

• Can you modify the family schedule or rules to fit the child while still keeping reasonable expectations?

• Do you need to teach your child new ways of getting his or her needs met?

Would it help to get ideas from other parents?

Once you have come up with a plan, test each of your ideas by imagining yourself acting in the new way with the child.

• Do you think it would work?

• How might you have to adapt it for the mood or personality of the child?

### Change the way you react:

When you feel yourself being dragged into a familiar battle with your child, stop. Decide to do something new. Try staying relaxed. Try seeing the child as an amazing and delightful person. Instead of saying or doing what you usually say or do, try listening more carefully. Try understanding your child. If you can't see a good way to react, maybe you will decide to delay a decision until you have had time to think.

Since we already know that our usual ways of responding to problems don't work very well, our best hope for better family life is to try new and better ways.

### Learn from problems:

After you have tried your new plan, notice the results. Did it help your child act in ways that are better for him or her and the rest of the family? If so, congratulations!

If the plan did not work, you might be tempted to be discouraged. You might be tempted to blame yourself or your child. Blaming isn't helpful. But it may be helpful to go back through the process in this problem-solving

guide. Step 1: What can you do to feel peaceful? Step 2: What can you do to see your child with appreciation and understanding? Step 3: What can you do to understand your child's objective? Step 4: What is a better way? Step 5: Make a new plan.

The best parents are those who keep trying ideas until they find ones that work with their family. What makes an idea a good one? It is a good idea if it works and if it shows respect to all who are involved.

### Conclusion

Problems arise in all families. When they arise, we recommend that you use the ideas in this problem-solving guide. If you have a parenting partner, work on it together. You might also work with other adults who know and love your child.

If nothing seems to work, talk to your minister, school counselor, doctor or mental health professional to get more ideas of how you can be effective. It is possible that your child has special challenges that need professional attention.

The challenges you face as a parent may sometimes seem discouraging. You may get tired of all the problems. There is good news, though. As you learn to help your children act in better ways, not only will they become better people but you will become wiser, more compassionate and a happier person.

It is always better to prevent problems than trying to solve them when they arise. That is why we encourage you to learn about principles of loving, understanding, guiding and motivating children by studying the Travel Guides which accompany the Parenting Journey. The six guides will help you prevent problems.



## Enjoy your parenting journey!

Learn more to help you with your parenting journey by visiting [www.arfamilies.org](http://www.arfamilies.org), visiting your county extension agent or by reading a good book on parenting such as:

Haim Ginott's *Between Parent and Child* (2003, Three Rivers Press).  
John Gottman's *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* (1997, Fireside).  
Martin Seligman's *Authentic Happiness* (2002, Free Press).  
Redford & Virginia Williams' *Anger Kills* (1993, Harper).

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Printed by the University of Arkansas  
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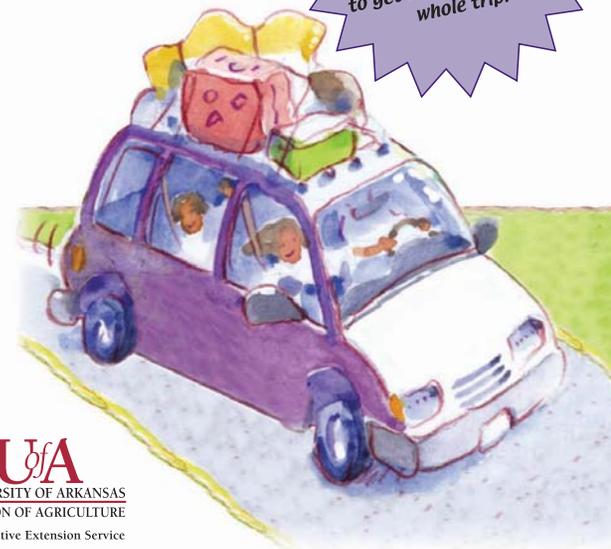


The Parenting Journey Travel Guide

# Parent Guide

Turning Specific  
Parenting Challenges  
into Family Growth

Don't start your  
journey without  
a map!  
Pick up the Parenting  
Journey Map (FCS 240)  
to get an overview of the  
whole trip.



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Turn specific parenting challenges into family growth with this...

# Parent Guide

This guide is intended to help you through the parenting journey as you deal with specific parenting challenges. It does not attempt to teach all principles of effective parenting. Six vital principles are discussed in the Parenting Journey and the Travel Guides for each of these communities. For more information, go to [www.arfamilies.org](http://www.arfamilies.org).

## The harder I try to solve problems with my children, the worse they get! Why?

Your children undoubtedly do things that bother you. Some of them may bother you a lot.

There is a funny quirk in human behavior. When we react to something that bothers us, our actions usually make the problem worse.

For example, when we nag children to hurry and get ready, they will probably slow down. The more we demand that they eat a certain food, the more they will resist. In both cases the more they resist, the more we nag and demand. The more we nag and demand, the worse they act. This is not likely to have a happy ending. The good news is that there are better ways to parent!

## A Problem-Solving Approach

Think of a problem you have with one of your children. As you work through this guide, consider how to apply the ideas to your challenges with that child. These steps can help you turn parenting challenges into personal and family growth. You can turn your parenting challenges into family strengths! Once you have identified a challenge, you are ready for step one.

### Step 1. How are you feeling?

When we have upset or angry feelings, we have a hard time seeing clearly. Think of yourself as a person in a burning house surrounded by flames and smoke. It can be very hard for us to see any way out. It doesn't help our situation to sit and fret or shake our fists at the smoke.

As you approach the parenting challenge you listed above, are you feeling angry, betrayed, disgusted, devastated or any other strong feeling? If so, the first job is to put out that fire.

No doubt you have many reasons for feeling tired, stressed or angry. There are probably many demands on your time and attention. None of us can make everything all right. But maybe we can find ways to feel more calm, safe and sensible.

It may help to find a quiet place to relax and breathe deeply:

It could help to direct your thoughts to things that are good in your life.

- Do you have the strengths of optimism, creativity or determination?
- Do you have many good friends?
- Do you have a strong family network?

What's good about your life?

It could help you to do something else while you settle down.

- Take a walk.

- Work on a hobby.

- Do something fun with a friend or family member.

Think of other things that would help you settle down. **Try them!**

As you feel more peaceful, you may be ready for step two.

### Step 2. How do you see your child?

When we think of the child as a problem, there is no good solution. When we see the child as doing the best he or she knows how, it will be easier to find good solutions.

As we face challenges with our children, it is good to remember that each child is an amazing human being. When we remember the child's finest qualities, we are better prepared to turn problems into blessings.

Can you see clearly what his or her best qualities are?

- What do you enjoy about your child?
- What does your child love to do?

What makes your child a remarkable person?

Would it help to think about your best experiences with that child?

- What have been your best experiences together?
- What pictures or remembrances do you have?

- What memories do you cherish? Why?

Before we can direct or correct a child, we must value that child. Do you feel loving and appreciative of the child? If so, let's move to step three.

### Step 3. What is the child trying to accomplish?

People do what they do for reasons that make sense to them. When a child's actions do not make sense to us, it is probably because we don't fully understand the child's needs and wants.

Let's assume that the child is trying to accomplish something good with the actions that are bothering us. In fact, let's try to see what life is like for the child. Sometimes children become overwhelmed while trying to figure out their lives. Sometimes they get discouraged.

Here are several reasons a child may do things that bother us:

- Maybe the child is feeling tired or sick.
- Maybe the child doesn't know any better.
- Maybe the child is feeling afraid or lonely.
- Maybe the child is stressed by something.
- Maybe the child wants our attention.

If you notice when and where the problem arises, you may be able to discover what the child wants. What good things do you think your child is trying to accomplish with the behavior that bothers you?

When we are feeling peaceful (which is the work of Step 1 in this Guide), loving (Step 2), and understanding (Step 3), we can help our child find a better way. This is step four.

### Step 4. Is there a better way?

As parents, we try to help children get what they want — in good ways. For example, children who fuss for our attention should be able to get our attention — but in ways that don't make us crazy. We might say to a child who is whining for attention, "I would love to talk with you or play with you, but I need you to tell me what you want in ways I can understand."

Or, if a child has a hard time getting ready for school on time, we can start by figuring out why the child doesn't get ready. Does the child need more time to wake up? If so, we might go in earlier and gently talk with and pat the child to help wake her up. Does the child find it hard to decide what to wear? If so, we might have the child decide what to wear the night before and lay out the clothes.

Notice in the examples above that there are things we can do as parents to set our children up for success. In the case of the fussing child, we can do fun things with the child before he or she gets fussy. In the case of the child who is late for school, we can help the child wake up earlier or lay out clothes. There may also be times when we need to teach our child new skills. There may also be times when the key is your own mood — choosing to be patient, positive or understanding.

Can you think of positive ways to help your child get what he or she wants?

- Try thinking of several ways you could help your child get what he or she wants in ways that respect everyone and that are reasonable for your child.

- Consider ways you have seen other good parents deal with this kind of problem.
- Consider which of those ways respect all family members.
- Consider which of those ways are likely to work with your child.

Once you have thought of better ways to help your child get his or her needs met, you are ready to try something new, step 5:

### Step 5. Try something new.

The problems that have bothered you in the past will surely happen again. Let's come up with a specific plan to deal with them in better ways.

#### Start with prevention:

An ounce of prevention is worth a ton of punishment. Step 4 gave some ideas for preventing problems. As you think about the specific challenge you identified at the beginning of this parent guide, what specifically do you think you can do to make problems less likely to occur?

How can you change the way you approach the situation?

- Do you need to find ways to stay calm?

What can you do to see your child positively?

- Do you need to think more about your child's strengths?
- Would it help to think about your best times together?

How can you help your child get what he or she wants in a way you feel good about?