

# Raising Positive Kids

## Use These Simple Strategies to Free Your Kids From the Negative Behaviors That Drive You Crazy

by Mimi Plevin-Foust

“I’m bored.” “I’m tired.” “My feet hurt; I can’t walk anymore.” Their three sons’ all too frequent complaints through dinners, car rides and family outings, were leading Brent and Laura Merritt to wonder why they had started a family in the first place. The usual parental warnings and time-outs were just not working. How could they shift their boys to more positive behavior that would help them not just through childhood but for the rest of their lives?

If, like the Merritts, you’ve ever felt desperate about getting your kids to stop complaining, blaming and putting down themselves and others, don’t give up: You *can* help your children learn more positive attitudes and behaviors using these proven strategies.

### SET THE EXAMPLE

You may be tired of hearing it, but modeling *is* the most powerful tool parents have, says Judith Grant, Author of *Positive Living*. Do you ever notice yourself acting like a victim, criticizing or blaming when you and your co-worker or sibling don’t see eye to eye? Don’t be surprised to find that your children will likely do the same.

When you adjust your perspective to recognize that everyone is always doing their best, given their circumstances, and that each situation is an opportunity to learn, you will be imprinting your children with positive ways to react when they face their own challenges, says Grant.

### REFRAME THE PICTURE

Are your children constantly putting down others? Try reframing their perspective with these compassion-building statements used by mom Sara McCall of Columbus, Ohio, “If you’re good at something without trying so hard, it’s just the way you’re made. If someone who tries hard at something is not as good, it’s just the way they’re made.” When McCall’s daughter Ruby downgrades her own abilities, McCall tells her, “There’s no shame in being who or how you are. Just practice and do your best, and you’ll do better.”

Should put-downs or other unkind behavior persist, rather than harshly demanding, ‘How would you feel if your friend did that to you?’, Charlotte Jones, Author of *Healing Our Children*, suggests gently wondering aloud to your child, “Gosh, I’m wondering what it would be like if Tina had a birthday party and you didn’t get invited. How would that feel...?” By not making your child feel defensive, she will be more open to imagining someone else’s feelings, building her ‘empathy muscles’ with each effort.

## **TAKE THE LONG VIEW**

Every parent gets discouraged at times. But if we believe our kids can't change, we fall into the same traps they're stuck in, warns child psychologist Tamara Chang. Instead, choose to see your child's negative behavior as temporary and situation-specific.

That perspective allowed Brent and Laura Merritt to realize their boys' complaining did not mean their sons were hopeless brats. Instead of time-outs, the Merritts began insisting that for every complaint, their sons say or write two things they were grateful for. Replacing 'complaining with thanksgiving' has improved family life considerably. And that is something any parent can be thankful for.