

Parenting guide: Raising an exceptional child

TODDLER

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Parents can bring out the best in their children by providing them with balanced and complete nutrition, setting goals, and encouraging them to be confident, independent and think critically.

All parents wish for their children to succeed in life and blossom into exceptional individuals. An exceptional child shows confidence in his/her abilities, and has an innate love of learning. This trust in self and love of learning, when nurtured from a young age, will help set your child on a path to success. Confidence and thirst for knowledge are also among the top traits of a well-rounded person.

However, in our pursuit of raising exceptional children, we often put such qualities on the back burner, and instead focus all our attention on scholarship and related activities: school, revision, homework, enrichment. Repeat. We do this with good intentions, so that our kids gain the skills we think they need for a bright future.

Yet, for children to navigate without getting lost in their future new world, they need more than just academic brilliance. True excellence in a child is balanced and nuanced. Along with intelligence, children need certain exceptional skills that you, their parents, can teach them in their day-to-day life.

7 Ways to bring out the exceptional in your child



The beauty of one-year-olds or even seven-year-olds is that they have an innate curiosity about the world, and are supremely self-confident. These are qualities that are crucial to help them face the future successfully.

But as kids grow older—caught up in their own little rat races to “success” — they often lose these traits. That is unless these qualities are nurtured lovingly by parents, and further enhanced with a layer of other important skills that will help to raise a truly exceptional child.

Here are some tips on how you can do this. Remember, kids are highly receptive to new information between the ages of one and seven, so these ideas are age-grouped accordingly.

1. Teach your one-year-old independence

We anxiously wait for those first steps, but we are equally worried about our children falling. It's okay to let your little ones fall (of course, in a safe space) because if they don't, they won't learn how to get up again.

Enable your child to trust in his/her own abilities beginning as early as when they are one. Start when your little one takes his/her first steps. Keep a distance of around two feet between you. Get down to your little one's eye level, open your arms and encourage your toddler to walk towards you with a smile on your face and love in your eyes. You'll marvel at your child's confidence as he/she walks towards your embrace, knowing that you are there to catch him/her if he/she falls.

You can also let your little one self-feed. Hand your little one a sippy cup and a soft spoon and prepare to dodge incoming food projectiles. Yes, it will be messy, but that's

okay. Know that your child is already learning a skill that is highly valued in this new world: independence. You're also teaching your child to be confident in his/her own abilities and skills.

2. Nurture your two-year-old's innate curiosity

Toddlers are such inquisitive little beings. While it can be tiring for parents, nurturing this natural curiosity is the starting point of raising an exceptional child. When you encourage and engage your child's curiosity, you're actually establishing in him/her a lifelong love of learning.

One good way to do this is through reading books—to them and with them. Research consistently shows us that reading to our children from as early as two years old (and even before) helps them become diligent students with an insatiable appetite for learning.

Their language and speaking skills develop as they are read to. It's also an invaluable tool to learn about the world. It can encourage them to start reading on their own sooner as well. Additionally, it's a good way to develop your little one's working memory, which is an important executive function skill. Ask your little one simple questions after the story to hone this skill.

As you can see, setting aside time to read as part of children's daily routine will pay dividends in their development.

3. Encourage self-confidence in your three-year old



Three-year-old toddlers want to do many things by themselves. But often, we don't let

them for many reasons: it takes too long, they can't do the task "properly," it creates mess, and so on.

However, by discouraging three-year-olds when they want to do something alone, we're restricting their confidence in their own abilities. A mark of an exceptional child is having trust in his/her own skills, and this should be nurtured by caregivers to allow little ones to be the best versions of themselves.

So let your threenager do little things on his/her own with your guidance and encouragement. It could be putting on his/her own shoes or helping you with simple chores like sorting the laundry. Trust in your little one's abilities and you'll be surprised by just how much he/she can do, confidently and independently.

4. Teach your four-year-old how to set goals

The ability to set—and achieve—goals is an important skill of an exceptional child, and one that will be highly valued by future employers. Give your four-year-old a head start in life by teaching him/her the importance of goal-setting, and how he/she can do this.

A fun activity to try is "3 Stars and a Wish." Ask your four-year-old three things he/she is proud of—it could be that he/she is a great friend or can count up to 20. Then ask your little one what he/she "wishes" he/she could do. Could it be to tie his/her shoelaces alone, or sing the national anthem? List these down and discuss the steps for how to make these wishes a "reality."

If you set a timeframe, then you're also teaching your child how to manage his/her time to achieve a goal. Additionally, this task hones a crucial executive function skill in your little one: self-control. Unless all the steps are followed, your child will not achieve the goal. And to do this, it takes self-control and patience.

5. Talk to your five-year-old about the importance of proper nourishment

It's never too early to help a child understand the importance of a balanced diet. After all, a child cannot truly reach his/her full potential and be truly exceptional unless both body and mind are nourished. Instead of just telling your five year old, "Don't eat that hamburger. You can't have one," tell them why there is better, more nutritious food for them. Teach them about the various nutrients present in a balanced diet and what each of these does for the body and brain.

Take this learning one step further by bringing your child grocery shopping with you, and involving them in selecting healthy items. You could even (under supervision) let your five-year-old cook a simple, healthy meal with you and eat it together.

6. Teach your six-year-old critical thinking skills



There's no doubt that the ability to think objectively and logically in order to make an informed decision (critical thinking) is a significant marker of an exceptional child. It involves understanding that what worked the last time for a certain problem might not apply in a slightly different situation. Children who can think critically have an edge over others without this skill, because critical thinkers can swiftly make connections that others don't see. How to nurture this skill in your primary schooler?

If the answer doesn't appear straight away, encourage your six-year-old to open up his/her mind to alternative solutions. By doing this, you're promoting cognitive flexibility in your child, or the ability to switch between thinking about two different concepts. At the same time, your little one learns how to generate new ideas while being open to suggestions from other people. Once you teach your child this lesson, he/she will carry this approach in life to be flexible in the face of adversity.

Another way to encourage this trait in your six-year-old is to answer his/her questions with a question. This compels your child to think more deeply about the "problem" and logically deduce an answer.

Here are some simple ways to do this:

- Ask why, what, and how: "Why do you feel that way?" "What do you think is happening here?" "How would you solve this problem?"
- Ask for clarification: "Can you say what you mean by...?"
- Ask for more: "Can you say more about that?"
- Ask for an example: "Can you give me an example?" "Show me what you meant by that"

Understand your child's responses and respect them, whether you view them as correct or not.

7. Help your seven-year-old to be accountable for their actions

Disciplining children is part and parcel of parenting. However, instead of blindly doling out timeouts for your seven-year-old child's inappropriate behaviour, help him/her understand why this behaviour is not acceptable.

Crucially, teach your seven-year-old the importance of taking responsibility for his/her mistakes, and how to fix them. The focus is on humility and being willing to accept mistakes and learn from them.

Mums and dads, start nurturing these qualities of a well-rounded person in your child today, knowing you're well on the way to raising an exceptional child.

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