

If Raising Kids Came with an Instruction Manual

1. Play- Play is a child's work, with benefits far beyond the obvious one: fun!

The brains of children who lack a stimulating environment and who don't play much or are rarely touched are 20-30% smaller than normal for their age.

Play teaches communication, cooperation

Play helps a child express feelings, develop empathy and cope with difficult situations.

Play prepares a child for school.

2. Read- Read or tell stories together every day, starting at birth!

Talk to your child about what you see around you and what you are doing.

The more you speak, the more you build your child's vocabulary.

Sing songs and nursery rhymes over and over again.

3. Talk- Talk early and often!

Let your child watch your face and mouth as you speak. Diaper changing, feeding, and bathing times provide ideal talking moments.

Ask questions. Encourage your child to tell you more about her ideas and feelings. Be sure to listen and respond to her questions too.

As your child's vocabulary grows, remember to repeat what she says and change your child's words and phrases into sentences.

4. Hug, hold & snuggle- Helping your child feel safe and secure is the key to encouraging growth and development.

Touching, rocking, talking, smiling, and singing affect the way a child's brain is wired and help to shape later learning and behavior.

A child who feels loved will have an easier time learning about the world around her. Therefore, make sure you interact with your child, providing love and affection.

5. Brush teeth- Brush twice a day- everyday.

As soon as the first tooth appears, begin cleaning it with a soft brush or wipe with a cloth.

Don't send a bottle or cup to bed with babies & toddlers.

Visit the dentist at least twice a year for a good cleaning and prevention of future problems.

6. Eat healthy meals together- You create close bonds and fun memories around the family table.

Set a regular family mealtime and try to enjoy at least one family meal together each week.

Family meals can teach your child about healthful eating.

Family mealtimes have been associated with reduced risk for substance abuse, promotion of language development, school success and reduced risk for pediatric obesity.

7. Create a routine- Children thrive on repetition and predictability.

Perform certain activities, such as mealtime and bedtime, in the same way every day; your child will feel a sense of comfort and security.

Routines for arrival and departure, such as creating a special sign or phrase for saying goodbye at child care, can help your child move through transitions more easily and calmly.

Although routines need to be consistent, they should also be somewhat flexible. Rather than being rigid, they need to evolve with the changing needs of the child and the family. As the child grows and changes, so should the routines.

8. Choose healthy people & healthy relationships- A mentally & physically healthy family is the best gift to give a child.

A happier you creates a calm, steady environment — ideal for building stable and loving relationships.

Successful parents focus on solutions to problems, not the problems. They accept and handle their feelings of anger in positive, nonviolent ways.

Focus on teaching children, not punishing them. Establish rules children can obey.

9. Safe & healthy- Set up a safe space for your child; you will feel more relaxed, and your child will feel secure to explore.

Remove potential hazards. Get down on her level to look under furniture and in bottom cabinets. Pay attention to sharp corners, hanging cords, fireplaces, windows, and tabletops.

Use car seats, boosters and seatbelts as recommended by authorities in your state.

Regular visits to a health care provider help your child stay healthy and keep her learning on track

10. Choose quality care- Quality child care can enrich a child's early experiences and provide much needed support to your family.

Licensed care adheres to safety and health standards, some training, and minimal staffing. Accreditation attests to higher standards of training, staffing, and learning environments.

Smaller groups with more adults enable more time, attention, and care given for your child.

Healthy snacks, hand washing routines, fenced-in outdoor play areas, alert adults, no small/broken items, covered plug-ins, etc., contribute to a safe, healthy environment.

Warm, responsive care. Adults, who listen and interact with kindness, respond to a child's interests, and expand on experiences build a caring place which is vital to learning.

Be sure to get references.