

# 10 Tips for Helping Your Child Have a Bright Future

## Infancy, Toddlerhood, Early Childhood

1. Keep your child's routine as close as possible to "normal" while you are in the hospital.
2. Keep all of your child's doctor appointments.
3. Talk to your child using good speech, not baby talk.
4. Sing to your child and play games like Peek-A-Boo, Pat-A-Cake, This Little Piggy and Wheels on the Bus. These games and songs utilize speech and motion.



5. Read to your child every day. Reading aloud to your child will help your child understand how our speech sounds, and how much fun it can be to read.

6. Keep up with your child's medical history and medications. Consider getting a Medic Alert bracelet or necklace or tag which you could even put on your child's diaper bag.

7. Treat your child as normally as possible. Get parenting handbooks that help you know what to expect your child to do at certain ages, but take into account the time your child has spent in the hospital.

8. Limit exposure to television or computers. Your child needs to interact with you and other people. Even Baby Einstein and other shows geared to young children are not a good substitute for Mom or Dad or even brother or sister.

9. Go to the park, Storytime at the library, or other places which have limited contact with others yet provide socialization and learning opportunities. Outdoor activities are great because it reduces the chances a child will be surrounded by germs which could cause your child to become sick.

10. Start your child now on a healthy diet. Talk to other parents in your support group for ideas of good foods to substitute if your child refuses to eat certain things.

## Pre-Teens and Early Teens

1. Trust your child to set their own limits.
2. Challenge your child, but remember Tip #1! Don't make your child a "cardiac cripple." Believe in your child and challenge him to be the best person he can be.

3. Brainstorm creative ways to help your child participate in activities he or she wishes to.

4. Give your child options --if swimming doesn't work, how about ice skating? Tennis? Golf? Bowling? Ping Pong? Find a way to keep your child active in a way he is happy.

5. Be sensitive to how your child feels about his condition. Some children aren't bothered by their scars. Some are. Some children hate having to take medicine. Try to be matter-of-fact about their situation and help them accept their defect as just a part of who they are.

6. With this in mind, now would be a good time to look into summer camps for your child. There is a listing on my website:

<http://www.congenitalheartdefects.com/resources.html#camps>

7. Make sure your child knows the name of his heart defect. By educating your child about his heart defect, you will eliminate some of the fear associated with it.

8. Increase your child's responsibility for his medications. Make it his responsibility to let you know a week in advance if medications need to be reordered.

9. Order a Medic Alert bracelet, sportsband or necklace for your child or at least have some kind of information (in a wallet or in a purse) regarding your child's heart defect, medications, allergies and doctors' names.

10. Start talking to your child honestly about the effects of drinking, using drugs and sex on his or her body. Teens need to know the risks involved with experimentation. This is also the time to answer any questions about their ability to have a child. Once they are old enough to ask the questions, they deserve the courtesy of an honest answer.

## Teens and Young Adults

1. Trust your teen/young adult.

2. Help your child investigate many different options for her future --technical school, vocational programs, internships, apprenticeships, junior colleges, traditional colleges, online colleges and training.

3. Check if your child is eligible for extra financial aid due to his heart defect.

4. Help your child learn how to be an active member of her care team. She should be able to keep a calendar with appointments and important medical information and have all of her care team's phone numbers somewhere handy in case she needs it.

5. Make sure your child understands the importance of making/keeping regular medical appointments.

6. Help your child understand her future ability to have children.

7. Make sure your child's insurance is taken care of when going to college. Make sure your child is aware of policy numbers and benefits. Let your child know about co-pays and what should be brought to a doctor's appointment.

8. Help your child find a doctor she feels comfortable with.

9. Be honest with your child. Offer to go to doctors' appointments, but don't push too much. You want your child to know you trust her and believe in her ability to care for herself.

10. Revel in your child's accomplishments. Part of helping your child have a bright future is enjoying the journey with her and helping her continue to make new goals and achieve them.

