

Advice for Parents Who are New to the US

Sleeping and Waking

Younger children usually need more sleep than teenagers. In general:

- Children under age 5 need 10-12 hours of sleep a night.
- School age children need 9-10 hours of sleep a night.
- Teens need 8-9 hours of sleep each night.

The night before school, some parents and children find it helpful to lay out the clothes and books they will need for school the next day.

Going to School

All girls and boys in the U.S., including disabled children, are required by law to go to school.

Children must arrive at school on time. Children who ride the bus to school should be at the bus stop five minutes before the bus is scheduled to come. If children are late or absent from school, parents should call the school to explain. Ask for an interpreter if needed. Never use a child as an interpreter.

Meals and Nutrition

Children need to eat a healthy breakfast before school so they have energy to learn. Children in the U.S. usually eat 3 meals a day, with 1 or 2 snacks during the day. A meal should include a staple (rice, corn, or wheat); protein (meat or beans); and plenty of fruit and vegetables. Drink plenty of water and limited amounts of fruit juices and milk.

Street Safely

Adults should help children cross the street safely. Use crosswalks, and teach young children to “stop, look and listen” before crossing the street. Make sure children have the clothing they need for the weather.

Car Safely

Never leave children under 10 years old alone in a car.

Seatbelts

Most states require people to use seat belts when they ride in a car. Usually, people in the front seat must wear a seat belt, children under age 4 must be in child-sized car seats, and children between ages 4 and 8 may need booster seats.

Home Safely

Put dangerous things where children cannot reach them, including matches, bleach, cleaning liquids, and medicines. If a child swallows something that might cause harm, call 911 immediately.

Child Supervision

Parents are expected to watch their own children and to know what their children are doing. Neighbors will not watch someone else's child unless they are asked and they have said yes. Child supervision guidelines are different for every state. Here are some general guidelines:

- 7 and under – Do not leave alone.
- 8-10 years – Don't leave alone more than 90 minutes during the day or early evening.
- 11-12 years – May be left alone up to 3 hours, but not late at night.
- 13-15 years – May be left alone, but not overnight.
- 16-17 years – May be left alone, in some cases up to 2 overnights.

Children who are left alone should always know how to get in touch with parents or other responsible adult and to call 911 in case of an emergency. Children in the U.S. usually do not start baby-sitting until 11 or 12 and may not watch your children or infants until age 15.

Safety in Public Places

Children under age 8 should be supervised at all times, especially in public places. Children over age 8 should ask parents' permission before going out alone or with friends. Parents should teach children not to take candy or gifts from people their families do not know, and to tell a trusting adult if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable. Warn children about the danger of drugs, alcohol, and smoking.

Showing Children Attention

Sometimes children will misbehave to get parents' attention. Children are happier when parents spend time with them, including talking, listening, and having fun together.

Discipline

Harsh physical discipline, such as slapping, hitting, beating, or shaking hard enough to leave a mark or to injure a child, is illegal in the U.S. Certain people, such as teachers, doctors and social workers, must report marks on a child that could be signs of child abuse. Since any physical discipline can become harsh, and because children learn better from other methods discipline, many people in the U.S. do not use physical discipline today. The next three pages show common discipline methods used in the

U.S.

Time Outs

"Time outs" are often used for children up to age 8, by making a regular place where a child is sent to sit alone, calm down and think about his or her actions. Use the child's age as a guide: for example, 2 minutes for a 2-year-old, and 3 minutes for a 3-year-old. Parents should explain calmly to the child how to behave correctly in the future.

Rewards and Consequences

Children ages 6-12 can be disciplined with rewards and consequences. Reward children for good behavior, for example, letting them watch a special TV program for making their bed every day or allowing them to play with a friend if they help with the dishes. Take away something children like when they disobey parents, for example, not letting children play outside after school because they did not tidy their bedroom.

Privileges and Limits

Teenagers can earn privileges when they obey parents' rules and lose privileges when they disobey the rules. For example, teens who complete their chores, tell their parents where they are going, and come home on time can earn time on the computer, driving the car, using the phone, or with friends. If teens do not follow the rules, parents can take away these privileges. Be clear and consistent about expected behavior, house rules, rewards, and consequences.

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Occasionally, a family that is reported for possible child abuse or neglect may get a home visit by a case worker or a police officer from Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to make sure that the child is safe. There are four types of harm to children:

- ***Physical abuse:* Injury to a child from action such as beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking or other ways of harming a child.**
- ***Child neglect:* Abandoning, or not supervising a child; not meeting a child's physical, or medical needs; however being poor does not mean parents are neglectful.**
- ***Sexual abuse:* Any sexual activity between a child and an adult.**
- ***Emotional abuse:* Frequent screaming, name calling, or rejection of the child.**

Most families are never visited by DCFS. However, families that are visited by DCFS should stay calm and cooperative, and should make sure that worker brings an interpreter or cultural liaison to help with communication and understanding. Children should never be used as interpreters. DCFS will help the family learn to resolve conflicts and use effective discipline methods with their children. They may help the family get

needed services in the home or at an agency. If DCFS believes it is not safe for the child to remain in the home, the child will be placed with a relative, foster family or emergency shelter. If this happens, the parents should contact an elder or community leader and a lawyer to make sure both the family and DCFS have enough information. There may be a court hearing where a judge decides whether it is safe for the child to return home. DCFS will work with the family to make the home safe for the child's return. Sometime children threaten to call 911 when parents have not harmed them, in order to get something they want. Parent should know the laws and tell children that they can get into trouble making false reports.

Prepared to Learn

Children who have daily routines, constant discipline, family meals, and are shown attention are happier and better able to learn in school.

School

Schools expect parents to be involved in their children's education. Parents meet with teachers a few times each school year. In meetings with teachers or other school workers, ask for an interpreter if needed. Never use a child as an interpreter. Parents may be asked to volunteer at the school or donate certain things. This is voluntary.

After School

Every day after school:

- Ask children about their school day ("What was the best/worst thing about school today? What made you laugh today? Who did you play with and why?") Help them complete homework. Check for notices sent home from school. Supervise and set limits on TV, video games, and computer use. Schools and community centers often have after-school activities for children.

Junk Food

After school, limit snacks and encourage children to eat healthy foods such as fruits. Do not let children eat many cookies, chips, or candy and limit sodas.

Eating Together

It is important for families to eat meals together. Sharing at least one meal each day can help make families strong, and can give time to enjoy cultural foods and traditions together.

Household Chores

Share household responsibilities. For example, everyone can help to set the table and

clean up after meals. Children often have household “chores,” but their job is to help their parents, not to be fully responsible. Some families reward children for completing their chores by giving them a small money “allowance,” or by letting them do some activity they enjoy.

Hygiene

Teach children to wash their hands after playing outdoors, before meals, and after using the toilet, and to brush their teeth after eating.

Breastfeeding

Breast milk is best for babies. When American mothers nurse in public, they often cover themselves with a blanket or go into another room to nurse their babies.

Bedtime

Children do best with a regular schedule. Set a bedtime routine, such as brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, reading a story or singing before bed, and getting to sleep at the same time each night. This can be a good time to share positive memories, stories, or songs from your culture with children.