

# Family Fundamentals

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

## No parent is perfect, but guidelines can help

**Now that our daughter is almost 4, she often doesn't pay attention no matter what my wife and I say. We can't tell if this is just a phase or if she will soon get completely out of control. What's the best way to handle things?**

As you know, parenting isn't easy. But there are guidelines you can use — guidelines that more than 30 years of research says can help.

The research, from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, resulted in a set of recommendations called "RPM3." More of a mindset than a how-to, they can take some time to put into practice. And that's OK, because parenting itself takes practice.

RPM3 stands for Responding, Preventing, Monitoring, Mentoring and Modeling. It focuses on principles you can apply in different situations:

- **Responding** to your child in an appropriate manner. Many parents quickly react to their child instead of thinking things through. The goal is to make sure your response is neither overblown nor too casual, and that you explain the reasoning for your response to your child. If your daughter is acting out at the playground, for example, don't threaten to never take her there again if she doesn't behave. Rather, calmly call her name, ask her to look at you so you know you have her attention. Remind her of the rules and give her an option of calming down or going home to rest — a natural consequence of her behavior. Being consistent in your expectations and your follow-through, while at the same time being flexible depending on the situation, are key elements to keep in mind.
- **Preventing** risky behavior or problems before they arise. To spot potential problems, you



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need to be actively involved in your child's life. Knowing how your daughter usually thinks, feels and acts will help you notice when her behavior changes. Often, just spending enough one-on-one time with your daughter can prevent unwanted behavior.

- **Monitoring, Mentoring and Modeling** are the other key elements of the RPM3 guidelines. Monitoring means you are aware of your child's whereabouts and who she is with. Talk with her, even at a young age, about the things you do when you're apart. Ask her about what she does when you're apart, as well. Acting as a mentor for your daughter means you support and encourage her in behaviors that you want to see her develop, much like a coach does to develop a player's strengths. Modeling means you make sure your own behavior provides a consistent, positive example for your daughter.

To learn more about these guidelines, read *Adventures in Parenting*, available free on the institute's website at [nichd.nih.gov](http://nichd.nih.gov) (search for "RPM3"). You can also gain insights about families from Ohio State University Extension's Live Smart Ohio blog at [livesmartohio.osu.edu](http://livesmartohio.osu.edu).

Remember, no parent is perfect, and no child will respond flawlessly to any parenting style. But an active, attentive parent who is consistent in words and actions can be much more effective.

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**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by James Bates, assistant professor and field specialist of family wellness for Ohio State University Extension.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*

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