



## EPRESS

### Questions from Directors

*We have a family that has been visiting for several months, and recently we have started to realize that the children are aggressive with each other. I think we've focused so much on the parenting that we lost sight of the kids' relationships. We didn't include any notes on their behavior in the past – can we do that now? One monitor says she saw the oldest child yelling at the youngest, but that incident never made it to the visit notes. The parents have each been to counseling, but the kids have not. We don't want the parents to blame us for the problems, and they are a high conflict couple. But we must have missed some things. Where do we go from here?*

First, please start putting notes in the files at the very next visit when you observe problematic behavior. It's also important for the parents to take notice of the behaviors, so you will likely have to point them out to the parents. To do this, I suggest a meeting with each parent to review specific behavior. Remember not to blame the parents for the behavior. Focus on positive ways to redirect the children, and help the parents develop a plan for addressing the behavior. In the past, researchers did not pay as much attention to sibling relationships, but more recent research indicates that sibling aggression can result in both short and long term psychological and social issues problems. I also suggest that you add a clarifying document to the file that indicates that you are noticing problems now and that some staff members indicate that they did notice the behavior in the past, but didn't write anything down about it. Do not go back and add notes to the observation documents – this will look like you are trying to change what you wrote in the past and could cause confusion. The children's behavior could come from a variety of sources, including the children trying to get the parent's

attention. Thus, it may be that the parents need to learn how to manage their children at the same time, or it may be that the children simply need more contact with their parents. It could be both, or it could be something deeper. At this point, I would also recommend that the children be evaluated by a mental health professional if the behavior continues.

*I made an appointment for a visit with a client, and he didn't show up. We have indicated a "no show" on his file, and now he says we never made the appointment. He says I can't "prove" that he had an appointment, so I can't count his time as a "no show." I have the court order and referral, and he called and made the appointment. We saved that time for him. How do I accurately reflect what happened? Even if I had handed him a card with the appointment on it, he could have claimed he never got it. I'm upset because he's not telling the truth.*

You should document all of the contact you have with a client. You can do that by creating some type of case note that goes in every file.

### **RECORD OF Administrative-Parent Contact**

<b>CASE NAME:</b>	
-------------------	--

**CODE:**

**Intake** [Intake]    **SI** [ Scheduling Issues (*Scheduling, cancellations, make-ups, etc*) ]    **OR** [Program Overview/Informational Request]

**C** [Complaint]    **O** [Other]

Date	Employee's Initials	Code	Description of conversation (Note by phone, in person, by proxy, by email, etc.) Attach copies of any records.
April 25, 2015	KO	SI	I called Mr. Jones and confirmed that he would be coming to the program to visit with Johnny on Saturday, May 2, 2015 from 3-5 pm.


While it is true that the client can still argue that the conversation never happened, your fine reputation as a supervised visitation program director will likely convince others of your honesty. This client, however, should be handled differently in the future: I would recommend that you receive an email confirmation of future visits.

[Just in Time for Mother's Day: Remember to Print Out and Hand Out!](#)

[http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/10\\_Things\\_Parents\\_Do\\_Great.pdf](http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/10_Things_Parents_Do_Great.pdf)

# Preparing a Child for a New Baby

By Kayla Kirk

## Introduction

A new baby can have a large impact on a family. It can especially be difficult for older children who are becoming a sibling for the first time. A lot of energy is spent by the family on preparations for the new baby, the arrival, and meeting the baby's basic needs. The family dynamics shift and the older child will no longer be the center of attention. It is common for the older sibling to feel jealous and react by acting out. As a supervised visitation monitor, you can share with parents how they can prepare their older child for a new baby and give ways they can help him or her adjust.



Included in this E-Press:

- How to prepare a child for a new baby
- How to introduce a child to a new baby
- How to help the older child adjust
- Setting aside special time for the older child
- Watching and listening to the older child's feelings about the baby

## Preparing a Child for a New Baby

It may seem overwhelming for parents to prepare for a new baby while preparing their older child as well. The most important first step is to tell the older child a new baby is coming. This information should come straight from his or her parents and not from friends or other relatives. Parents should sound excited as they announce to their child



a new member of the family is coming. Parents can explain the addition of a new child in the following ways:

- The mother showing her growing abdomen

- Using books to explain what the baby will be like when he or she arrives and what being an older brother or sister means
- Showing photos or videos of the older child as a baby
- Explaining that the new baby will eat, sleep, and cry most of the time when the baby first arrives

Older children may ask a lot of questions about the new baby. As a monitor, tell parents that they should be honest and try to answer all of their child's questions in an age-appropriate way. The child's questions should act as a guide to how many details a parent should give about the pregnancy and the new baby. Once the older child understands that a new baby is on its way, parents can include the child in preparations for the baby. The older child can be included in the following arrangements:

- Helping pick out the new baby's name
- Collecting baby supplies
- Setting up the nursery
- Accompanying the mother to prenatal visits so he or she can see the ultrasound and listen to the baby's heartbeat
- Playing with a doll or stuffed animal so he or she can see how to care for a "baby"

In addition, parents should minimize stress for their older child. If the child needs to be moved into a new room, transition into a bed from a crib, or be potty trained, parents should do these well in advance of the baby's birth. If this is not possible, it is better to make these changes several months after the new baby arrives so that the older child does not associate the baby with a loss of familiarity and comfort.

Another suggestion you as a monitor can give parents is to enroll a child into a sibling birth class. Many hospitals have these, and they can provide an orientation for soon-to-be brothers and sisters. Children will learn how to hold a baby, receive an explanation of birth, and be given the opportunity to discuss their feelings about the new baby's arrival.

Lastly, parents should arrange childcare during the time they spend at the hospital or birth center. The older child should be told of these arrangements so



that he or she is prepared and ready to meet the new baby.

## Introducing a Child to the Baby

Once the baby has been born, introducing the older child to the baby is very important. Parents should make the introduction fun for the older sibling. Suggestions you as a monitor can give to parents include:

- Have the older child briefly visit the baby at the hospital or birth center when no other visitors are there so can be an intimate family moment
- Give the older child a gift such as a shirt that says “Big Brother” or “Big Sister”
- Have the child and baby exchange gifts



- Have a small family party when the baby arrives home

It is also important that when friends or family come to meet the new baby, they also acknowledge the older child. Parents should let visitors talk to the older child. If friends or family bring gifts for the baby, it is a good idea to have gifts set aside for the older child so that he or she does not become jealous or feel in competition with the baby.

## How to Help an Older Child Adjust

An older child’s age and development will affect how he or she reacts to having a new sibling. Older children are typically eager to meet and help with a new baby, while younger children might be confused or upset.

- **Younger than 2:** Children at this age won’t likely understand yet what it means to have a sibling. Parents should talk in-depth to these children and look at picture books with them about babies and families.
- **2 to 4:** Children at this age might feel uncomfortable sharing attention with a new baby. Parents should explain that the new baby will need lots of attention, but eventually will be able to play with the older child. Parents can encourage the involvement of the older child by taking him or her shopping for baby supplies or having the child act as a “helper” during changing and feeding time.

- **School Age:** Older children might feel jealous of how much attention a new baby gets. Parents should talk to the older child about the newborn's needs. Parents can also talk to their child about the advantages of being older, such as going to bed later and being able to play with certain toys. A child at this age may be able to hold the baby with supervision.

There are a lot of ways parents can get their older child involved and bonding with the baby. Several ways parents can create closeness between the child and baby are:

- Allow the child to hold the baby with supervision
- Have the older child fold a diaper or help with feedings
- Have the older child pick out the baby's clothes or pajamas
- Have the older child smile, talk, and sing to the baby
- Have the older child share some of his or her toys with the baby if willing

Sometimes children will not have any interest in the new baby. Parents should not be alarmed or try to force interaction. It can take time for an older child to be ready to begin a relationship with a younger sibling.

## Setting Aside Special Time for an Older Child

Older children many times feel left out or jealous because they are not getting as much attention from their parents as they used to. For this reason, it is important that parents spend special alone time with their older child so that the child does not resent or feel jealous of the new baby. By setting aside alone time with the older child, the child is reminded that they are loved and have not been replaced or forgotten. Some examples you can tell parents for spending special alone time with older children include:



- Lunch at the child's favorite restaurant
- Playing in the park
- Reading together before bedtime
- Going on walks or bike rides

- Playing board or card games together

Another idea is to create a space exclusively for the older child. This will be an area that they can go to for alone time that the baby and parents respect. It is important for the older child to feel loved and included in the family. Knowing that he or she has special time may help reduce any resentment or anger about the new baby.

## Watch and Listen to Older Child's Feelings

There are many different ways children show their feelings. Sometimes they will speak about what they are thinking and feeling, but many times only their actions will tell parents how they feel. If a child feels ignored, he or she might try to get his or her



parents' attention by breaking rules. To stop this behavior, parents should praise their child when he or she is behaving well.

Siblings sometimes regress after the arrival of a baby. Regression is when a child reverts back to behaviors that he or she engaged in at a younger age. A child might do this because he or she sees that the baby

gets attention when engaging in those behaviors. The child may begin to have toilet accidents, use "baby talk", cry more, or want to drink out of a bottle. Parents should not punish their child if they begin to regress. Instead, the child should be given lots of love and assurance. If the regression continues, speak to your doctor about other possible causes to make sure your child is developing appropriately.

An older child may become stressed and frustrated with the addition of a new baby and take out these frustrations on the baby. These aggressive behaviors can include taking away a bottle or toy from the baby or trying to harm the baby in some way. If this type of behavior occurs, parents need to have an immediate talk with their older child. It must be explained that the child is not allowed to hurt or take things away from the baby and that the baby is very fragile and could get hurt easily. Parents should teach their child how to be gentle and what behaviors with the baby are allowed. Parents should praise the child when he or she acts lovingly toward the new baby. Many times when children begin to get aggressive toward the baby, it is another sign that they are jealous and need more attention.



## Conclusion

A new baby is an exciting and also stressful time. As parents prepare for the new addition, it is also important that they include their older child and provide him or her with love and reassurance. Parents should prepare their older child for the baby by including him or her in daily activities with the baby. It is also critical that the older child receives special individual attention from each parent. As a supervised visitation monitor, you can provide parents with the above information and tips so that their older child can adjust positively to a new addition to the family.

## Books to Help Prepare Children for a New Baby

Below are a list of books that parents can read and show to their child that can help prepare him or her for a new baby and explain what it means to be a “Big Brother” or “Big Sister.”

- We Have a Baby, by Cathryn Falwel
- The New Baby, by Fred Rogers
- Our New Baby, by Wendy Cheyette Lewison
- Julius, the Baby of the World, by Kevin Henkes
- Will there be a lap for me? by Dorothy Corey
- How You Were Born, I’m a Big Brother and I’m a Big Sister, by Joanna Cole
- Pinky and Rex and the New Baby, by James Howe



## References

<http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/newbaby.htm>

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/sibling\\_prep.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/sibling_prep.html)

<http://www.webmd.com/baby/guide/prepare-children>

<http://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/sibling-issues/preparing-older-child-for-new-sibling/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/childrens-health/in-depth/new-sibling/art-20044270>

# Encountering PTSD: How Social Service Providers Can Do To Help

By: Shayna Harris



As supervised visitation providers, it is essential to be aware of how PTSD will impact you on a professional and personal level. Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur in the children and parents you work with on a daily basis, so it is important to be aware of how PTSD affects the family unit as a whole. Additionally, as supervised visitation providers, you may be exposed to traumatic stories and experience secondary PTSD so it can be beneficial to know how to deal with PTSD while you're on the job and in your personal life.

## **What is PTSD?**

Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms will vary in intensity, frequency, and the length of time based on the individual. Being able to identify signs and symptoms of PTSD in both children and parents will give you the ability to safeguard the health and happiness of the family unit as a whole.

## Signs and Symptoms

While most symptoms vary, the most common symptoms of PTSD are listed below.

1. *Intrusive memories.* This includes any unwanted or upsetting memories that are associated with the traumatic event. This can include reliving the event, having nightmares about the event, or having a severely negative reaction to something that reminds the individual of the event.

2. *Avoidance.* Individuals who are suffering from PTSD may want to avoid places, people, or events that may remind them of the traumatic event. This can also manifest in PTSD victims as avoidance of talking or thinking about the traumatic event.

3. *Negative changes in thinking, mood, and emotional reactions.* This includes experiencing a sudden decline in self-esteem, being unable to express feelings, feeling “numb” or “distant”, being unable to maintain relationships and engaging in self-destructive behavior such as drug use or speeding.

4. *Problems in work and personal life.* Individuals who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder may have difficulty maintaining close personal and professional relationships. Additionally, those suffering from PTSD may experience a sudden decrease in responsible behaviors and start to have an “I don’t care” attitude, which may further negatively impact their professional life.

5. *PTSD symptoms may be different for young children.* While adults and older children often exhibit the symptoms above, younger children may not have the same symptoms due to their stage of development. Some specific symptoms to look out for when working with extremely young children are...

- Nightmares
- Angry outbursts
- Refusing to go places or hang out with friends
- Complaining of stomach problems
- Being unable to talk
- Behavioral problems such as aggression or inappropriate sexual behaviors.



## What causes PTSD?



Post-traumatic stress disorder can be developed when an individual goes through, witnesses, or hears about a distressing event that involves any life threatening situation, serious injury, or act of violence, including domestic abuse or a sexual assault. PTSD can be caused by a complex combination of factors including the individual's current mental

health, the way the individual's body responds to stress, the severity of the event, support from family and friends, and various other factors. It is important that, as a supervised visitation provider, you are aware that PTSD can impact individuals differently. You should also avoid making any generalizations about the disease. Common misconceptions are...

- *You have to be physically hurt to have PTSD.* PTSD can occur by hearing threats, witnessing events, or hearing about a traumatic experience. The traumatic experience does not have to result in physical violence.
- *2. PTSD only happens to those who were in the military and have been to war.* PTSD can be caused by any major traumatic event in an individual's life. While veterans may experience PTSD after returning from combat, many individuals with no military affiliation also develop PTSD. It is important to realize that both military veterans and non-veterans can develop the disorder.

## Treatment options

Fortunately, there are numerous treatments for individuals suffering from PTSD including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy which is a form of talk therapy that allows individuals to identify certain behaviors and thoughts that hold them back, Exposure therapy which forces individuals to face their fears, and EDMR which helps to change an individual's reaction to certain situations through a series of eye movements combined with talk therapy.

As supervised visitation providers, it is important to be able to identify PTSD in your clients and help individuals suffering from PTSD so that the family unit can function in a healthy manner. Identifying PTSD in a parent may help you to ensure a child's needs are being met while the parent deals with a traumatic event. Additionally, identifying PTSD in children may allow you to identify if abuse or neglect is occurring within the home, which are the two most common causes of PTSD in children.



### **What social service providers can do to help clients deal with PTSD**

As social service providers, you have the ability to connect individuals to resources that may help them in their recovery. It is important to learn as much about PTSD as possible so that you can accurately identify it and help your clients receive treatment. Additionally, it is important to recognize that anger is a part of PTSD so if a child's parent is suffering from the disorder, you may need to make sure that the child is safe and having their emotional and physical needs met. Additionally, you as supervised visitation providers should be able to suggest coping strategies and healthy lifestyle changes that will aid in the client's treatment plan.

### **Secondary Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Social Services workers**

Unfortunately, you may hear about or witness traumatic events that your clients go through. This may result in secondary PTSD since social service providers are human and are not immune to emotional trauma. Thus, it is important to focus on your self-care and avoid scheduling too many distressing cases in one day. You can reduce the likelihood of developing PTSD by...



1. Finding time to do things you like to do such as going to a weekly painting class or a daily run in the morning before work.

2. Seek out continued education on self-care and how to deal with hearing traumatic stories.

3. Talk with your supervisor about appropriate workloads, time-off, and mental health programs available to you.

4. Leave work in the office whenever you can, which can help you create a safe space within your home to relax and unwind.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, supervised visitation providers need to be aware of how PTSD can affect both themselves and the clients they work with. By educating yourself about the causes, symptoms, and effects of PTSD on the family unit, supervised visitation providers can work towards protecting the children and families they work with. Additionally, by recognizing the signs and symptoms of PTSD, social service providers can be aware of their own mental health and work towards self-care and seeking treatment when needed.

## **References**

- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.  
[http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/Facts\\_for\\_Families\\_Pages/Posttraumatic\\_Stress\\_Disorder\\_70.aspx](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/Facts_for_Families_Pages/Posttraumatic_Stress_Disorder_70.aspx)
- What is post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD?  
<http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/031714p18.shtml>
- Treatments for Veterans With PTSD — Outside the Traditional Toolbox  
<http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/031714p18.shtml>
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)  
<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/ptsd.html#>
- Helping someone with PTSD <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/ptsd-in-the-family.htm>
- Helping a family member with PTSD  
<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/family/helping-family-member.asp>
- Post-traumatic stress Disorder (PTSD)  
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/basics/definition/con-20022540>

## **Resources**

- PTSD: National Center for PTSD <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- PTSD Alliance Center Resources <http://www.ptsdalliance.org/resources.html>
- Screening for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) <http://www.adaa.org/screening-posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>
- Self-Help and Coping <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/public/treatment/cope/index.asp>

# How to Conquer Separation Anxiety in Children

By Kayla Kirk

## Introduction

It is very common for infants and young children to suffer from separation anxiety. Separation anxiety occurs when a parent or caregiver is in the process of leaving and the infant or child begins to cry and becomes upset. Many parents and caregivers struggle when their child shows signs of separation anxiety. Parents may even have trouble leaving their child as well. As a supervised visitation monitor, you have the opportunity to help parents or caregivers support their child who has separation anxiety. This Epress will cover:



- What separation anxiety looks like at different ages
- Tips on how to overcome separation anxiety
- When severe separation anxiety turns into a disorder
- Books parents can read with their children about separation anxiety

## Separation Anxiety by Age

Separation anxiety differs depending on the infant or young child's age. It is a perfectly normal part of childhood development. Specific information about separation anxiety at different ages is discussed below.

**Infants:** Separation anxiety may begin around six to eight months. This is the time during which infants begin to grasp that their parents exist apart from them, yet they do not understand that their parents are coming back. This is referred to as a lack of the concept object permanence. At this age, an infant will usually cry and scream when his or her parent or caregiver leaves the room. This process can occur for several weeks or months until the infant realizes that the parent or caregiver is not abandoning them.

**Toddlers:** Sometimes, separation anxiety will peak between twelve and twenty-four months. At this age, a child is beginning to develop a strong sense of attachment to his or her parents or caregivers. The child also has the desire to control certain aspects of his or her life. Toddlers understand that the parent or caregiver is coming back, but they want them to stay.

Toddlers may scream, cry, or have a tantrum to keep parents from leaving.

**Preschool Age:** It is common for children to experience large changes at this age, which can lead to anxiety. Preschool-aged children may have separation anxiety because they are starting school, moving to a new home, or a new sibling has been added to the family. They may feel unsafe, uncertain, or worried that they will be forgotten or overlooked. At this age, children understand the effect their anxiety and pleas have on their parents, so they may cry, scream, or act out on purpose to keep the parent from leaving.



If a parent is struggling with an infant, toddler, or preschool-aged child with separation anxiety, there are ways to survive this stressful time and tips you can provide to parents to help prevent the anxiety from continuing.

## **How to Survive Separation Anxiety**

Separation anxiety can be overwhelming and unsettling, but there are several ways to handle it and prevent it from occurring. As a supervised visitation monitor, you can provide the following tips to parents and caregivers who are struggling with a child who has separation anxiety.

- 1. Practice being apart.** As an infant, parents can introduce the child to other caregivers so that he or she becomes comfortable with others.



Parents can practice being away from the infant, which may minimize anxiety later in life. As the child becomes a toddler or preschooler, arranging play dates and having babysitters can help the child learn to be independent and comfortable being apart from his or her parents.

- 2. Create quick goodbye rituals.** Prolonging a departure gives a child the impression that there is something to be afraid of. Instead, come up with a quick goodbye ritual. Rituals create order around the departure and provide security to children. A ritual could be giving each other two high fives and a hug and a kiss, or having the child close the door when the parent leaves. Also, advise parents not to sneak off while the child isn't looking because this can break a child's trust in the parent. Instead, have the caregiver redirect the child with a toy after the quick goodbye.



- 3. Be consistent.** After a parent leaves, he or she should not return if the child is crying or has a tantrum. This gives the child an incentive to cry and reinforces this type of behavior. Parents should use the same goodbye ritual each time they leave so that the child has trust that they are coming back.
- 4. Give attention.** If a child feels that he or she is being forgotten or abandoned, parents should provide special one-on-one attention. This will make the child feel confident in his or her parents love and ultimately feel less threatened. Also, during a goodbye, parents should have their full focus on their child.



- 5. Be specific.** Parents should provide their child with an estimated time that they will return. Instead of using actual time, such as "I will be back in 3 hours," parents should define time in a way the child understands

such as “I will be back after snack time, but before dinner.” If a parent is going to be gone overnight, referring to how long he or she will be gone as “sleeps” instead of “nights” can be helpful to the child’s understanding.

- 6. Keep promises.** A parent should always try to return when promised. This builds trust and independence. If a parent is going to be gone longer, calling to update the child on the new return time can help prevent negative emotions. Parents can also remind children that they always return.
- 7. Let the child know that his or her feelings are normal.** A toddler or older child may feel nervous when his or her parent leaves. Instead of saying “Be a big boy/girl”, parents should let the child know it is okay to feel nervous. They could say, “I know you’re nervous, but let’s think of another time you were scared, and it was all ok.” This shows the child that his or her feelings are normal and that he or she can handle them.

These tips can help prevent and stop separation anxiety, while building a trusting relationship between the child and parent. If the child’s separation anxiety continues and becomes severe, it could be an indication of a more serious disorder.

## Separation Anxiety Disorder

In cases where the separation anxiety interferes with an older child's normal activities, it can indicate a deeper anxiety disorder. If intense separation anxiety lasts into preschool, elementary school, or beyond and interferes with a child’s daily activities, parents should discuss it with their doctor. It could be a sign of a rare, but more serious condition known as separation anxiety disorder.

Children with separation anxiety disorder fear being lost from their family members and are often convinced that something bad will happen. Parents should talk with their doctor if their child has the following signs or symptoms:

- Panic symptoms (such as nausea, vomiting, or shortness of breath) or panic attacks before a parent leaves



- Nightmares about separation
- Fear of sleeping alone (although this is also common in kids who don't have separation anxiety)
- Excessive worrying about being lost or kidnapped or going places without a parent

## **Conclusion**

Separation anxiety varies widely between children, but it is a normal part of child development. It can be a struggle to help ease a child's anxiety, but there are several different tips parents can use to help prevent or stop the anxiety from continuing. As a supervised visitation monitor, you may witness this anxiety or learn about it from parents and caregivers; therefore, the above information can be shared to help.

## **Books**

The following books can be helpful for children and parents to read together so that children understand that the parent will return and that their feelings are normal.

1. The Goodbye Book by Judith Viorst
2. The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn
3. Even if I Spill My Milk? By Anita Grossnickle Hines

## **References**

<http://thrivinghomeblog.com/2013/04/five-tips-to-help-a-childs-separation-anxiety/>

<http://www.webmd.com/children/guide/separation-anxiety>

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/sep\\_anxiety.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/sep_anxiety.html)

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx>

<http://www.parenting.com/article/separation-anxiety-age-by-age>

# Smartphones' Negative Effects on Children's Sleep Patterns

Shayna L. Harris



## **Introduction:**

In today's fast paced, technology-driven society, an increasing number of children and teens are gaining access to smartphones. While this form of technology can be beneficial for more frequent and consistent communication with the child's parents or guardians, having unlimited access to social media, the internet, and other forms of socialization can be detrimental to a child's sleeping pattern. Parents should be encouraged to limit their child's use of technology, especially when it is time for bedtime to ensure that the child gets a quality night's worth of sleep.

## **Objective:**

The purpose of this article is to provide information about the effects of smartphones on a child's sleeping patterns and methods that parents can use to help facilitate healthy technology use. Supervised visitation providers can provide parents this information to help children develop positive technology habits.

## **How Smartphones Affect Children's Sleeping Patterns:**

With constant and uninterrupted access of the internet and social media, a common concern for children and teens is a feeling of "I don't want to be left out." This fear creates a feeling of obligation to respond to every message, post, tag, and comment that comes their way through notifications. These notifications that produce "blue light"

and sound can disrupt a child or teen's regular sleeping habits while also serving as a constant temptation to stay "plugged in." According to a new study by the American Academy of Pediatrics Scientific Journal, children who sleep with smartphones in their room sleep an average of twenty one minutes less than children who do not. It was also found that children who sleep with smartphones experience a poorer quality of sleep, which can lead to detrimental health effects.

## Negative Effects of Sleep Deprivation:

Sleep deprivation can have negative effects on multiple aspects of a child's life, including physical and mental development, academic achievement, and even his or her safety.



- **Physical Affects:** The physical effects of chronic sleep deprivation include damage to the immune system's ability to fight illnesses, weight gain that can lead to childhood obesity, and weakening of the reflexes.
- **Mental Affects:** Chronic sleep deprivation can cause both depression and anxiety in children and teens. In fact, a recent study found that 75% of depressed or anxious children and teens do not sleep enough at night. In addition to depression and anxiety, chronic sleep deprivation can result in children and teens being quick to anger and may even lead them to make socially embarrassing choices.
- **Academic Affects:** Children who do not get enough quality sleep at night have difficulty focusing in class and completing assignments to the best of their ability. These children may be falsely diagnosed with ADD or ADHD due to their difficulties in the classroom, leading to stigmatism and often unnecessary drug use.
- **Safety:** Fatigue often impairs alertness which may be hazardous for a child's safety, especially for teens that have the ability to drive.

## How Parents Can Help:

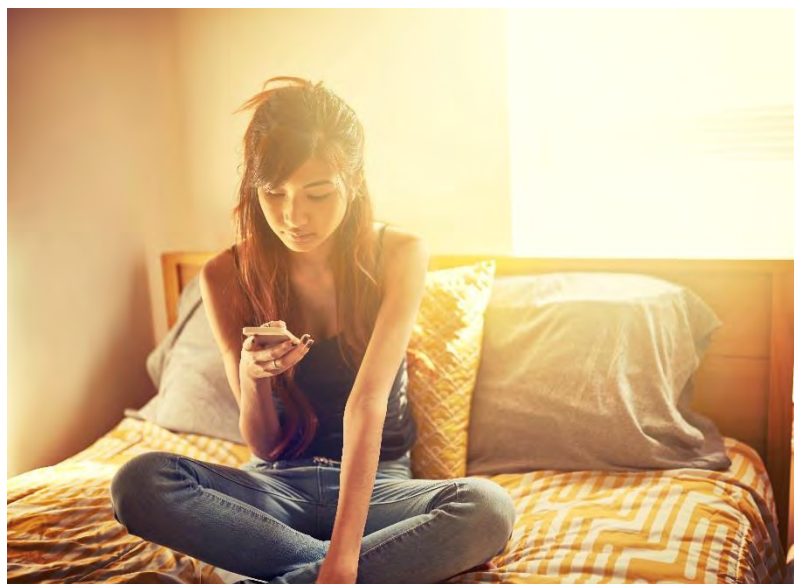
In order for parents to be able to help their child maintain healthy boundaries with technology, they can set specific rules and boundaries with their child or teen. Here are

a few tips and suggestions on how to model and regulate healthy boundaries between children and technology.

- **Make bedrooms a “screen free zone” during bedtime hours.** Prohibiting smartphones or other technology in a child’s room when he or she is getting ready to go to sleep can help remove the temptation to stay up late responding to texts and alerts.
- **Teach children healthy technology practices.** Limit your child’s recreational activity on his or her phone to only a few hours a day. It is recommended that two hours be the limit, so that they can give their brains a rest. This limit also helps stop the psychological dependency that develops if technology is used every minute of every day.
- **Have children sign a “responsible use” contract.** Parents can develop a contract for their child to sign that includes various rules on technology use, such as times when technology use is allowed, what websites the child is allowed to visit, and rules clearly against cyberbullying of others. Any behavior that breaks these rules, such as playing on their phone for too long or bullying another individual through social media, can result in loss of phone privileges. **See the Example Responsible Use Contract attached below.**
- **Model healthy boundaries with technology.** Children look to their parents to set an example so it is crucial that parents take time to be present with their children without using technology, such as during family dinners or near bedtime. This will designate a family value of healthy technology use that children will be able to more easily adapt.

## Conclusion:

Getting adequate sleep is especially essential for growing children and teens. Allowing children to use smartphones in their room at night can upset their regular sleeping patterns and cause chronic sleep deprivation. Chronic sleep deprivation can negatively impact children’s daily lives and long-term development. It is crucial that parents regulate their child’s technology use, encourage powering down of phones at least an hour before



bedtime, and model healthy boundaries with technology.

## References:

Smartphones in Kids' Bedrooms Are Worse Than TV, Study Says

<https://www.yahoo.com/parenting/smartphones-in-kids-bedrooms-are-worse-than-tv-107339749462.html>

Sleep creep: Letting kids have smartphones in bed not smart

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/05/living/small-screens-harm-childrens-sleep/>

Texting at Night: Teens, Smartphones, and sleep

<http://kckidsdoc.com/teens-texting-at-night.html>

Smartphones can cut your kid's sleep, layer on the pounds.

<http://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/smartphones-can-cut-your-kids-sleep-layer-on-the-pounds/>

7 physical effects of sleep deprivation

<http://www.foxnews.com/health/2014/10/16/7-physical-effects-sleep-deprivation/>

## Responsible Cell Phone Use Family Contract

This contract between \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ (Parents' Names) and \_\_\_\_\_ (Child Name) establishes set family rules and consequences regarding cell phone usage.

### Cell Phone: Child Responsibilities

**I promise to only use my phone at appropriate times and places.**

- I will not text or place phone calls after \_\_\_\_ p.m. on the weekdays and \_\_\_\_ p.m. on the weekends.
- I will not bring my cell phone to the family dinner table.
- I will obey rules of etiquette regarding cell phones in public places. I will make sure my phone is turned off when I am in church, in restaurants, or quiet settings.

- I will obey any rules my school has regarding cell phones, such as turning them off during class, or keeping them on vibrate while riding the school bus.
- I will never text while driving and will not ride in a car with anyone who does.

### **I know my phone is a privilege.**

- I understand that having a cell phone is a privilege, and that if I fail to adhere to this contract, my cell phone privilege may be revoked.
- I will not go over our plan's monthly minutes or text message limits. If I do, I understand that I may be responsible for paying any additional charges or that I may lose my cell phone privileges.
- I will not download apps, movies, or music without permission.
- I understand that my cell phone may be taken away if I talk back to my parents, I fail to do my chores, or I fail to keep my grades up.

### **I promise to take care of my phone.**

- I understand that I am responsible for knowing where my phone is, and for keeping it in good condition.
- I will not share my passwords with anyone except my parents. I am responsible for my phone even if others are using them.

### **I promise to use my phone to keep me safe at all times.**

- I will keep my phone charged at all times.
- I will try my best to respond to my parents' texts/calls as soon as possible in a given situation.
- I promise to call if plans change or I am running late.
- I promise to call if I ever feel that I am in danger or in a bad situation.
- I promise I will alert my parents when I receive suspicious or alarming phone calls or text messages from people I don't know.
- I will also alert my parents if I am being harassed by someone via my cell phone.
- I understand that having a cell phone can be helpful in a emergency, but I know that I must still practice good judgment and make good choices that will keep me out of trouble or out of danger.

### **I promise to not use my phone to bully another person.**



- I will not send threatening or mean texts to others.
- I will not use my cell phone to bully or spread rumors/gossip about another.
- I will not send text messages that are vulgar, obscene or inappropriate.
- I will not send embarrassing photos of my family or friends to others. In addition, I will not use my phone's camera to take embarrassing photos of others.

**Cell Phone Contract: Parent Responsibilities**

- I understand that I will make myself available to answer any questions my child might have about owning a cell phone and using it responsibly.
- I will try my best to respond to my child's texts/calls as soon as possible in a given situation.
- I will support my child when he or she alerts me to an alarming message or text message that he or she has received.
- I will alert my child if our cell phone plan changes and impacts the plan's minutes.
- I will give my child \_\_\_\_\_ warning(s) before I take his or her cell phone away.

I agree to all conditions stated above and will meet these expectations to the best of my abilities.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Child)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_ (Parents)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Think About the Way You Talk to Children

By: Erica Doig

## Introduction

As a supervised visitation provider, you can provide the following information to parents during visitation to educate them on ways to make common parental statements more nurturing. Parents may use some of these phrases without realizing the ways a child can interpret them negatively. Review our chart to see how a child could see each statement negatively and to learn ways to re-frame the statement to best express what the parent means in a supportive way. You may even want to print this chart out for parents to review during visitation or to keep as a reminder for home.



## Ways to Make Common Parental Statements More Nurturing

<u>Parental Statement</u>	<u>Why It Might Be Perceived Negatively by a Child</u>	<u>How To Support Your Child</u>	<u>A More Nurturing Way to Express What You Mean</u>
“If you do that again...”	The issue with using this phrase is that sometimes children view this as a threat, sometimes leading to a weakened parent-child bond and loss of a supportive environment.	Be clear and explain: clearly state what the child should avoid doing and the consequence if not followed.	<i>“I’ve asked you several times not to throw the blocks, and you’re continuing to do so. I am going to take the blocks away the next time you cannot play with them nicely.”</i>
“We’ll see.”	If parents continually use this phrase to deter having to respond to children’s requests, some children will begin to feel mistrust for the parent due to feeling that their needs are being ignored.	Give your child a time frame of when you will respond to their requested permission, allowing your child to respect and trust in you and follow through on your promise.	<i>“I’m not sure at this moment if we will be able to do that, but I will let you know after dinner time.”</i>

<p>“Calm down.”</p>	<p>Saying “Calm down” to a child in distress can sometimes make the child feel that their expression of feelings is being ignored or misunderstood as a misbehavior needing to be punished.</p>	<p>Rather than just giving a command to halt the behavior, redirect it. If the child is screaming and crying because she is upset, give them a technique to replace the behavior that is inappropriate and then discuss what is making them upset to come up with a solution.</p>	<p><i>“Take a deep breath with me, honey. Breathe in and out... Now, tell Daddy what is making you upset.”</i></p>
<p>“Stop acting like a baby.”</p>	<p>Children may feel shamed by this statement, when they simply need assistance in developing better communication skills or are acting out for attention. This phrase can breed resentment if children interpret it as an attack.</p>	<p>If you feel like your child is “not acting their age”, figure out what it is that is causing them to respond in such an “infantile” way. Then, redirect that behavior to be more age appropriate. If you determine your child simply wants attention, spend more one-on-time with him or her.</p>	<p><i>“Acting this way is simply unacceptable. If you want to tell me something then talk to me and tell me what is wrong. I cannot help you if I don’t know what the problem is.”</i></p>
<p>“Are you (stupid/dumb)?”</p>	<p>Some children will hold onto these words as a sense of his or her own intelligence. Hearing this over and over from parents may create a negative self-concept in some children that will be difficult to change.</p>	<p>When your child is struggling to learn a skill, try to help them develop an understanding and practice the skill with your child regularly until it is a learned behavior.</p>	<p><i>“I see you got a C on your math test. Which questions were hard for you? Let’s practice them together every night this week and see if you understand them better then.”</i></p>

<p>“You’re a bad (girl/boy).”</p>	<p>Some children will interpret this as a definition of self, leaving them with a negative self-concept of not being able to be good, which can lead to more acting out.</p>	<p>Refer rather to the child’s inappropriate behavior that can be changed. When giving your child consequences for bad behavior, explain what he or she did wrong and supply words of support and love to encourage his or her ability to be better.</p>	<p><i>“I love you very dearly, but talking back to me is bad behavior. You’re not a bad child, but <u>we</u> need to work on you talking back to me.”</i></p>
<p>“You’re such a bully, jerk, brat, etc.”</p>	<p>Some children may internalize the words that are used to characterize them, particularly when applied by adults whom they value. Derogatory terms are simply destructive to the development of human personality in children and should be avoided at all costs.</p>	<p>If you find yourself frustrated with the way your child acts, focus more on changing that behavior rather than disrespecting your child and your relationship by calling him or her names.</p>	<p><i>“Hitting your brother is not acceptable. I know you are better than this and can show your brother love. Show me that you know how to be a good brother by helping him clean up his room for the next thirty minutes. Then, we need to talk about what is appropriate behavior.”</i></p>
<p>“Are you sure you want to eat that extra cookie?”</p>	<p>Some older children (pre-teens and teens especially) may feel judged easily about questions pertaining to food and portion sizes, which can amplify a negative self-worth if parents are not careful with their words.</p>	<p>Cook healthy foods, talk privately about health concerns, and encourage healthy eating without judgment or cruelty to encourage open discussion with your children about body-image.</p>	<p><i>“Make sure to save room for dinner! I made grilled chicken and vegetables to give you energy for your activities. You don’t want to fill up on sweets.”</i></p>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the way words are phrased by a parent can determine if the words will have a negative or positive influence on his or her social and emotional development. In

all cases, parents should attempt to use encouraging, supportive, and nurturing words that show children that they are accepted and loved. Parents should be thoughtful of their words and tones around children to ensure that a healthy parent-child bond persists and that children grow up with positive self-worth and confidence. Supervised visitation providers can help parents understand ways to effectively communicate with their children by helping them redirect their words, encouraging healthy relationships through effective communication.

## References

<http://www2.aap.org/pressroom/playfinal.pdf>

<http://ha6lk3ly9z.scholar.serialssolutions.com/?sid=google&auinit=M&aualast=Buckley&atitle=Promoting+emotional+competence+in+children+and+adolescents:+Implications+for+school+psychologists.&id=doi:10.1521/scpq.18.2.177.21855&title=School+psychology+quarterly&volume=18&issue=2&date=2003&spage=177&issn=1045-3830>

Child Development: Risk and Opportunity, M. Krantz.

The Relationship between Child and Parental Social Competence, M. Krantz

