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## Positive Parenting for Behavior Problems

When parents expect the worst from their children, they often get it.

by Terra Trevor

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Like many children adopted in middle childhood, our daughter went through some difficult early years before she joined our family. As her mother, I saw the hero, or good part of her, and kept an even more fascinated eye on the willful, unmanageable kid she often insisted on being. It wasn't long before we headed to family counseling to work through lying, stealing, and excessive demands for attention. Once there, I discovered it wasn't just my daughter's behavior that created our problems, it was my own attitude as well.

Although I praised her strengths, her shortcomings were lodged in my mind. I never made negative statements about her when she was within hearing distance. But behind her back—to friends and colleagues—I focused only on what she was doing wrong. Like all children, my daughter was intuitive. She tuned into my negative perceptions. They made her feel she was all bad, not just some of the time but all of the time.

### Can Thinking Make It So?

One of the best ways to make something happen is to predict it. When I began to cultivate an optimistic outlook and to talk about my daughter in positive terms, a mysterious energy emerged. She grew cheerful and visibly calmer, her sense of well-being and confidence soared. Letting go of my negative chatter lessened my own anxiety and made me a more effective mother.

I am not suggesting that you indulge in denial or avoid talking about worrisome behavior. Just don't let it dominate your thoughts or conversations about your child.

Children who have experienced disruptions in a previous home life may get stuck in certain problematic stages for a long time. It's important to deal with **behavioral issues** as they come up, but it is equally important to move on quickly. If you let negativity become your internal landscape, it shows.

It's hard to live with serious behavioral problems and focus your conversations on the things your child does well. But practice helps. For each negative statement, make a positive one. If you're too busy feeling sorry for yourself, you can lose sight of the joy your child brings to your life.

## Points to Remember

- Keep a gratitude journal. Every day, write down four things you adore about your child.
- Think of parenting as a relationship to be built rather than a wall to be torn down.
- Talk about the things you enjoy about your child.
- Know the common behavioral problems of children adopted at an older age.
- Find a therapist before you need one.
- Tell your child you love her even when she does something wrong.
- Do your best every day to help your child feel valued. But also be gentle with yourself. There will be setbacks and detours along the way, but once you change your attitude, you'll be better able to help your child and yourself.

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