



The Family Toolbox

Tools for Parenting – Tools for Living

When you put your children to bed at night, do you think about whether they are stronger people because of the things you have said or done that day? Do you ask yourself if your words and actions make them stronger?

~ Adapted from Brooks & Goldstein, *Raising resilient children*

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D O V E T A I L
L E A R N I N G

The Task of Parenting

Helping your child locate and learn to use his/her Inner Tools to navigate the complexities of the world in which they live.

All parents want their kids to be happy, healthy and successful. Parenting is preparing your child to be resilient in the face of a complex world.

I like to think of my love for my children as the “slack net” spread beneath a performing aerialist. I hope that they will climb as high as they might go, secure in the knowledge of having support. It is frightening to know that pulling the corners too tight could send them bouncing off into oblivion and leaving the knots too loose might plunge them into certain disaster . . .

~ By Helen Claes (modified by Mark Collin)

A Healthy Parent:

1. Learns to love “tight enough” to keep your child safe and “loose enough” to allow your child to grow and thrive.
2. Understands that it is okay and normal to be a parent who makes mistakes (the “good enough” parent). This way we realize that trying to be a “perfect” parent simply feeds negative self-judgment.
3. Knows the importance of separating the “child” from the “mis-behavior.” This let’s us love unconditionally even when mistakes have occurred.
4. Helps his/her child access their inner compass to go within to find the solutions.
5. Remembers that the child has an underlying need:
 - To belong, to contribute, to be accepted
 - To push you away and pull you in at the same time
 - For safety and independence, as well as interdependence
 - For firm parental boundaries and a need for personal freedom
 - To learn natural consequences of behaviors (punishment does not teach a child how to learn from a mistake)



T O O L B O X

Parenting Principles

1. **It is our task as parents to be the “safety net” for our children.** *This includes loving them unconditionally and teaching about boundaries with positive discipline.*
2. **Becoming an engaged parent requires a willingness to be self-aware and to develop a self-reflective, non-judgmental consciousness.** *Parents need a daily practice of observing ourselves, taking inventory, to separate our reactions from the “true” needs of our children.*
3. **Parents have embodied within them the seeds of a healthy and nurturing parenting experience.** *Regardless of our past experiences or current circumstances, at the core of every parent there is an innate felt-sense of wellbeing, wholeness and goodness.*
4. **As Parents we must model and practice the behaviors we desire in return.** *Children live what they learn. Children are watching us. Children put their trust in us.*
5. **When parents use their Inner Tools, they are able to model emotional intelligence and are more able to help their children have the same.** *As parents or caretakers of children, it is our responsibility to use the tools, which provides a common language and a framework for this wholeness and goodness to thrive.*
6. **As parents, we work to understand how our family of origin experience influences our feelings, thoughts and reactions to our children’s behaviors and needs.** *I work to understand how I project my inner condition onto my outer circumstances and commit to learning how to work with these “filters” of past experience. Understanding projection is essential.*
7. **We do not have to be the ‘perfect parent’ but simply a ‘good enough’ parent.** *Parenting is an evolutionary process, and there are no short-cuts. We see the building of a family and the parenting process, with all of its inherent paradoxes, as an opportunity to practice and learn about parenting, commitment, and service.*
8. **As parents we see the inevitability of conflict or opposing desires as an opportunity to build intimacy and develop our differentiation.** *As parents we are committed to non-violence through self-control and self-discipline.*



The 12 Parenting Tools

Breathing:

I can take a breath. I calm myself.

Quiet/Safe Place:

There is *always* my inner quiet/safe place.

Listening:

I listen with my eyes, my ears and my heart.

Empathy:

I care for my child. I care for myself.

Personal Space:

I have a right to my space. Children have a need for their space.

Using Our Words:

I ask for what I want and need. I am a problem solver.

Garbage Can:

I let the little things go.

Taking Time:

I use time wisely by checking in with myself.

Please and Thank You:

I treat my child with kindness, appreciation, and gratitude.

Apology and Forgiveness:

I admit my mis-takes. I accept that children make mistakes, too.

Patience:

I am strong enough to wait.

Courage:

I have the courage to do the 'right' thing.



The Twelve Tools

Tools for learning, tools for life

1. **Breathing Tool:** *I can take a breath—I calm myself.*

Awareness of breathing brings immediate calm and time to think. It is a bridge to self-reflection that guides one toward effective choices and positive change. Cultures across the world have recognized the breath as a gateway to wisdom. Without the healthy ability to achieve inner-calm and self-reflection, it is difficult to learn, to relate with others or know oneself. Attention to breathing is the key to self-control, understanding, and genuine connection with others.

Breath is life, and if you breathe well you will live well. ~ Ancient proverb

2. **Quiet/Safe Place Tool:** *I remember my quiet/safe place.*

Quietness gives one strength. When we have a “place” of solace, safety and quiet—then creativity, imagination and self-expression emerge naturally. One way to feel safe is when we have a quiet, safe place—physically. The Quiet/Safe Place Tool is a way of remembering one’s quiet stillness. When we listen from the quiet place within our heart we make space to hear our natural wisdom.

3. **Listening Tool:** *I listen with my eyes, ears and heart.*

Listening with ones heart is the key to strong relationships and conflict resolution. Listening with one’s heart brings empathy. This is most important. When we listen, the rest of the tools work easily. This ability to listen is naturally within each person. When we breathe from a quiet place inside, then listening become easier.

4. **Empathy Tool:** *I care for others, I care for myself.*

Empathy is noticing how another person is feeling and being able to understand what they must be feeling. Empathy is caring about someone else. Empathy is the root of tolerance, kindness and forgiveness. Turned inward, this becomes care and understanding for oneself.

5. **Personal Space Tool:** *I have a right to my space and so do you.*

We all have an indelible right to our personal space and the responsibility to give others the same right. Noticing the physical space around us helps us see our own needs and those of others. In addition, this Tool also encompasses intelligence through awareness of our body wisdom: body language, sensations, gestures, position, posture, voice tone, quality and volume.

6. **Using Our Words Tool:** *I ask for what I want and need.*

Careful use of words encourages understanding, connection and intimacy. We start in kindergarten by using our stop sign (arm outstretched, hand up): “Please stop, I don’t like that” This is our first “I” statement. By learning the importance of feelings, and how they inform what needs to be said, “using our words” helps us with conflict resolution. This is a skill we must learn. Using the right words, in the right way, at the right time, for the right reasons creates deep connection. Using our words tool requires practice, practice and more practice.

“Careless words make people love you less.” – A. Roy

7. Garbage Can Tool: *I let the little things go.*

We do not have to take unkind words personally (into our personal space). We can take responsibility for what we do with other people's words and actions, and how we feel about them. Sometimes the best choice is to throw harmful words away. Sometimes we need to listen more carefully to what is behind the words. This tool has its origins in the martial art of Aikido, The Art of Peaceful Reconciliation. This is one of the younger children's favorites.

Don't take anything personally ~ Don Miguel Ruiz

8. Taking Time Tool: *I use time wisely.*

There are many useful ways to use time intelligently for one's well-being and the well-being of others. When we choose how to use our time we can be more effective. Stepping back and taking *time-away* renews our resiliency. Taking *time-in* (within oneself) to self-reflect leads to better self-understanding and more authentic connections to others.

9. Please and Thank You Tool: *I treat others with kindness and appreciation.*

Please and Thank You are the "magic words" that make people feel good. Expressing gratitude and giving thanks are basic principles of kindness and generosity. This opens the doorway to intimacy and caring relationships. If added politely to a request, the word "please" encourages others to want to be helpful and kind. Saying thank you lets people know you value them. These simple words create warm connections with others.

10. Apology and Forgiveness Tool: *I admit my mistakes and work to forgive others.*

A sincere apology opens the door to self-responsibility and forgiveness. It takes self-esteem and inner strength to admit a mistake and do the right thing. Using the Apology Tool is a giant leap towards maturity. Forgiveness takes equal strength. It requires letting go of anger and judgment. It does not mean we have to forget, but there must be a willingness to forgive. If we are still holding the hot ember of anger, resentment, or hatred, we are the one still getting burned.

11. Patience Tool: *I am strong enough to wait.*

Patience is the ability to wait quietly. Patience comes with our capacity for tolerating situations that are not in our control. Children learn patience when we model it—if patience is not modeled, children can learn to be impatient, demanding and impulsive.

Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

12. Courage Tool: *I have the courage to do the "right" thing.*

Courage is having inner strength and bravery to do the 'right thing', even when it is difficult. When we feel troubled by our own or others behaviors, it takes courage to use our tools. Helping children to have courage lets them explore the unfamiliar. Courage, in Latin 'couer' means to act with "heart." Acting with courage is empowering.

"Courage is grace under pressure." –Ernest Hemingway