



# The Way of the Donkey

## Positive Parenting in The Way of the Donkey

Donkeys have many wonderful traits. Donkeys are very friendly and exceptionally smart. Donkeys are very laid back, but also very self-protective. They have a mind of their own. Donkeys are very intuitive and have an excellent sense of how others are feeling.

Positive psychology, also called the “science of happiness,” provides insight into strategies people can use to live happy and empowered lives ~ and respond effectively to stressful situations. Amazingly, it appears that donkeys already know these ways. The following are strategies for parents to use for parenting in The Way of the Donkey! You can also try using these strategies for yourself.

### The Seven Ways of the Donkey

**Connect With Friends** Donkeys bond very closely with a “buddy.”

Friendships help young people develop emotionally and gain healthy personal values. Through their interactions with friends, young people learn many important social skills, including how to communicate, cooperate, and solve problems. They gain empathy. They practice controlling their emotions and responding to the emotions of others. They develop the ability to think through different situations that arise. It is also helpful for young people to have close relationships with several “trusted adults who are outside the family.

- Help your child take other people’s perspective. How do you think that person feels? Encourage self-reflection and the “Golden Rule.” How would you feel if someone treated you like that?
- The best way for young people to make friends is by engaging in activities they enjoy. Support your child in engaging in these kinds of activities to have fun. Watch for positive relationships to emerge and encourage these relationships.
- Encourage relationships with adults who you know to be very safe.
- Facilitate and help your child make positive connections with friends and trusted adults.

**Reach Out To Be Kind** Donkeys reach out to scratch each other’s back. Mutual grooming helps to form strong bonds.

When your child reaches out to be kind to others, this not only makes others feel good, this also promotes your child’s happiness and well-being. Reaching out to be kind will result in kind responses in return. This helps your child to form better relationships.

- For young people who have difficulties forming friendships or are being treated badly, reaching out to be kind is a critical step to improve this situation. Discuss and jointly practice with your child how to reach out to be kind.
- Encourage your child to reach out to be kind to another person at several times a day. At the end of the day, discuss the ways your child reached out to be kind, how this made the other person feel, and how this made your child feel.

**Build Your Strengths** Donkeys are very curious and like to learn new things.

One of the most important things you can do is build your child’s strengths and do things that make them proud. You can encourage them: Have the courage to become who they really are. Follow their interests and dreams. Keep at it, even when things get tough. Work through their problems — persevere. Welcome failure, this means that they tried. Become a little better each and every day. Break through their barriers by doing what they are afraid of doing. Remember, life is a journey, not a race. Believe they can do hard things. Keep following their dreams.

- Every day encourage your child to strive to do things that makes them proud, uses their personal strengths, and builds new strengths. In the evening, ask, “What did you do today that you are proud of?”

**Be Thankful** Donkeys are thankful when they receive treats, especially carrots, scratches, or hugs. ;)

Being thankful for the good things that happen helps people feel more happy — and appears to lead to more good things happening. Gratitude makes us more resilient, strengthens relationships, and promotes forgiveness. Young people who practice gratitude report greater life satisfaction, more positive emotions, and that they feel more connected to their community.

- Every evening, ask your child what great things that happened that day. Encourage your child to express their gratitude to others.

**If Things Get Tough...** When faced with a possible threat, donkeys stop and stay calm, stand tall, and think things through.

**Stop and Stay Calm** Donkeys do not usually act impulsively or overreact.

Help your child learn to avoid acting impulsively when stressed. The frequent practice of mindfulness helps people achieve calmness and focus. Research has documented that mindfulness practice for young people results in improved well-being, social skills, self-regulation, and academic performance.

- Help your child learn and practice the principles of mindfulness. Encourage a happiness meditation: As they take the time to be calm, think: I had a positive connection with ... I reached out to be kind to ... I am proud that I ... I am happy that ...
- Remind your child that if something upsetting happens, their first response should be to stop and to breathe slowly to remain calm and focused. Then, they should stand tall and think things through. Help them to decide what other things they can do to help self-regulate.

**Stand Tall** Donkeys are prey animals. Other animals could eat them. They stand tall to appear more powerful.

Young people who stand tall and walk with pride are more likely to be perceived as being successful and competent. They are less likely to be treated badly. Simply adopting a physical pose of standing tall creates the feeling of personal power. In other words, your child can “fake it” by standing tall and this will then help your child to feel more personal power. It is not possible for you or your child to control how others might treat your child. It is possible to control how one feels about oneself and responds.

- Help your child practice “feeling small” and then “standing “tall.” Remind your child to stand tall and walk with pride throughout the day — especially in times your child feels stressed or is facing a challenge.
- Teach your child to keep their personal power in a situation when someone has been hurtful or something bad has happened by thinking this: “I choose not to give anyone the power to control how I feel about myself or respond.”

**Think Things Through** Donkeys think things through to decide what to do.

Avoid trying to resolve problems that emerge for your child. Assist your child figure out how to resolve problem situations by themselves. Avoid saying, “I think you should do this.” Instead, say, “Let’s talk about this so you can figure out what would be best for you to do.” This will help them learn how to solve problems on their own.

Especially teach your child how to handle situations where someone has treated them badly or if they made a mistake.

- The Think Things Through approach asks these questions: What has happened? What is my goal? What several powerful positive actions in accord with my strengths could I take? For each action, what might happen? What is my best first choice? If this does not work, what else could I do?
- If someone has treated your child badly, they should take these steps: Stop and breathe slowly to remain calm. Stand tall to keep your personal power. Take a positive action to leave the situation. Think things through to decide what else to do. Talk with a friend or trusted adult to get support or assistance..
- If your child been hurtful to someone else, they should take these steps: Stop and walk away. Calm yourself. Think things through to figure out why you did what you did and how you can accept personal responsibility. Not make excuses for your hurtful behavior. Stand tall and take steps to make things right by telling the person that you are sorry and will not be hurtful again
- If your child witnesses someone being treated badly, be a kind leader and step in to help. Depending on the situation, they can: Talk to the person treated badly later to provide them support and help them to think things through to figure out what to do. Ignore the person being hurtful and help the person being treated badly to walk away. Encourage the person being hurtful to stop and make things right. If their friend has been hurtful, strongly encourage them to stop and make things right — and consider whether they want to remain friends. Report serious or unresolved concerns to an adult who can help.

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