting adequate time with mom and dad? Does my child have tools to regulate intense emotions? Anger, sadness, frustration, are not negative but very natural emotions. Children can learn very healthy and constructive ways to regulate these intense emotions without suppressing them.
- **Is my child spending enough time outdoors?** Is my child spending enough time in active play? Is my child spending too much time on screens? Exercise and play are critical to healthy development. Too much screen-time can have a powerfully negative effect on child health and development.
- **Does my child feel safe?** This question could be within the context of home and/or school? Children have different ways of processing information. Fears of the dark or a fight with a friend can be incredibly intense and emotional experiences for children and erode their sense of safety and stability.

- **Does my child feel loved?** Remember—you are your child's favorite toy. Rewards, trips to fancy places, and gifts seem great, but your eye-contact, attention, love, attention, and praise are worth more than any of that.
- **Do I see my child as the individual that he or she is?** Children are different. They have different temperaments, personalities, interests, capabilities, and so on. Can you recognize what your child is good at and build on that?
- **Does my child feel respected?** Do I allow my child choices when possible? Do I see him or her as an individual and not a “mini-me” or compare him/her to other siblings? When safety is not an issue, can I allow my child to exercise choice and show me who he/she is? Respect is best learned when it is modeled by parents.
- **Does my child know the rules and boundaries and consequences?** There are non-negotiables in every family. What are the non-negotiables in your family? It is important to communicate this clearly and also discuss consequences for when these rules or boundaries are broken. Consequences should be fair and appropriate.

#### **There is no one-size-fits-all**

Every child, parent, and family is different. Some strategies are great for some families and not relevant for others. As such, the approach here is to offer a number of self-reflective questions wherein parents can think deeply about their own personal situations and see what areas of their life might need extra support.

**Contact Us**  
(+971) 4 365 8498  
(+971) 50 778 2785  
[hric@hricdubai.com](mailto:hric@hricdubai.com)  
[www.hricdubai.com](http://www.hricdubai.com)



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