



## Positive Parenting Norms Toolkit for West Virginia Home Visitors

Center for Health and Safety Culture

This document was created by the Center for Health and Safety Culture  
([www.mostofus.org](http://www.mostofus.org)) at Montana State University for TEAM for West Virginia Children.

TEAM for West Virginia Children  
[www.teamwv.org](http://www.teamwv.org) • [www.preventchildabusewv.org](http://www.preventchildabusewv.org)

# Table of Contents

## Pg. 1

Purpose

## Pg. 2

Why focus on Positive Norms?

How Positive Norms can be used in Home Visitation

How were these norms measured?

## Pg. 3

Guidance on Using Positive Parenting Norms

## Topics

## Pg. 4

General Well-being of Children

## Pg. 5

Breastfeeding

## Pg. 6

Developmental Activities /  
School Readiness

## Pg. 7

Safety and Discipline

## Pg. 8

Parent Learning

## Pg. 9

Crying

## Pg. 10

Shaken Baby Syndrome / Crying

## Pg. 11

Stability / Support Systems

## Pg. 12-13

Safe Sleeping

# Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide West Virginia home visitation providers with information to help support new parents. Specifically, the toolkit contains sample language that providers can use with parents and caregivers to motivate dialogue about various parenting issues. It also summarizes a recent survey of West Virginia parents, which revealed the positive parenting norms used to develop these recommendations.

## What are Positive Parenting Norms?

A “norm” is something that is usual, typical or accepted by most people. It describes what most people believe or do. Norms are powerful because they provide guidance for people on how to behave. For example, if a new mother believes most babies eat every few hours, she will be more likely to expect this and think this is “normal.”

Positive parenting norms are values, beliefs and behaviors shared by most West Virginia parents that promote safe and healthy lives for children. These norms are powerful because they can provide guidance for new (and current) parents on things they can do that lead to the best outcomes for their children.

We should be proud of West Virginia’s positive parenting norms – they reflect the caring and goodness that are present in our parents. For example, most (98%) of West Virginia parents strongly agreed that they want to do what’s best for their children. While not all parents always do their best, it is important to know that the norm among West Virginia parents is that they want to do what’s best. This desire to do their best is a good starting point for educating new parents.

Positive parenting norms are values, beliefs and behaviors shared by most West Virginia parents that promote safe and healthy lives for children.

Positive parenting norms improve the health and safety of children and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect.

## Why Focus on Positive Norms?

Positive parenting norms improve the health and safety of children and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect. If more parents engage in these behaviors, the number of children who benefit will increase.

However, norms are often misperceived. That is, while most West Virginia parents may engage in positive behaviors with their children, some may think just the opposite is true. Because parents are influenced by their perceptions of what most parents do, misperceptions can have negative impacts. Therefore, correcting these misperceptions can increase the chances they will adopt positive behaviors.

## How Positive Norms can be used in Home Visitation

What we say at the start of a conversation sets a tone for the entire dialogue. This tone can make all the difference when people are choosing to engage. By starting a conversation using a positive norm, we can begin with a positive tone.

Sometimes, if people feel they are being judged, they can become defensive or anxious. By focusing on a positive norm, we can move the attention away from the individual and focus on behaviors. This allows us to preserve our relationship with the person while still fostering improvements in parenting behaviors.

## How were these Norms Measured?

In August, 2013, a survey was sent to a random sample of 3,000 parents of children born in West Virginia in 2011, 2012 or 2013. The survey asked 52 questions about a variety of issues including safety, stability, development, discipline, breastfeeding, shaken baby syndrome, and safe sleeping. Overall, 25 percent of the parents responded. The overwhelming majority of respondents (90 percent) were female; most (95 percent) had a child under the age of 18 living in their household; and the average age of the respondents was 30. The survey asked about their own values, beliefs and behaviors as well as what they thought most parents in West Virginia value, believe and do.

# Guidance on Using Positive Parenting Norms

The positive parenting norms shared below are organized by topic. Within a given topic, results from the parenting survey are provided. These are indicated by a “□”. The first norm is often a value (“this is important to me”). Values are a good place to begin the conversation, because they influence our beliefs and our behaviors, and we can often align around shared values. Helping parents connect with their values will build a foundation for their positive beliefs and behaviors.

Following the values, there are statements about beliefs or behaviors. These statements are also norms among West Virginia parents and act as a starting point for a conversation.

Under each statement is sample language that can be used to start a conversation about the topic. This language should be changed to your own words so that it sounds natural and real. Do not read what is provided here, because this language is only an example.

Often, the language concludes with a question. Questions are a powerful way to allow others to connect with ideas in their own way. They also provide an opportunity to learn what is most meaningful for others.





# Topics

## General Well-being of Children

**99% of WV**  
parents strongly  
agree that it is  
important that  
their child never  
experiences child  
abuse or neglect.

- 98% of WV parents strongly agree that they want to do what's best for their children.  
*"I know that most parents in West Virginia (9 out of 10) want to do what's best for their children. And my job is to help parents be their best. Parenting is hard – and there are lots of tips and ideas that we can share to help make it easier. I am here as a resource for you."*
- 99% of WV parents strongly agree that it is important their child NEVER experiences child abuse or neglect.  
*"I know you, like most parents in West Virginia, never want anything bad to happen to your child. So let's explore some things that you can do to keep your child safe."*
- 99% of WV parents strongly agree that it is important their child is well cared for and develops well both physically and mentally.  
*"I know you, like most parents in West Virginia, want your children to grow up healthy and strong. And while it might not seem like it, they are learning and growing all the time. Let's explore some things."*



## Breastfeeding

- 79% of WV parents agree breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for their babies.  
*"I know that most West Virginia parents (almost 8 out of 10) agree that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for their babies. However, it can be a challenge sometimes. Are there any questions you have or issues you are experiencing that I can help with?"*
- 58% of WV parents reported breastfeeding for at least six weeks.  
*"Most West Virginia parents are breastfeeding for at least six weeks. The research shows that the longer a child receives breast milk, the healthier he or she will be. Can I help you put together a plan?"*

**79%** of WV parents agree breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for their babies.



## Developmental Activities / School Readiness

- 98% of WV parents strongly agree that it is important to them that their children are prepared to succeed when it is time for them to start school.

*“Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) strongly agree that it is important to them that their children are prepared to succeed when it is time for them to start school. How do you feel about this? Is helping your children be prepared when they start school important to you? Would you like to explore some ways to do this?”*

- 92% of WV parents agree they would like to learn more things they can do right now with their child to help prepare them to do well in school.

*“Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) are interested in learning more things they can do right now with their children to help prepare them to do well in school. Surprisingly, we can do things even with young babies that will help develop their brains. Would you like to explore some ideas?”*

**92%** of WV parents agree they would like to learn more things they can do right now with their child to help prepare them to do well in school.



- 98% of WV parents strongly agree that babies and young children need to be read to, spoken to and played with to develop healthy brains.

*“Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) strongly agree that babies and young children need to be read to, spoken to and played with to develop healthy brains. What are some things you like to do with your baby? Would you like to hear about some resources for books and other things?”*





## Safety and Discipline

- 99% of WV parents strongly agree that it is important that their child never experiences child abuse or neglect.
- 96% of WV parents strongly agree that a child's healthy brain development can be harmed by child abuse or neglect.  
*"It is important to West Virginia parents that their children grow up free from harm and fear. And most understand that harm and fear can hurt a child's healthy brain development and result in long term consequences. Since this is so important to all of us, let's work together to create the best experiences we can for your child."*
- 82% of WV parents agree physically punishing a child is not necessary because there are other ways to discipline a child.
- 76% of WV parents agree they are interested in learning new ways to discipline their children.  
*"Most West Virginia parents (almost 8 out of 10) agree physically punishing / disciplining a child is not necessary because there are other ways to discipline a child. And in fact, most parents are interested in learning new ways to discipline their children. Is this something that interests you?"*
- 64% of WV parents agree they are interested in learning new ways to control their frustration / anger when their child misbehaves.  
*"Sometimes, we can get frustrated when our children don't listen to us. This can make disciplining them a challenge at times. Most West Virginia parents are interested in learning new ways to control their frustration / anger when their child misbehaves. Is this something that you would like to learn more about?"*

**99% of WV parents strongly agree that it is important that their child never experiences child abuse or neglect.**

## Parent Learning

**91% of WV  
parents agree  
they can benefit  
from learning new  
parenting ideas /  
skills.**

- ☐ 91% of WV parents agree they can benefit from learning new parenting ideas / skills.  
*“Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) agree they can benefit from learning new parenting ideas / skills. What would interest you the most?”*
- ☐ 76% of WV parents agree they are interested in learning new ways to discipline their children.  
*“Most West Virginia parents are interested in learning new ways to discipline their children. This is such an important and at times challenging issue. Would you like to explore ideas about disciplining children?”*
- ☐ 64% of WV parents agree they are interested in learning new ways to control their frustration / anger when their child misbehaves.  
*“Most West Virginia parents are interested in learning new ways to control their frustration / anger when their child misbehaves. Certainly, at times our children’s behavior can really test our patience. There are steps we can take to help us. Would you like to learn more about these?”*



## Crying

- ☐ 73% of WV parents disagree that responding to a baby's cries will spoil the baby.  
*"Most West Virginia parents (7 out of 10) don't think responding to a baby's cries will spoil the baby. Would you like to talk about ways to help a crying baby?"*
- ☐ 94% of WV parents agree that sometimes babies will cry even if all of their needs have been met.  
*"Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) agree that sometimes babies will just cry even if all of their needs have been met. How do you feel when your baby keeps crying? How about others in the house? Would you like to talk about some ways to help you deal with those hard times and how we can develop a plan now?"*
- ☐ 95% of WV parents agree that they should not be embarrassed if their babies cry in public and they cannot stop the crying.  
*"Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) agree that they should not be embarrassed if their babies cry in public and they cannot stop the crying. But this is so hard! It seems like there is an expectation that babies should not cry. I was really glad to see that most parents agree they should not be embarrassed. How do you feel when your baby cries in public? Would you like to talk about some things you can do so you don't get worried?"*
- ☐ 99% of WV parents agree they know how to control their frustration when their babies cry for a long time.  
*"Most West Virginia parents agree they know how to control their frustration when their baby cries a long time. But we all know that it can be hard. Would you like to talk about some ways to help cope with those times? What are some strategies you use to help cope?"*

94% of WV parents agree that sometimes babies will cry even if all of their needs have been met.

99% of WV  
parents know how  
to control their  
frustration when  
their baby cries  
for a long time.

## Shaken Baby Syndrome / Crying

- ☐ 90% of WV parents are concerned about the possibility that their babies could be injured or killed if shaken.
- ☐ 94% of WV parents believe it is never OK to shake a baby – even if you are very frustrated and the baby will not stop crying.  
*“Every year, some babies are injured or even killed because they are shaken by caregivers who are frustrated. Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) are concerned about this and agree it is never OK to shake a baby.”*
- ☐ 94% of WV parents believe sometimes babies will cry even if all of their needs have been met.
- ☐ 95% of WV parents agree they should not be embarrassed if their babies cry in public and they cannot stop the crying.  
*“Babies can cry – sometimes a lot, especially in their first year. As a parent this can make us feel embarrassed, especially when we are in public. You should know that most West Virginia parents believe that sometimes babies will cry even if all their needs have been met. As a parent, you should not be embarrassed if your baby cries in public. How do you feel when your baby cries in public?”*
- ☐ 99% of WV parents know how to control their frustration when their baby cries for a long time.
- ☐ 95% of WV parents have a plan to make sure they never get upset or angry to the point when they might shake their babies.
- ☐ 98% of WV parents agree they should make sure that other caregivers of their babies have a plan to avoid getting upset and never shake their babies.  
*“When a baby cries and we are unable to stop the crying it can make us frustrated. Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) have a plan to make sure they never get upset or angry to the point they might shake their babies. Would you like to work on your plan? This is definitely something that you will use!*  
  
*Most West Virginia parents also agree they should make sure other caregivers of their baby have a plan to avoid getting upset. We might feel awkward asking others about their plan. Is this important to you? Would you like to explore what this plan looks like or how to discuss it with your caregiver?”*

## Stability / Support Systems

- 99% of WV parents agree they want to be a stable and positive influence in their children's lives.
- 94% of WV parents believe they can be a better parent when they are supported by family, friends and the broader community.
- 95% of WV parents agree they have ways to take care of themselves when parenting starts to feel stressful.  
*"Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) want to be a stable and positive influence in their children's lives. And we know being a parent is one of the toughest jobs. Most parents know they can be a better parent when they are supported by family, friends and people in the community. They also have ways of taking care of themselves when they feel stressed. Would you like to explore some of your support systems? Maybe we can work together and come up with more ways to support you as a parent."*
- 99% of WV parents agree they have someone they can turn to for advice about parenting.
- 95% of WV parents agree they are comfortable asking their baby's doctors questions about parenting ideas / skills.
- 95% of WV parents agree they are comfortable asking their child care providers questions about parenting ideas / skills.  
*"We don't naturally know how to be a parent. Maybe this is why most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) have someone they can turn to for advice. Many parents are comfortable asking their doctor or their child care provider. Who are some of the people you can turn to? Are you comfortable asking your doctor or child care provider? What could we do to make that easier for you?"*

95% of WV parents agree they are comfortable asking their child care providers questions about parenting ideas / skills.



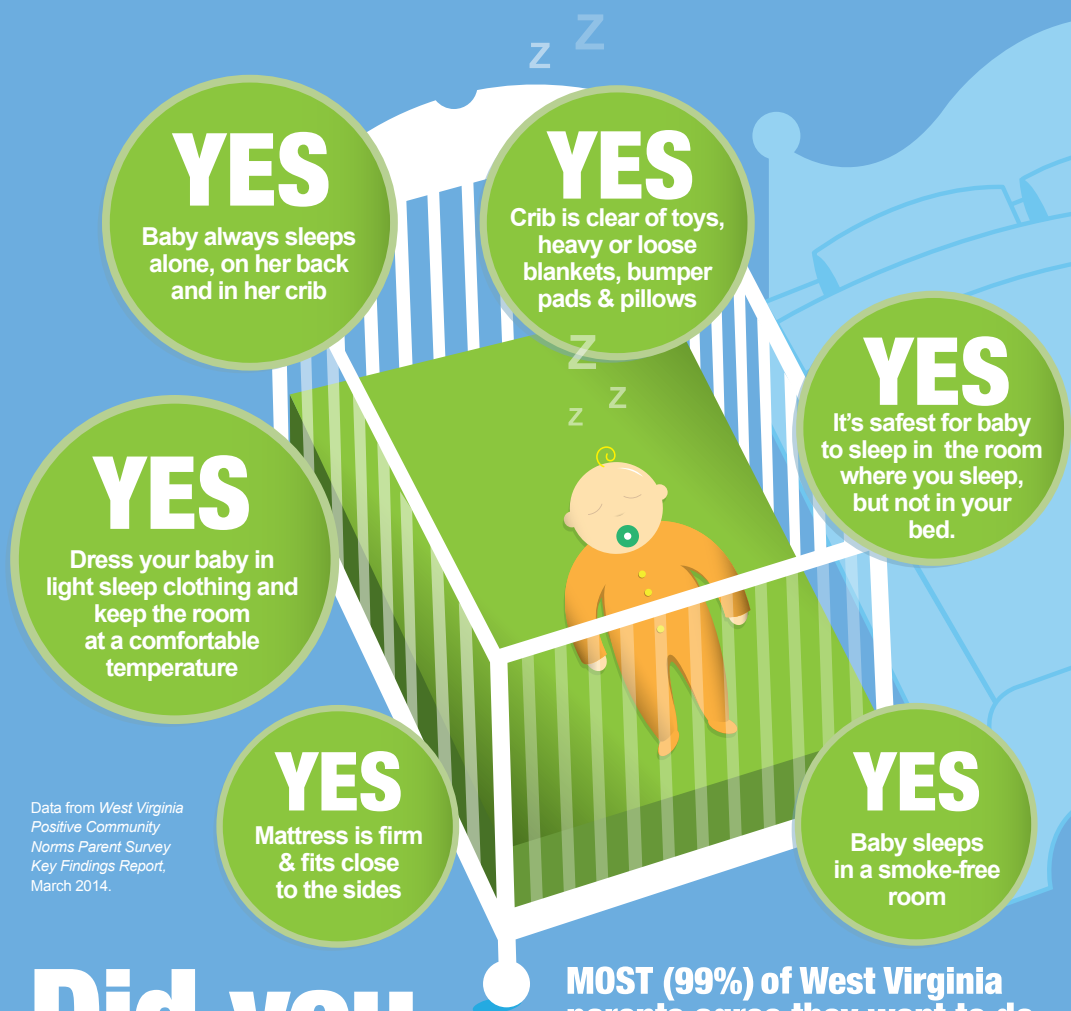
## Safe Sleeping

97% of WV  
parents agree that  
the safety of their  
baby is most  
important  
when thinking  
about where their  
baby sleeps.

- ☐ 97% of WV parents agree that the safety of their baby is most important when thinking about where their baby sleeps.
- ☐ 85% of WV parents agree that it is never safe for an infant to sleep or nap on a couch or sofa.
- ☐ 86% of WV parents agree that it is safest for a baby to sleep or nap alone instead of in a bed with an adult or other child.
- ☐ 56% of WV parents reported their baby sleeps alone in a separate place (or sleeping surface) most of the time.  
*“Most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) agree that safety is most important when thinking about where their baby sleeps. Certainly, ideas about safe sleeping have changed over the years. Most West Virginia parents agree with the current findings that it is never safe for an infant to sleep or nap on a couch or sofa and that it is safest for a baby to sleep or nap alone. And, in fact, this is what most parents report is happening with their babies. Would you like to discuss sleeping arrangements for your baby?”*
- ☐ 78% of WV parents always make sure toys, heavy blankets, comforters and bumper pads are removed from the crib, bassinet or “pack and play” when their baby sleeps.  
*“Sleeping on a separate surface is very important, as is checking what is in the crib with the baby. Most West Virginia parents always make sure toys, heavy blankets, comforters and bumper pads are removed when their baby sleeps. Do you have any questions about this?”*
- ☐ 95% of WV parents strongly agree that babies should always sleep in rooms/ homes that are smoke-free.
- ☐ 95% of WV parents report their babies always sleep in rooms / homes that are smoke -free.  
*“We are all aware about the harm of tobacco smoke. In fact, most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) strongly agree babies should always sleep in rooms or homes that are smoke free – and most do! What are steps that you can take to make sure your baby sleeps in a smoke-free room?”*

- 95% of WV parents strongly agree they should make sure that other people who take care of their babies know about the safest ways for babies to sleep.

*“So learning about safe sleeping is very important for you, and it is important that you teach other adults who care for your baby about this as well. In fact, most West Virginia parents (9 out of 10) strongly agree they should make sure that other people who take care of their babies know about the safest ways for babies to sleep. Sometimes, this might be an awkward conversation. Would you like to talk about ways to approach a conversation about safe sleeping with other adults who care for your baby?”*



Data from West Virginia Positive Community Norms Parent Survey Key Findings Report, March 2014.

# Did you know?

**One baby dies every 10 days in West Virginia as a result of unsafe sleeping.**

**MOST (99%) of West Virginia parents agree they want to do what's best for their children.**

**What's best for infants is saying **YES** to safe sleep.**

**For video + more information visit:**

**[SafeSoundBabies.com](http://SafeSoundBabies.com)**

Our Babies:  
safe&sound

The West Virginia  
Children's Trust  
Fund

Claude Worthington  
Benedum Foundation

**TEAM**  
for West Virginia  
Children

**95% of WV parents strongly agree that babies should always sleep in rooms/homes that are smoke-free.**



## **TEAM for West Virginia Children**

P.O. BOX 1653, Huntington • WV 25717-1653

(304) 523-9587 • FAX: (304) 523-9595

E-MAIL: [team@teamwv.org](mailto:team@teamwv.org)

[www.teamwv.org](http://www.teamwv.org)