In our *guiding* example, there was no effort on the parent’s part to challenge the daughter’s perception of things, nor was there any moralizing, preaching, or the use of pointed questions. The daughter simply received comfort, understanding and a positive guiding experience from her mother. This experience will help the daughter grow up learning how to make her own decisions. When parents help their children make appropriate decisions, without making the decisions for them, children are more likely to learn how to make good decisions on their own.

*Guiding* is one of the most difficult parenting principles to apply. Parents love their children and want them to do what’s right. Children are not born knowing what is right. They must learn what is right and how to choose what is right when parents aren’t around. Parents’ goal should be teaching them how to make responsible decisions on their own. This means we have to *guide* our children to make the right decisions. *Guiding* is a way to help keep children safe while helping them become happy, healthy and responsible adults.

Being a parent is not an easy job in today’s world. Sometimes parents need support or ideas to help them be better parents. While all families do things differently, research has suggested that there are common characteristics that make families successful. These characteristics have been studied by nationally recognized parenting experts and put into six categories or keys1. These keys are: Care for Self, Understand, Guide, Nurture, Motivate, and Advocate.

Each family is different. So, there is no one correct way to be a parent. This fact sheet does not teach the “how to’s” of parenting. It does, however, explain one of the six keys of successful parenting. These keys are important to parents and parenting, although different styles and customs may influence how these keys and used in families. It is important for all parents to: Care for Self, Understand, Guide, Nurture, Motivate, and Advocate. How a parent practices these principles is up to each family and its way of doing things. If parents can practice these keys, they can unlock the door to a happy and healthy family.

*This fact sheet focuses on one of the keys, Guide. Look for additional fact sheets with Parenting Keys: Care for Self, Understand, Nurture, Motivate, and Advocate.*

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Parents who **guide** their children walk alongside them at first, directing them down the path and then slowly allowing children the opportunity to walk by themselves. Foremost, parents have the responsibility to set limits to protect their children and make sure each child shows concern for others. Parents need to set limits that are fair, consistent, and clearly understood by their children. For example, a limit might be that a child must clean up his/her room once every two weeks or that a child can watch 10 hours of television a week. These limits need to be firmly enforced providing consequences when necessary. For example, a child may decide not to do his or her chores. The child must have a firm but fair consequence for this choice, such as having to stay home on the weekend until the chores are complete.

Children on the other hand, seek freedom from such limits even when they need guidance and structure. While rules and boundaries are important, children’s growth as individuals depends on making choices and facing the consequences of their own decisions. While setting limits is an important part of **guiding** children, the other ingredient is teaching them to make their own choices and regulate their own behavior. **Guide** means striking a balance between discipline and providing children the freedom to develop their own sense of responsibility. It means helping children learn how to behave and make good choices when parents are not around.

Research has found that children raised with a **guiding** style of parenting tend to have greater success at school and fewer difficulties with other children. Research has found that parents who **guide** raise happy, healthy, and competent children.

In many cases, **guiding** children is the most challenging of the six keys to parenting (Care for Self, Understand, Guide, Nurture, Motivate, and Advocate). Below are some ways parents can strike this balance between setting the limits and having a child learn self-responsibility:

**Self - Responsibility** means encouraging children to realize that their choices always have a consequence, whether it is positive or negative. For example, suppose it is agreed upon that a child must return home from playing at 6 p.m. or he/she will lose the privilege to play with his/her friend the next day. If the child then comes home at 7 p.m., the child has made a choice and has to accept the consequences of that choice. After the parent acknowledges that he/she is happy that the child is home and safe, it is important that the parents enforce the consequence and reemphasize that the child chose not to be able to play with his/her friends.

**Positive Discipline** means that parents reward the positive behavior of children and not focus solely on the negative. For example, two children are playing and a parent tells them that they need to clean up their toys before dinner. The parent returns to see one child still playing, while the other has begun to clean up his toys. The parent then thanks the child who has begun to clean up his toys. The parent then goes about his/her business. The parent is encouraging the positive behavior while ignoring the inappropriate behavior. Children learn that in order to get a positive response from a parent they must behave appropriately, while negative behavior does not receive attention.

**Not reacting to the moment** means that parents should try and not react to the moment, but have planned responses to different situations. For example, a child spills his/her milk while eating dinner. A parent takes a deep breath and responds by saying, “Sorry you spilled the milk. Please get a towel and clean it up and get yourself a new glass of milk.” This reaction is in contrast to a parent saying, “What happened? What is wrong with you? Pay attention to what you are doing.” Clearly, the child already feels bad for spilling the milk. Rather than making the child feel worse, the parent uses a response that was thought of beforehand. This parent is being proactive and not reacting to the moment.

Here is a scenario that illustrates how to **guide** your children:

**Daughter:** I really feel bad for Theresa. She is pregnant, and her boyfriend doesn’t want anything to do with her anymore.

**Mom:** She must really feel terrible. I’m certainly proud of you, Honey, for being so concerned.

**Daughter:** I don’t know. Mom it’s so complex. But I am going to keep being her friend.

**Mom:** Good for you. A true friend is worth more than gold. Certainly that’s so in situations like this. You’re a good friend, Honey. I love you.

**Daughter:** I love you, Mom! It so great talking to you—even about difficult things like this. You really understand.

**Not - Guiding**

**Daughter:** I really feel bad for Theresa. She’s pregnant, and her boyfriend doesn’t want anything to do with her anymore.

**Mom:** Well it was bound to happen. Just a matter of time. Play with fire and you get burned. I’m not the least bit surprised, nor do I feel sorry for her. She knew what she was getting into when she got mixed up with that loser. I don’t know mom it’s so complex. But I am going to keep being her friend.

**Daughter:** Mom! How can you say that? Theresa’s a neat girl. She just made a mistake. No one is perfect! Not you or me. Don’t be so hard on her.

**Mom:** Neat girls don’t go to bed with dumb guys. You bet she made a mistake, and she’ll pay for it the rest of her life. As for you, young lady, don’t you dare do a stupid thing like that.

**Daughter:** I can’t believe you, Mother! (as she leaves in a huff).

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4 Adapted from Latham, G. (1997) *What’s a parent to do?* Salt Lake City: Deseret.