

uncommon sense

PARENTING

Overview



What is it?

Uncommon Sense Parenting is a framework of understanding and supporting behaviour based on fundamental skill-building. USP views children's poor behaviour as an indication of lagging skills which require development and support. In Uncommon Sense Parenting, we view adults as the "masters"- the proficient teachers imparting knowledge. Children are the "apprentices"- the students who require guidance, understanding, and mentoring to learn. It is a strength-based, child-centred, adult-led framework.



✦ ✦ The 3 Core Competencies of UNCOMMON SENSE PARENTING ✦ ✦

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is the first and last concern in Uncommon Sense Parenting. In the moment, we guide children through poor behaviour instances using the Natural and Logical Consequence process. By following this process, we actively teach children to make good choices, pause to consider consequences to their actions before acting, and remediate the consequences of poor decisions.

THE NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE PROCESS

NOTE: If after any of these steps the child remediates their behaviour- stop. Do not proceed with the process. The child has demonstrated an ability to think critically and adjust their behaviour. No further intervention is necessary.

Step 1: Natural or Logical?

Natural consequences take place without any intervention from an adult. They are simply the typical fall-out from an action. *Example: Choosing not to wear a coat outside on a cool day. The consequence is you're cold.*

Natural Consequences are preferable, but not always appropriate.

- 1 **It's dangerous:** the natural consequence will result in mental or physical harm to the child or others.
- 2 **It's delayed:** the natural consequence will take a very long time to come into effect.
- 3 **It's detached:** the natural consequence will make a negative impact on someone other than the child who is behaving poorly.

In which case, a logical consequence is preferred and should be carried out as such:

Step 2: Declare

Now that we've established a logical consequence is preferred, we observe out loud what the child is doing using declarative language. This is speaking like Captain Obvious- you are simply going to observe what the child is doing in a non-judgemental, neutral tone. *Example: "You're throwing the trucks."*

Step 3: Question

Ask a problem-solving question designed to encourage the child to think of an alternative to their maladaptive behaviour. *Example: "How can we play with the trucks?" Pause to give the child an opportunity to come up with an answer. If the answer they give is acceptable- praise their good idea and encourage them to do it. If the answer is maladaptive, proceed to Step 4.*



Step 4: Choices

Offer the answer in the form of a controlled choice. Note: both options must be available and equally acceptable. If there is a “wrong answer” you are trapping and manipulating the child. One of the two options must be enforceable by an adult. *Example: “You can drive them on the carpet, or you can roll them down a ramp.”*

Step 5: Choose

If the child has not taken the offered opportunities to remediate their behaviour to this point, choose one of the given options in Step 4 and support the child in completing it. Hand-over-hand is acceptable to complete this step but should be used with caution and as a last resort. *Example: “Okay, I’m going to bring the trucks over here to the ramp. You can come play with them when you’re ready.”*

Remember: The NLC process is only to be used in the moment, and without shame. It is not a punishment, and the choices given should never be designed to humiliate or demean a child.

SELF-REGULATION

Self-Regulation is an understanding of how stress influences behaviour expression. In Uncommon Sense Parenting, we use the Shanker definition of stress: as energy expenditure. Anything we expend physical or mental energy on is considered a stressor. What is defined as stress for any one person is individual to them (ie: some people find social interaction energizing, others find it exhausting.) When children have more stress than they have the capacity to handle on a regular basis they become “kindled”- they easily become overloaded and go into fight or flight. Our job is to understand what a child’s stressors are so we can help them to better manage their energy and tension, and ultimately- reduce behaviours.

We categorize stressors into five domains:



1. Biological

- ✔ By being regulated a child develops the ability to self-regulate. Being regulated does not mean being managed.
- ✔ There are four neural mechanisms for dealing with stress: (1) social engagement; (2) fight-or-flight (3) freeze; and, (4) dissociation. The brain uses this "hierarchy" for responding to threat. If one proves inadequate to deal with the present stress, the brain shifts to the next. Social engagement is the goal.
- ✔ Children who are chronically zoned out, hyperactive, and/or aggressive are not somehow 'weak' or purposefully acting out. They are experiencing too much stress for social engagement or their cognitive processes to cope.
- ✔ A chronically hypoaroused or hyperaroused child has difficulty staying focused and alert, which is the optimal state for learning to occur.

2. Emotional

- ✔ Using "left-brain processes" like language and executive functions to regulate a child's emotions will not be effective if the child's left brain is "off-line" as a result of all the adrenaline pumping in the hyperaroused state.
- ✔ If a child is in a flooded state, parents and early childhood educators need to help the child calm down, not try to force them to monitor, evaluate and modify what they're feeling.
- ✔ Young children experience intense emotional reactions that can be sudden and feel catastrophic—all-or-nothing.
- ✔ Parents and early childhood educators need to soothe before they try to "educate."

3. Cognitive

- ✔ Sustained concentration makes a high energy, high-cost demand on a child's autonomic nervous system.
- ✔ For some children, just trying to sit still or inhibit an impulse takes an enormous amount of energy and there may not be enough left to sustain attention.
- ✔ When we work on the roots of attentional problems we look at things like the child's ability to register and integrate different kinds of sensory information.
- ✔ The better the child learns how to identify and reduce the stressors that render him inattentive, the better he will be able to recognize patterns in what hitherto has been a "blooming, buzzing confusion."

4. Social

- ✔ Problems in the social domain lie in the arousal created by the system that serves as a child's first line of defence for dealing with stress: the social engagement system.
- ✔ In fight-or-flight, even the most benign of social acts can be interpreted as a threat. These sorts of distortions are a sign that a child has gone into a state of low energy/ high tension. The child's immediate need is to be soothed and caregivers need to re-establish the child's sense of safety.
- ✔ When a child feels threatened the result can be sympathetic flooding (anger and aggression, flight or desertion) or parasympathetic flooding (withdrawal, paralysis).
- ✔ Nature's mechanism for socialization in the early years is play.

5. Prosocial

- ✔ The crux of Self-Reg is that we born with a brain that expects social engagement.
- ✔ Stress overload shuts down the very systems that enable us to experience "cognitive empathy": not just being affected by, but aware of what someone else feels.
- ✔ What is critical in such situations is how we respond to the child's anxiety, which can manifest in acts of aggression.
- ✔ Chastising a child for his lack of empathy, shouting when a child needs to be soothed, escalating when the child needs to down-regulate, can make things worse. Instead, we have to do Self-Reg, on ourselves as well as with the child.

When we understand self-regulation and can reframe behaviour into one of these five domains we become empathetic, regulating caregivers who can help our children grow and flourish. When children's energy is being extraordinarily consumed by any of these domains, their access to their executive functioning skills becomes physically untenable.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Executive Functioning skills are the neural mechanisms we use to accomplish tasks and manage expectations. They are the "mental tools" necessary to be civilized, functioning people. Executive functioning skills are located in our neocortex and require us to be regulated (see the previous section) in order to access and use them. When certain executive skills are weak their use becomes a stressor in and of itself, reducing the energy available to meet demands. By strengthening executive functioning skills we reduce the amount of energy necessary to behave well.

WE CATEGORIZE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING INTO 8 CATEGORIES:



1. Impulse Control

The ability to put the mental breaks on and pause to think critically before acting.



2. Emotional Control

Recognizing and understanding emotional expression in ourselves and others.



3. Working Memory

The ability to hold information in your mind short term, and then to use it.



4. Self-Monitoring

Keeping track of how our actions are being received by others and adjusting as needed, as well as keeping track of how far we are along in a task and adjusting as necessary to achieve our goal.



5. Task Initiation

Starting a task without hesitation.



6. Organisation

Being aware of the tools or thoughts you need to complete a task.



7. Planning & Prioritizing

Taking the tools or thoughts you have and making a plan to use them in accordance with your priorities.



8. Flexible Thinking

The ability to problem-solve and set-shift when necessary.

These skills are essential to be able to meet expectations, but only begin to develop around the age of two. By supporting children in developing and using these skills, and by reducing the necessity to use these skills when they are weak and demanding an inordinate amount of energy- we enable children to navigate everyday situations with ease and proficiency.

LEARN MORE

This info sheet was prepared by Allana Robinson, Parenting Effectiveness Coach
Uncommon Sense Parenting
ALLANAROBINSON.COM