

Hand-out for Parents

YOUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

ONCE CHILDREN START going to school, their world changes. They start spending more time away from you, and they are more influenced by friends and teachers. So their needs, and your parenting role, also change. Here are some key ideas for parenting your school-age child.

Play – especially free play – is important

Compared to past generations, today's children spend more time playing electronic games and watching TV, and more of their activities are organized by adults. But free, unstructured play is very important; it helps children:

- Learn how to make decisions
- Learn how to get along with others
- Recover from stress
- Develop skills
- Experience joy

So try to give your child an opportunity to play every day, if possible.

Encourage independence

During the elementary school years, children want more independence and they need to start learning how to handle it.

- Let your child make age-appropriate choices.
- Give your child chances to think and to solve his own problems, instead of always providing instant solutions.
- Show your child how to be increasingly independent in a safe and responsible way.

Be stress aware

Research shows that today's children have higher levels of stress than in the past. Parents have an important role to play in helping children deal with stress.

When your child is upset or misbehaving, try to develop the habit of asking yourself, "Why is my child acting like this? Could it be stress?"

If you can figure out what is stressing your child, deal with that first before turning to discipline. Children



under stress are much less able to control themselves, listen well, accept consequences or learn.

Keep connecting

As children mature and spend more time away from us, we may need to work harder to keep a strong connection:

- Be ready to listen when she is ready to talk.
- Show an interest in your child's interests and concerns.
- Show your child that you like her and enjoy her company. We spend a lot of time telling, reminding and criticizing. Talk about her positive qualities, too.

Teach negotiation and conflict skills

Start now to develop the negotiation and conflict skills you will both need during the teen years:

- Don't forget to listen as well as talk.
- Use short phrases when reminding your child. Say, "Cassie, boots," rather than "Cassie, if I have to tell you one more time to put away your boots I'll..."
- Let your children "win" sometimes, when they have negotiated well (and politely) and can show you they have a good plan.
- When the issue is not negotiable, offer your child alternatives. "You have to do your homework, but you can either do it now or right after supper."
- Try to respond to your child's behaviour in ways that don't promote conflict. Be willing to negotiate – but remember, you're still the parent.