One of the remarkable things about humans is that a husband and wife will endure the pain of child delivery followed by months of sleepless nights, fighting through an onslaught of bodily fluids and putrid smells while caring for a human whose sole means of communication is screaming at the top of its lungs. They’ll then look at one another a year later and say, “Honey, we should do that all over again.”

Ah, yes…parenting. There’s nothing quite like it, and we all want to do it the best we can. To that end, we sat down with Village Employee Assistance Program Counselor Andi Wheeler to get some tips to help you improve your parenting skills.

1. **Practice what you preach** — If we tell our kids not to yell or talk ugly to one another, for example, but we’re always raising our voice and losing our temper when we have a disagreement with our spouse, we’re really undermining our own parenting.

   The old line “Do as I say, not as I do” may sometimes be our wish as parents, but, in reality, it doesn’t work very well.

**Parenting, on Back**

Q: My child has been putting themselves down and making negative comments about themselves. At what point should I be concerned? How do I help them value themselves and develop self-respect?

A: Each stage of a child’s development seems to bring with it a new concern or worry for a parent. (Remember potty training? Or their first day of school?) Worrying about a child is normal, but how might a parent respond when faced with these concerns?

   Support positive thought patterns in your child. Consider this: How do you describe yourself? When you are sincerely complimented, do you deflect the praise as undeserved or untrue in some way? Practice accepting praise from others graciously (“Thank you. Those are such kind words!”), being proud of your strengths, and reframing areas where you hope to gain strength as “growth areas.” Set an example of positive self-image and practice acceptance of yourself and of the “gray areas” in your life. So often we talk negatively about our bodies and focus on the need to lose weight, without recognizing the wonderful things our bodies allow us to do ably each day (walk, talk, hug our kids, make a meal, etc.).

   Practice recognizing your child’s strengths and positive attributes, and say them aloud. You, as a parent, can shine light on the child’s strengths and remind them they will use those strengths to...
Parenting, From Front

“You’re a role model for your kids,” Wheeler says. “They’re always watching you and learning from you.”

That can seem daunting, but, parenting isn’t for wimps.

2. Be consistent – Whether we’re talking about bedtime, punishments/rewards, daily schedules, or whatever, consistency helps kids know what to expect, and that helps kids thrive,” Wheeler says.

Consistency provides a child with a sense of safety in which they know what to expect and what consequences (good, bad, or otherwise) follow what actions.

“It helps build trust,” Wheeler says.

Consistency is an important part of discipline. If a child is aware that a given behavior will result in an unpleasant consequence every time, they’re less likely to engage in that behavior than if they think they might get away with it this time.

3. Rethink “bad behavior” – Wheeler says that sometimes bad behavior (lashing out at a sibling, for example) is – well, just that – bad behavior. But she also says it can be a signal that there’s more going on beneath the surface and can result from a child not knowing how to react to what they’re feeling or experiencing inside.

Of course, the behavior itself may need to be addressed for its own sake, but you don’t want to ignore what may be behind it, Wheeler says. It could be a problem at school, an argument with a friend, or maybe they just need a little more attention.

“Part of a parent’s job is helping kids learn how to regulate themselves and express themselves in healthy ways,” she says.

4. Know your kids and trust yourself – Wheeler says some parents are scared to trust themselves when it comes to parenting. In the media-saturated world we live in, there’s always an online article or Facebook post about how you’re “supposed” to do things. And while it can be helpful to study up, Wheeler reminds parents that they know their kids better than anyone else, so they shouldn’t be afraid to trust their instincts about what’s good for them, within proper bounds, of course.

And the better you know your child, the more likely those instincts are to be correct. So it’s important to spend time with them talking, listening, and just enjoying one another. When you know what’s typical for your child, you’re in a much better position to notice when some unusual behavior arises.

5. Take care of yourself – Many people tend to take care of others while neglecting to take care of themselves, Wheeler says. “How can you really be your best self for other people if you don’t take care of yourself?”

An exhausted and emotionally frazzled parent probably isn’t going to be the most understanding and involved parent. Finding time to relax, eat well, exercise, and rest properly, are all part of self-care.

6. Allow yourself to be imperfect – We all want to be great parents and raise healthy, happy children. That’s as it should be. But we can also fall into the trap of trying to be a perfect parent. Moms and dads make mistakes too, and being able to move on after you mess up (even at a job as important as raising your kids) is crucial.

Those times when we mess up as parents can also be wonderful teaching moments. They provide parents with opportunities to apologize to one another or to the children, and, by doing so, set an example for them. What’s more, when we mess up and are able to move on, it teaches children that mistakes and bad decisions aren’t the end of the world.

“It sets a tone that it’s okay to mess up,” Wheeler says.

And that’s a lesson that will serve them well all their lives!