



BIG FIVE Parenting Skill #1:

Encouraging kids to be brave

Lions are queens & kings of the jungle because they are at the top of the food chain. They have no predators (apart from man) so they lie around seemingly with immunity.

I've always considered encouragement as the king of parenting skills, for the simple reason that if you can be a real encourager then everything else tends to fall into place. Encouraged kids are less likely to misbehave. Kids who experience real encouragement are more likely to take (sensible) risks as learners and make the most of the opportunities open to them. They are also less susceptible to peer pressure as parents who understand how encouragement works are less likely to make kids reliant on them for approval.

Encouragement derives from the French term meaning 'to give heart', which pretty much describes what true encouragement is about!

All parents want their kids to develop a strong sense of self-confidence. Many parents use praise as their primary confidence-building technique, but encouragement is a much better strategy to boost kids' confidence.

Encouragement is a more powerful confidence-building tool than praise and it doesn't have the adverse side effects of demotivating kids or promoting sibling rivalry. The differences between the two are slim but important.

Encouragement focuses on the processes of what a child does whereas praise focuses on the end result of his or her activities.

Here are five ways to encourage your child:

1. **Focus on improvement in any skill:** "You really have picked up on your reading." You can always point out improvement no matter how small.
2. **Highlight their efforts** "I can see you really tried hard to get it right." Make sure you highlight real effort, and don't elevate lack of effort to anything more than what it is.
3. **Comment on their contribution:** "I really appreciate your help with cleaning the house. It makes my job easier." Kids like to know when they're appreciated.
4. **Focus on enjoyment they get from an activity:** "It's great to see you enjoying your jazz ballet." Highlighting fun and enjoyment is great when you want to remove the focus from the scoreboard.
5. **Show your confidence:** "I know you can do this. You've tackled hard stuff like this in the past, and you can do it again." Communicate your confidence through your words, as well as your actions.

How many of these encouragement statements do you regularly use? If you aren't a natural encourager then pick one of these statement types and challenge yourself to use it at least five times a day for a week.

If you do this encouragement will become automatic in no time. Go on, you can do it!



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BIG FIVE Parenting Skill #2:

Teaching kids to behave well

Elephants are the second of the BIG FIVE wild animals. They're valued for their ivory and they're impossible to ignore, when you come across them (usually in herds of up to 30). They are big and so impressive!

Similarly, kids' behaviour is impossible to ignore... particularly if it's poor behaviour. Parents generally feel badly, when their kids behave poorly and family-life can be hard to enjoy. Now I'm talking about occasional poor behaviour when kids such as when kids are tired & whiny; or developmental poor behaviour where kids are wearing L plates and test out your boundaries, as well as your patience. That's part of being a kid!

Generally, it's the job of parents to make our kids social and safe. That means, they need to learn to behave well (most of the time) around others, or at least they try to. Learning to behave well takes time for some kids so you have to work harder with some kids than others.

Effective parents understand that they need to be the bad guy at times, and they have a range of strategies at their disposal to teach kids to behave well.

Here are five practical ways to teach your kids to behave well:

1. **Teach kids good manners:** Manners is respect in action, and guides kids into appropriate responses in social situations.
2. **Catch kids doing the right thing:** Most kids want to please their parents so make sure your face lights up and your voice gets excited when they've behaved well.
3. **Be a good role model:** Kids learn what they live! Most social learning occurs through modelling so make sure your kids hear you speak and act in appropriate ways when you interact with them and others.
4. **Practise social behaviours at home:** Want kids to behave well in a restaurant? Then you need to practise social eating habits around the kitchen table. The same principle applies for a range of other social behaviours.
5. **Use consequences when kids behave poorly:** The link between children's rights & their social responsibilities is reinforced when parents implement (or display a willingness) to put a respectful, reasonable and related consequence into action. Less talk and more action is the key here!

Okay, teaching kids to behave well is actually a range of skills, rather than just one skill. I thought it was so fundamental to effective parenting that I gave it a category on its own.



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BIG FIVE Parenting Skill #3:

Hooking kids onto learning

Buffaloes are the third of the BIG Five African animals. Like many hoofed animals they are basic to the survival of many other species such as lions and some other cats. They are basic building blocks as it were in the African eco-system.

Thankfully, they can be still be found in large numbers.

Similarly, parent attitude to learning is a basic block for children's success at school. It helps to hook kids into learning at a young age.

New research from the Australian Council for Educational Research has found that students hook onto the notion of going to university in primary school. While I'm not advocating that school success necessarily equates to a tertiary education, this study shows how early children establish their own educational goals and expectations.

If a successful school journey starts at home then what are the most important steps for bringing out the best in your child?

Here are five ideas to help your kids become great learners:

1. **Become involved and interested in your child's pre-school or school life:** One of the predictors for children's success at school is their parents' level of engagement in their school. You can become engaged by attending school meetings & functions, reading newsletters, forming a relationship with your child's teacher and supporting school activities at home.
2. **Read with your children:** As literacy holds the key to almost all learning the single most important, practical thing you can do to assist your child as a learner is to establish a reading household where kids see you reading; kids are read to; and kids read.
3. **Take a real interest in learning:** You want your kids to be life-long learners as they will need to keep learning well after they've left school. Foster learning and curiosity by asking interesting questions, holding conversations, taking them to interesting places, and modelling by learning new things yourself.
4. **Build self-confidence:** Kids with well-developed independence, social skills (link to Friendships ebook), organisational skills (link to Organising ebook) and resilience (link to Resilience resources) will thrive in the classroom. Shape the emotional environment for your kids to their maximise success by treating their mistakes as learning opportunities, giving them plenty of positive feedback and helping them identify what they're good at.
5. **Create a home study space & a routine:** When kids start school make sure you establish a place to hear them read and also a time for reading. These space & routine concepts will change over time as kids develop different interests and their homework demands expand but it really helps to be thinking about them early in your child's learning life.

There are plenty more ways you can help your kids hook into learning. For more idea check out my article [Help your child Achieve this year](#) on my blog. I think the concept of developing kids as learners is a really important one, and this certainly at home



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BIG FIVE Parenting Skill # 4:

Speaking so kids will listen

The leopard is the fourth of the BIG Five African animals, and one of the smartest. While it often finds and kills its prey out in the open, it will always drag its kill up into a tree to eat it.

The leopard knows it's vulnerable out in the open so it chooses the safest place possible to eat.

Communication is one the most important skills a parent can have. But like the leopard, parents need to consider the **best place possible to make sure kids listen**.

Here are five great ways to make sure communication works for you at home.

1. **Talk on their turf:** If you want to be heard by your kids think carefully where you deliver your message. Many kids will open up in the privacy of their own bedroom or while you are driving in the car. Choose a time and place to speak when kids are more likely to listen. Read my blog for more ideas about this. ([link to The Place Matters on my blog](#)).
2. **Put processes in place to ensure kids communicate:** When I first researched effective families over 20 years ago I discovered that parents with the most harmonious families had processes in place that encouraged communication. These ranged from family mealtimes through to more formal family meetings. Whatever methods you choose, you do need to have some processes in place that bring kids and adults together so you talk.
3. **Ask good questions:** If you have conversational clams in your family you need to ask good, open questions beyond "How was school today?" to get them to open up a little. Use open questions "What's different about your new teacher from your previous teacher?" or directed questions "What's the best thing that happened at school today?" to get some chat happening
4. **Listen up, don't parent down:** Listen more than you speak and learn to bite your tongue Nothing shuts kids down more than parents who always want to give advice.
5. **Try shoulder-to-shoulder parenting:** Some boys (and girls) communicate better when eye contact is removed. That's why cars can be great places to talk with some kids. If it's hard to strike up a chat with your child then try doing something together, which removes the need for eye contact and takes the focus away from the chat.



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BIG FIVE Parenting Skill # 5:

Teaching kids coping skills

The rhino is the last and rarest of the BIG FIVE African animals. The rhino with the support of conservationists around the world has proven to be a resilient species, as it's been driven to the edge of extinction in recent years.

Fortunately, the decline in rhino numbers has been halted, making a small but significant rise.

Like the rhino, there are times when kids need to bounce back. But they do need the support of adults who can teach them how to cope when life throws them curve balls. Helping kids cope is one of the big five skill sets parents need if they are to maintain kids' mental health in this modern, sometimes difficult world.

Here are my favourite five coping skills.

1. **See the funny side of a situation:** Humour is THE great coping strategy. It reduces stress and heightens feelings of control.
2. **Park their bad thoughts somewhere:** The ability to compartmentalise your life and keep bad events from impacting on all areas is a powerful coping skill. "Don't let this wreck your day" is an important message to get across to kids.
3. **Let's talk about it:** A problem shared is a problem halved. Resilient kids seek solace in the company of others, when they experience difficulty. That's why social connection is so important for kids.
4. **Keep your perspective:** Some kids catastrophise ("this is the worst thing to happen to me.....ever") and others will personalise ("it's my fault that I have no friends") when bad stuff happens. These types of reactions exaggerate anxiety. One way kids can keep a sense of proportion is to ask them to identify their problem or difficulty on a disaster scale of 1 to 10. Another is to wind back their language.
5. **Set a goal or two:** Help kids look ahead rather than backwards when bad stuff happens. "Let's take the first step" can have a powerful impact on a child or young person when life doesn't go their way.



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Final words

I hope you found this BIG Five Parenting skill series useful.

Here's a quick recap of the BIG FIVE skills and their links to the African BIG FIVE.

Parenting skill #1: **Encouraging kids to be brave**

(The lion is the king of the jungle & encouragement is the king of parenting skills.)

Parenting skill #2: **Teaching Kids to Behave well**

(Just as an elephant is hard to ignore, you can't ignore poor behaviour.)

Parenting skill #3: **Hooking Kids into Learning**

(Just as the buffalo is basic to the survival of all species, a parent's attitude is the building block to successful learning)

Parenting skill #4: **Speaking so kids will listen**

(Just as the leopard chooses where to eat its prey parents need to think carefully where and how they are to speak if they want kids to listen.)

Parenting skill #5: **Teaching kids coping skills**

(Like the rhino kids need to be able to bounce back in this sometimes difficult world.)

Stay in touch and learn!

Four great ways to stay in touch & get more ideas from Michael Grose to help you bring out the BEST in your kids:



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