

Child and Adolescent Therapy

Welcome to SLFS

Welcome to Smart Love Family Services. We are glad that you have turned to us to help your child. Bringing your child to therapy may be a new experience for you as parents/caregivers and we understand that you may have a lot of questions. Our professional staff has created this handout as a way to answer parents' commonly asked questions about child therapy at SLFS. (*Child therapy here includes adolescent therapy*). We hope that this information provides you with an understanding of how we help children. We are also available to answer any additional questions you may have in person: parents may contact their child's therapist at any time or Dr. Carla Beatrice, Director of Clinical Services at (773) 665-8052, ext. 200.

The Type of Child Therapy SLFS Provides

Smart Love Family Services uses an approach, Intrapsychic Humanism (IH), which was developed by two highly respected experts in the mental health field, Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D. **Inner Humanism[®]** is the application of these ideas to caring for individuals of all ages in therapy. **Smart Love[®]** is the application of these discoveries to parenting and child development. Supported by the latest child development research, IH has been successfully applied by trained professionals in a broad range of settings for over four decades.

The Piepers, Chicago natives and parents of five, discovered that everyone is born with the capacity to achieve a stable and pleasurable inner well-being. They identified effective ways to foster this well-being, and hence avoid the development of self-sabotage. Children, adolescents, and adults who possess inner happiness are able to make constructive and healthy self-caretaking choices, enjoy a productive and fulfilling school/work life, and sustain close and pleasurable relationships with loved ones and peers.

Our professional staff receives ongoing training in IH and uses these principles when caring for the children and adolescents who come see us at SLFS. We have found this approach to be highly effective in helping children become more self-regulated and happier. As you read this brochure, you may find that this type of child therapy is unique in certain ways. We provide detailed explanations below for why we structure the therapy this way so that you can understand the benefits to you and your children.

How is Child Therapy Structured?

Therapists at SLFS meet individually with children and adolescents for 45 minute weekly sessions. Parents or other caregivers are not directly involved in the therapy sessions. However, we believe that it is very important for parents to receive support as well as be part of the therapy process by meeting with their own parent guidance counselor or parent coach at SLFS. (See below for details). The reason we meet with children individually is that it has many benefits in terms of effectiveness. We have found that children make much more progress when they know that the therapist is their therapist and not shared by other family members. This helps children feel taken seriously, which enhances their trust in the relationship. Further, child clients greatly benefit from knowing that the details of their therapy are kept private and confidential. While therapists will always share some information with parents, such as the goals of therapy, general progress updates, and any serious health and safety issues, we keep the specifics private because children are much more likely to share their feelings and concerns when they know it is private. Research in general indicates that one of the greatest predictors of effective therapy is when clients trust their therapists and know that what they share is confidential. At SLFS, we believe this applies to clients of all ages, including very young children.

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How Do We Understand Children's Problems and Behaviors?

From an IH perspective, we believe that all people, including children of all ages, are born with a desire and capacity to be happy, loveable and loving. However, it is very common for children to develop what Smart Love calls inner unhappiness, which is when children unknowingly acquire motives to feel unhappy. We believe that children's acting out behaviors or symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, are an expression of inner unhappiness and reflects the child's difficulty with self-regulation and self-caretaking. In addition, we also understand that children's problems can be a sign of the difficulty they are having in response to painful losses that may be occurring in their lives, such as divorce, bullying, having a learning disability, to name a few. Many children that come to therapy are having reactions to losses.

Reactions to Losses: Children with inner unhappiness often react to losses in such a way that makes them feel worse or causes more problems for themselves. When children act out, we understand this as a maladaptive attempt to feel better. We all want to feel happy and when we don't, we do something to try to feel better—sometimes we turn to things that are good for us and sometimes we turn to things that are not so good for us. For example, a child may have a tendency to get angry or aggressive towards others in response to something going wrong (e.g., getting a bad grade), or another child may take it out on herself, such as being self-critical and feeling inadequate. Children can also isolate themselves or shut-down when there are problems. Therapy helps children learn that there is a better way to feel and a better way to deal with losses. We help children develop and turn to more constructive ways of coping and taking care of themselves when something goes wrong, such as learning to acknowledge and express their feelings, turning to healthy positive relationships, and renewing positive efforts to solve problems as ways to resolve problems. Over time, therapy helps children lose interest in their negative, unhealthy ways of relating, coping and taking care of themselves and transition to positive, constructive responses.

Children Can Also Have Reactions to Positive Experiences, Called Aversive Reactions to Pleasure: Children who have inner unhappiness can also respond to positive experiences with what Smart Love calls aversive reactions. Parents often wonder why their child may suddenly become unhappy while having a positive experience—for example, a child has a meltdown after receiving the exact birthday present he asked for. Or sometimes parents wonder why their child may be doing well in something, such as school, and then she sabotages herself by not turning her homework in on a regular basis. When children have needs to feel unhappy, they can then unknowingly react negatively to positive, pleasurable experiences. Through the type of therapy we do at SLFS, children's desire to feel internally happy and to be able to enjoy themselves and others grows significantly such that their aversive reactions decrease over time.

Overall, therapy helps children develop greater internal self-regulation and self-esteem so they are equipped to respond more constructively to the inherent losses in life as well as to be able to stably enjoy the positive pleasures in life, including school success and positive relationships with friends and family members!

How Do We Help Children in Therapy? — An "Inside-Out" Approach

In essence, our goal in child therapy is to strengthen children's inner happiness and their ability to turn more to their constructive motives to be happy, loving, self-regulated and self-caretaking. We believe that every child we see, no matter with how many problems, has the underlying motive and desire to take better care of themselves, to have better relationships, and to generally experience greater fulfillment and success.

Therapy first and foremost creates a comfortable, safe place and relationship for children so that they can trust that all their thoughts and feelings are welcome. Therapists let children know that they will not be judged and that they will not "get in trouble" in therapy. In order for therapy to work, children have to trust that the therapist really wants to know who they are and that we are there to help them. This immensely helps children bring their problems and inner unhappiness into the therapy, which needs to happen in order for progress to be made.

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Once that relationship is established, our goal is to help children gradually get to know their inner experiences and to be able to express their feelings and concerns, whether that is directly through words or metaphorically through play (see below on use of play). Children often come to therapy unaware of their feelings, yet your children have feelings that are just as complex and intense as yours. When they cannot express those feelings verbally, they tend to act them out with negative or isolative behaviors. The therapist helps the child turn to the therapy relationship to get help for their feelings rather than act them out in negative behaviors or symptoms. Therapists' expertise helps children better understand their conflicting wishes for happiness and unhappiness and the workings for their minds.

Parents will often ask whether we tell children what to do in sessions, such as directly teach them coping skills or have them do "homework". Inner humanism therapy is different in that we believe that real change comes from an inside-out approach. What does that mean? It means two things. First, children's symptoms and problems are an expression of an inner experience of something troubling the child. It is important to address the problem at the inner level to really resolve the issues, rather than only change an external behavior. A medical analogy can be helpful here. If your child has a rash, you would not only treat the external symptom with an ointment, but you would also find out what the cause of the rash is and treat it (e.g., steroids for eczema). Therefore, the goal of our therapy is to resolve the inner unhappiness and strengthen children's inner happiness and self-esteem. When this "inside" problem gets addressed, the "outside" problems eventually disappear, with the result that your child will function better both inside and "outside." When a child feels better about herself, she is much more likely to cope in a positive healthy way when something doesn't go her way (e.g., her friends don't invite her to a sleepover—she shares her feelings with you and then finds a friend to hang out with rather than sulk and feel rejected). Good coping and problem solving skills come directly out of this type of inner self-regulation. Everything else falls into place so to speak. As children start to feel happier and better about themselves, they are much more open to other adults, such as their parents and teachers, guiding and helping them and ultimately they perform better in school, with peers, and in family life.

Further, we give children the opportunity to share their feelings with their therapists on their own timetables. So our therapists do not pressure children to talk on any particular topic or about any specific problem. To do so is to get into a power struggle with the child. When the child brings feelings and problems to the therapist out of trust and a wish for help, the result is that the child's trust in the therapist deepens which makes the therapists' insights to the child transformational and powerful. We strengthen the child's innate motives to seek positive care and a positive experience of herself, and healthy self-caretaking. All children have this motive and it is more effective to respond to the child's own motive rather than force our agenda on children.

What Does the Child Therapist Do With My Child in Sessions?

Many parents wonder "What does my child do in there?!" The most important thing parents can know is that whether children directly talk about their problems, there is always an effective therapeutic process occurring. This includes even when children say, "All I do in there is play games and eat snacks!" Children and adolescents will "talk about their problems", but many do not. Child therapy is different than adult therapy. Often, children will express their problems metaphorically through play, or through the way they interact with the therapist. It is important to allow children to express themselves in ways they feel comfortable. The therapists at SLFS are trained to understand the meanings of these communications and then respond in therapeutic ways to facilitate the child's ability for self-regulation, including helping children learn that it is more constructive for them to turn to the therapist for help rather than negative ways of relating and coping.

Why Does the Therapist Give My Child Snacks?

You will probably notice your child and other child clients at SLFS come out of their sessions with all kinds of snacks. There is a therapeutic benefit to providing snacks. Initially, it can help children feel comfortable in being in a new setting and meeting a new person. When therapists respond to children's requests for certain snacks, it also helps children feel valued, cared about and taken

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seriously. In other words, there is a deeper meaning for the child of being emotionally nurtured and the experience that he/she can cause the therapist to respond, which facilitates therapy progress. Over time, as children internalize positive feelings about themselves, they become less reliant on needing external things to feel cared about and good about themselves. Because of the value of snacks, it is our recommendation to allow your child to have snacks in therapy and in general not to limit the amount (unless of course there are allergies or dietary restrictions). You may find that your child has more candy, for example, than you would normally provide as a parent. A therapist's role is different than a parent in that it is important for parents to regulate how many snacks children have. However, it is more beneficial if within reason the therapist allows children to have unlimited access to snacks during their sessions.

How Long Will My Child's Therapy Take?

First, it is best to talk directly to your child's therapist so that she can give you a more accurate assessment of your child's treatment needs. The length of therapy will depend on your child and the type of problems he or she is experiencing. In general, we recommend that children stay in therapy for as long as is needed to resolve the underlying "inside" issues that caused the "outside" problems or symptoms. We strongly recommend that children stay in therapy even when the presenting problem is resolved so that the changes can be internalized and stabilized. When parents end their child's therapy too soon, the child will often backslide and revert back to negative patterns and behaviors.

It is important to understand that therapy is very effective but that the results are not immediate. Patterns and symptoms can take years to develop and, therefore, they often take time to change. Parents may feel pressed to end their child's therapy because they worry that their child will grow "dependent" on therapy. However, we have found that the opposite is really true: children who stay in therapy longer make more progress in their self-esteem and self-regulation, which are indicators of genuine autonomy. They actually become less dependent on their symptoms and their negative ways of relating and coping, and instead, become happier and learn to turn to healthier ways of taking care of themselves.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Therapy Progress is Uneven

It is very common for children's progress in therapy to be uneven. Children will often have periods of progress followed by what we call backsliding. Therefore, it's often as though children take two steps forward and one step back. The reason for this is that children often have aversive reactions to the positive changes they are making. Why would that be? When a child has motives for unhappiness, she can react negatively to feeling happier and doing better because she has grown accustomed to feeling unhappy and that part of her mind can unknowingly disrupt the positive changes. It is very helpful for parents to understand this process. If you know what you are seeing is a common part of therapy and that the backsliding is in response to progress and is temporary, it can help you hang in there and not get discouraged with your child. It is best to be positive and patient while children are backsliding. Eventually, children's appetite for happiness outweighs their motives to feel unhappy, which means your child will experience less backsliding and more stable progress over time. You may be able to relate to backsliding as an adult because adults commonly experience setbacks when they try to make positive changes in their lives. For example, many adults have a positive motive to take better care of their health by eating better and exercising; however, it is not uncommon for people to make progress and then experience backsliding in the form of engaging in unhealthy behaviors, such as eating too much. The important thing to remember is that the motive to be happy and to take care of oneself is always there and that not all is lost when backsliding occurs.

Why Do Children Sometimes Say They Don't Want to Go to Therapy?

It is not uncommon for children at times to say that they do not want to go to their therapy sessions. This may confuse parents sometimes, especially in cases where the child appears to enjoy going to his therapy. Why does this happen? As discussed earlier, children who have needs for unhappiness can react to feeling better on the inside, and to the positive changes occurring in their

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lives. These reactions can cause them to refuse to continue to get help—a part of them unknowingly attempts to sabotage their progress as a way to maintain their inner experience of unhappiness. Further, children who have inner unhappiness can believe that it is better not to turn to others for help so that they can react strongly to the help available in the relationship with their therapist and the relationship pleasure that represents. So what should a parent do when this happens? It is important to insist that children attend their appointments and encourage the child to talk to the therapist about his feelings. You want to give your stamp of approval on your child's therapy. Children may overtly express anger about this decision, but a part of them will feel taken seriously and cared about by the parent. Parents may feel that the therapist is not listening to the child's feelings when she insists that the child come to his sessions. However, it is important to ask the question: which part of your child do you want to listen to? The part of him that wants to be happy and be able to take care of himself (no longer have troubling symptoms) or the part of the child that prefers to be unhappy and continues to have problems that cause him losses? Further, therapists will always listen to all of your child's feelings including the ones about not wanting to come to therapy—we will let your child know that we are happy that he could tell us about this part of him, and that we are there to help him with those feelings.

How Parents Can Be Involved

Many people are involved in your child's life but you are the most important. Your child's therapist will meet with you for 1–2 parent feedback sessions after he or she has met with your child a few times. This time is used to hear your perspective on your child and to learn how we can best help your child and family. After that time, you can contact your child's therapist if you have questions or if you would like to schedule a parent meeting for a progress update or for parent support.

We always recommend that parents attend at least a few parent sessions with a separate parent guidance counselor at SLFS to get support in your efforts to help your child. It will help you enjoy parenting more and it makes the therapy progress go faster. We recommend that parents see a parent counselor separate from the child's therapist because this helps children maintain their trust in the therapist, and it also provides parents with more availability of their own parent guidance counselor.

Parents may want to meet with their child's therapist so that the therapist is aware of what is happening in the child's life—parents wonder how we can help children if we do not know the details. It is our experience that we are fully able to help children without being informed of all the details of the child's life and, in fact, it can make progress faster. The reason for this is twofold. First, it is best for children to be able to decide what information they want us to know or not know. Children can feel a real loss when parents share things that they would not have shared with their therapist. The only exception to this of course is if there is some health or safety concern. If a parent is worried about a child's health or safety, it is very important to call the child's therapist to share this kind of information. Second, as described earlier, the type of therapy we do focuses on helping children have a more positive experience of himself, and therefore, it is not necessary to know all about the child's external life. As the child's inner well-being increases, the external problems she or he is having will diminish and then disappear.

Finally, you can also take advantage of the Smart Love parent education seminars and resource books—information is available on our website and in our waiting rooms. We always want to hear from you if you have concerns or questions about your child's therapy. Call us and then we can decide together the best way to help your child.

We look forward to helping you and your family!

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Chicago Location: Natalie & Ben Heineman Smart Love Center, 2222 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago, IL 60647
Oak Park Location: 1010 Lake Street, Suite 500, Oak Park, IL 60301

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Benefits of Telehealth Therapy for Children



Parents understandably wonder if children are able to benefit from virtual therapy sessions due to their developmental level. While in person psychotherapy sessions are best for a client of any age, virtual sessions still offer many benefits including for children! **The most important factor is that children are able to connect with their therapist--a virtual connection is much better than no connection at all. (Please see point about common behaviors in child telehealth below in red).** Therapists are trained on how to engage children during virtual sessions in a way that may be slightly different than in-person sessions. But the focus remains the same—child clients will still be able to use their therapy time to get help for their feelings in the way they want, including talking and/or playing. Therapists will continue to make observations about the child's feelings and provide helpful reflections to support the child and help them cope during this very difficult time. It is important to keep in mind that the current health crisis may last for a significant period of time in which virtual visits are the only option we have to provide care. Therefore, it is essential that children's therapy is able to continue or that children/teens needing therapy for the first time are able to get it.

Children benefit from having the following:

- Consistent structure during a period of immense change and uncertainty.
- Trusting relationship that is available for ongoing support /care during a very stressful time.
- Getting help with their unhappy and worried feelings about the big losses occurring in their lives:
 - Not attending school or having a familiar routine
 - Not seeing friends and teachers
 - Not being able to do fun activities outside the home
- Getting help with their anxiety, worries, and fear about themselves/loved ones getting sick or the family enduring financial strain.
- Support of their constructive, positive motives to take good care of themselves and still be able to feel good about themselves and enjoy constructive pleasure despite all the losses.
- Support to work on treatment goals that would be the same as in-person therapy.

The following are ways to enhance the virtual experience for children in their homes:

- Ideally, the child can be in a private space such as their bedroom. It is important they have privacy.
- **Parent or caregiving adult should be nearby** to step in if therapist reaches out to parent via phone in order to regulate any unsafe behavior or to help child come back to the session if necessary.
- Parent should also be nearby if there are technical problems. It is helpful to have a backup plan for the session (phone, for example, if internet goes down).
- Sessions take place at their regular in person appointment time or a new time that remains consistent as much as possible.
- Child can have toys, games, and even snacks as they would in-person sessions.

Important Heads Up About Common Behaviors During Telehealth Sessions!

Child/teen therapy is different than adult therapy and this also pertains to Telehealth sessions. Children and teens often demonstrate common behaviors that parents may understandably misinterpret to mean that their child is not engaging in therapy or that telehealth is not helping/working. For example, children can have a

harder time staying consistently engaged in front of a screen for their appointment. They may want to show the therapist other rooms in the house, the family pet, or introduce other family members! They may spend time on their phones, on their computers playing video games alone or with the therapist, be silent, or may want to do their homework. **Rest assured there is still a helpful therapeutic process occurring!** The most helpful response from parents is to be positive about the child's motives to be involved with the therapist however they choose to be as long as it is safe. The one time to intervene more actively is if a child leaves the Telehealth session—the parent can bring the child back to the screen and try to help the child stay on the session for the duration. Lastly, length of sessions may understandably vary—they may not be as long as in-person appointments. But therapists will help children stay connected as long as is workable for the child. Briefer therapy sessions are better than no therapy in our professional view.

We are here to answer any questions or address any concerns that parents have about telehealth therapy for children and teens. We understand this is uncharted territory for many!

Smart Love Therapists

(Feel free to also contact Dr. Carla Beatrici, Clinical Director, at carla.beatricic@smartlovefamily.org or 773-665-8052, ext. 200)

Smart Love in Action

Stay Positive

All parents feel stressed and overwhelmed at times. In difficult situations, when you are able to stay calm and positive, your child is more likely to be receptive to your help and easier to manage. When you remain positive about your child and the difficulty she is experiencing, it is easier to find constructive and creative solutions to help her regain her happiness and equilibrium (as well as yours!). Best of all, a positive approach causes your child to feel positively about herself and your relationship.

Model Kindness

Research shows that children copy how we treat them, then treat themselves and others the same way. Guidance and kindness are not mutually exclusive. When you guide with kindness, children will develop an internal compass based on compassion toward themselves and others. Their day to day choices are based on a desire for positive self-caretaking and positive relationships with others. An inner compass based on positive self-esteem is the most effective tool children have in being able to make good choices (personal, social, academic) throughout their lives.

Acknowledge Feelings

Make yourself available to hear your child's feelings and try to understand his experience - especially when he is unhappy and struggling. This is how he will come to feel unconditionally loved and lovable. There are times he may not be able to have what he wants, but even when he is struggling and out of sorts, he learns that he can always have your positive regard and understanding. By taking his feelings seriously, you help him understand himself, trust your relationship, and instead of acting out his feelings in negative ways, learn to turn to caring relationships for comfort and support.

Regulate Behavior

It is always important to step in to manage your child's unsafe, immature, or out of control behavior. You teach your child healthy self-regulation by intervening to change the behavior (despite your child's complaints or protests), while remaining firm, yet compassionate and understanding. Let your child know the reason for your guidance without "arguing" or expecting him to necessarily agree or understand why he can't have what he wants in the moment. Keep in mind that the most important thing your child wants is to feel lovable and loved by you, especially when he experiences disappointment or frustration.

Time-In Together

It is always best to offer solutions to problems that bring you and your child closer ("time-in"), rather than isolating her or withdrawing your love and approval. Your love and approval builds her positive self-esteem, and teaches her that problems can be resolved within a caring relationship, instead of isolation or with negativity and force. Your relationship with your child can also be viewed as a partnership with a shared goal. All parents love their children and want the best for them. All children come into the world loving their parents, wanting to be happy and to feel loved and lovable in their parent's eyes. It is within the context of a close loving relationship with their parents that children become happy, and your child's deepest desire is to have that kind of relationship with you. A close and loving relationship is deeply pleasurable for both parent and child.

Note about Immediate Health and Safety Concerns: if your child is about to engage in something unsafe, such as riding a bike into the street or hitting a sibling: first, step in immediately to stop the behavior, then follow the rest of the steps.

Remember: Smart Love is not permissive. Children need their parents' loving guidance to learn healthy self-regulation. When you use Smart Love, you respond to your child's immature behavior WITHOUT harshness (anger, reprimands) or negative consequences (threats, rewards, time-outs). Punitive measures breed resentment, anger, and negative self-esteem in children. Smart Love brings joy to parenting and happiness to children.

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Self Esteem



Understanding and Fostering It in Our Children

All parents wonder about their children's self-esteem from time-to-time. Do they have it? Will it be there when things get tough in school and in life? We all want the best for our children. Fortunately, the latest child development research has taught us a lot more about self-esteem. We know what it is as well as how it develops in our children and what we can do to foster it.

Experts agree that acquiring a genuine inner self-esteem is the most important developmental achievement in a child's life. Self-esteem is a child's positive feelings about herself and is the center of her confidence. A healthy and stable self-esteem will allow a child to succeed in school and in all endeavors in life.

Traditional views of self-esteem are centered around the belief that it is generated by everyday activities such as success in after school activities, a winning hometown sports team, how many friends you have and what they think of you, or how good your grades are, etc. While these are certainly important and add pleasure to life, they are inherently loss-filled (i.e. your favorite team won't win

every game, someone will eventually get better grades than you, or you no longer want to play soccer after school, etc.).

Good feelings generated by success from external things are unstable. Since you can't control things outside yourself, you will always need another experience of winning to feel good about yourself and it is impossible to win every time. Ups and downs in life are inevitable. Smart Love presents a more constructive view of an internal self-esteem that is genuine, lasting and comes from a deep conviction of being loved, lovable, and loving. This inner self-esteem is unshakable, so that when something bad happens, your child's sense of self-worth remains stable. For example, a child with stable inner self-esteem will view a low grade on a test at school this way - "I'm upset I did poorly on my test. I guess I need to try harder next time." A child who has attached his good feelings about himself to external successes will view himself in any number of negative ways, such as "I am so stupid for not doing well on my test," or "I hate that class!" Permanent, internal self-esteem helps your child make good choices at home and school and avoid situations that cause her trouble. How does my child acquire this type of inner self-esteem? All babies are born with it and then look to their parents and caregivers to build and foster it. From birth, her very survival is dependant on our responding to her desires and needs. The most meaningful experience in a child's life is to believe that she has caused her parents to love caring for her. When parents respond to their baby's cries it strengthens that basic need. When we respond lovingly to her cries, or coo back and forth with our baby, she takes it in and feels loved and connected to you. Early on every baby and young child copies her parents and wants to be just like them. Not just how you walk and talk, but how you treat her and how you feel about

her when you are with her. We are all born to love whatever care we get and to want more of it. The way you treat your child is how she will treat herself and others.

As parents, we have a wonderful opportunity to foster our children's inner self-esteem. It is comforting to know that your child's self-esteem at any age does not need to be under the control of outside influences. When we can be understanding, kind and loving, children internalize this way of relating and carry it with them the rest of their lives. All these positive experiences get deposited in your children's "self-esteem piggy banks" that they will draw on to feel good about themselves when the going gets tough in school and in life. Regardless of how old your child is and what they are struggling with, parents can always build on their child's innate potential for positive self-esteem. It is never too late!

Self-Esteem Building Tips:

- Keep your relationship with your child free from conflict and power struggles
- Have as many positive experiences and enjoyable activities with your child as possible
- Set aside focused individual time with each child everyday
- Use "loving regulation" to manage children's immature, yet age-appropriate behavior
- Avoid timeouts, withdrawal of privileges or using consequences in managing behavior.

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Oak Park Location: 1010 Lake Street, Suite 500, Oak Park, IL 60301

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Discipline Redefined



Using *Loving Regulation* to Manage Your Children's Behavior

Every parent wonders how to handle their children's behavior when it needs to be managed, from the full-blown tantrum to just getting a toddler to put on his boots when leaving the house.

Smart Love presents a unique answer to these challenges. Instead of prescribing consequences, counting to three, timeouts, threats, withdrawal of privileges or getting angry, Smart Love helps parents understand the meaning behind their children's behavior. When parents can respond to the meaning behind the behavior, then their children are more available to their parents' loving regulation because they feel loved and understood.

Parents will say that common "disciplinary" responses work because they stop unwanted behavior. But these measures only work because we are bigger and stronger than they are. It teaches that "might makes right" which isn't a healthy message to be giving children about how to interact. Children disciplined with these common measures feel doubly bad about themselves because something went wrong and also because they know that you are unhappy with them. And since all children copy

the way they are treated, they will learn to treat themselves and others the same way.

So rather than discipline, use loving regulation instead. It preserves your relationship with your children and helps them learn how to make healthy choices. Moreover, it helps children grow up to be happy and successful adults who make healthy and constructive choices when we aren't around all the time to guide them. This is the long-term goal that all parents have for their children.

What does loving regulation look like? An example from the book, *Smart Love*, goes like this. "To illustrate, a three-year-old insisted on wearing sneakers instead of boots on a snowy day. His father simply said, 'OK, but then you won't be able to stomp around in the snow. If you want to walk in the snow drifts, you need to wear boots so your feet stay dry and warm.' The little boy considered this for a moment and then agreed to put his boots on. If his son had continued to insist on wearing his sneakers, the father would have brought the boy's boots along in case the boy discovered that playing in the snow was more important to him than wearing sneakers. The father's objective was to make sure that his son didn't go out in the snow inappropriately dressed; it was not to teach the boy that he would be sorry if he didn't make the right choice."

What is the meaning behind the child's wish not to put on boots? A toddler can't understand that snow plus sneakers equals cold feet. He is at an age when he "wants what he wants when he wants it," so he feels invincible and doesn't like his wishes interfered with. So being diplomatic and "going under the radar" can be helpful with children this age. Again, as written in the book, *Smart Love*, "The Smart Love guideline is that your child will better accept your occasional need to interfere with

her wishes if you honor her requests whenever possible. When you can't grant a particular wish, showing your child that you will help her find an alternative emphasizes that you want her to make her own choices and to have fun. Smart Love is not permissiveness. A permissive parent would let the child climb through the snow in sneakers because the parent is uncomfortable with his child's unhappiness over putting on the boots."

When families begin using loving regulation, the rewards are great. Children are happier and parenting is so much less stressful and more enjoyable. To learn more about how to use loving regulation, visit www.smartlovetfamily.org for a current schedule of parent education seminars and publications and resources.

Loving Regulation: Smart Love in Action

Remembering the word SMART when responding to your child

Stay Positive

Model Kindness

Acknowledge Feelings

Regulate Behavior

Time-In Together

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism[®]. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapyschic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2019 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Chicago Location: Natalie & Ben Heineman Smart Love Center, 2222 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago, IL 60647
Oak Park Location: 1010 Lake Street, Suite 500, Oak Park, IL 60301

773.665.8052, ext. 4 | www.smartlovetfamily.org