



Humboldt Domestic Violence Services

# A Guide to Non-Violent Parenting



Revised February 2008

# Effects of domestic violence on children

Regardless of whether children are physically abused, the emotional effects of witnessing domestic violence are very similar to the psychological trauma associated with being a victim of child abuse. Each year, an estimated 3.3 million children witness domestic violence.

Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are physically abused or seriously neglected at a rate of 1500% higher than the national average in the general population.

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PARENT'S STRESS HOTLINE:.....	1-800-632-8188

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## How to feel good about Discipline

No child is born into the world socially acceptable; behavior is learned. Here are some skills for you to work with when teaching your child acceptable behavior.

1. Work on one problem at a time. You can't change all behavior overnight.
2. Try to understand why your child is behaving the way they are. Was your child up late last night? Is your child hungry, too cold or hot?
3. Decide what you can do to help the situation. Should the child rest?
4. Help your child improve their behavior by giving reinforcements. A smile, hug or a touch tells a child that their behavior is acceptable.
5. Don't hit or spank your child. Spanking teaches that using violence is an acceptable way to solve problems. No one feels good about hitting or being hit.
6. Yelling and nagging reinforces negative behavior. The most effective speech is simple, direct, slow and quiet.
7. Let the child be responsible for the consequences of their actions.

## Aggressive Behavior: How to deal with it

From time to time children will display aggressive behavior towards adults and other children (hitting, biting, throwing blocks, etc). When you see this behavior:

1. Stop the behavior to prevent injuries.
2. Affirm the emotion the child is experiencing. ---"It looks like you are very angry."
3. State the limit. ---"I can't let you hurt me or the other children."
4. Model for the child. ---"Tell Ted you are angry. Say I'm mad at you. Give me the truck back."
5. Re-involve the children in positive behavior. There are a number of ways to do this.
  - a) Let the children attempt to solve the problem while you watch.
  - b) Provide a solution. ---"Here's a car for you Max," or "Ted, you use the car for five minutes and then Max can use it." Be sure you do what you say!
  - c) Play with the children and provide a new interest in the same game. ---"You be the car driver, Ted, and Max and I will build a garage."
  - d) Direct the child into another area. --- " Let's go see what their doing in the art room

**Be sure that you stay with the child until he/she is involved in an activity.** Do not leave him/her. Tell the other adult in your area that you are occupied.

**Extreme Situations:** Child does not respond, continues aggressive behavior. Tell the child, "You seem to be having a hard time today. Can I hold you for a while? When you are feeling calm, you can try to play with the other children." If this does not work or the child does not agree to let you comfort them, it's OK to go get the parent from group to comfort the child.

\*Compliments of Humboldt Child Care Council

## Alternatives to Spanking

- ◆ **Reward positive behavior:** The purpose of discipline is to teach, not to punish. It is hard enough for children to know what you want and don't want them to do, they need to know what you want from them. Children need to be encouraged and rewarded for positive behavior. As their parent, attention from you is the most potent and powerful reward. Ways to reward a child include praise, hugs, treats, and special time with you. You may want to try a "star chart" system in which your child can earn stars or stickers for desired behaviors. When the child earns a certain number of stickers, these can be traded for a special treat. This is a good way to structure success for your child.
- ◆ **Mild disapproval:** At times your child will respond if you give your child a clear message by telling them to stop the behavior. You must be firm and serious.
- ◆ **Ignoring:** When your child is trying to get your negative attention, you may simply walk away and ignore the behavior. If the child's behavior is not physically harmful to themselves or others, ignoring will remove the negative attention payoff for the child.
- ◆ **Be fair:** Children really understand fairness from an early age. Unfairness leads to resentment and frustration. Children will understand and learn faster if you are fair.
- ◆ **Spanking increases** children's aggression and anger instead of teaching responsibility.
- ◆ **Spanking makes other consequences** less effective, such as these used at child care or school. Gradually, even spanking loses its impact.
- ◆ **Spanking can lead to physical struggles** and even escalate to the point of harming the child.
- ◆ **Children who continue** to be spanked are more likely to be depressed, use alcohol, have more anger with their own children, approve of and hit their spouses.
- ◆ **These results make** sense since spanking teaches the child that causing others pain is justified to control them-even with those they love.

**Work Toward consistency:** No one is consistent all of the time. But try to make sure that your goals, rules, and approaches to discipline stay the same from day to day. Children find frequent changes confusing and often resort to testing limits just to find out what the limits are.

## Some Helpful Tips

- ◆ **Look for underlying needs.** Give your child something to play with while waiting in line at the store.
- ◆ **Give information and reasons.** If your child colors on the wall, explain why we color on paper only.
- ◆ **Look for underlying feelings.** If your child hits her baby brother, encourage them to tell you why they are upset and together think of harmless ways that they can express their anger or jealousy.
- ◆ **Find acceptable alternatives and redirect your child's behavior.** If you don not want your child to build a fort in the living room, tell her where they can build one.
- ◆ **Demonstrate how you want your child to behave.** If your child pulls the cat's tail, demonstrate how to pet the cat gently. Don't rely on words alone.
- ◆ **Give choices rather than commands.** Decision-making empowers children; commands invite a power struggle. Try: "Would you like to brush your teeth before or after you put your pajamas on?"
- ◆ **Let natural consequences occur (when appropriate).** Don't rescue too much. A child who does not hang up her bathing suit and towel may find them still wet the next day.
- ◆ **Use logical consequences (only if necessary).** If while holding your child, they wiggle so much that they kick you, explain that it hurts, set them down, and offer to hold their hand instead.
- ◆ **Be playful.** Turn the situation into a game. "Let's pretend to be the seven dwarves while we clean up."
- ◆ **Make a deal; negotiate.** If you're ready to leave the playground and your child is having fun, reach an agreement on the number of times that they may go down the slide before leaving.
- ◆ **Revise your expectations.** Young children are naturally loud, curious, messy, willful, impatient, demanding, forgetful, fearful, self-centered, and full of energy. Try to accept them as they are.
- ◆ **Take a parental time out.** Leave the room and do whatever is needed – cry, call a friend, meditate, take a shower, read – to regain your sense of composure and good judgment.
- ◆ **Defuse the situation with laughter.** If your child is mad at you, invite them to engage in a playful pillow fight. Play your part by surrendering dramatically. Laughter helps resolve anger and feelings of powerlessness.
- ◆ **Do it together.** If your child refuses to take a bath, offer to take one with them.
- ◆ **Remove your child from the situation.** Stay away with them until they are ready to act appropriately. Use the time for listening, sharing feelings, and moving toward conflict resolution.
- ◆ **Hold, hold, and hold.** This expression of love enables children who are acting aggressively or obnoxiously to channel their pent-up feelings into healing tears.

## The Art of Enforceable Statements for the home

- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Please sit down. We're going to eat now.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** We will eat as soon as you are seated.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Please be quiet. I can't listen to your brother when you both talk at the same time.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I'll be glad to listen as soon as your brother is finished talking.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Clean your room so that we can go shopping.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I'll be happy to take you shopping as soon as your room is clean.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Don't talk while I'm reading to you.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I will start reading again as soon as you finish talking.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** You can't play until you've finished your homework.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** Feel free to go play as soon as you've finished your homework.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Don't shout at me.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I listen to people who do not yell at me.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Pay attention.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I'll start again as soon as I know you're with me.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Don't bother your sisters.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** You are welcome to stay with us as long as you are not bothering your sisters.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Don't talk to me with that kind of voice.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I'll listen as soon as your voice is as calm as mine.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** Show me some respect!
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I'll be glad to discuss this as soon as respect is shown.
  
- ◆ **Unenforceable:** I'm not picking up your dirty clothes.
- ◆ **Enforceable:** I'll be glad to wash the clothes that you put in the laundry room.

## Effective Strategies

**Be aware of your child's abilities and limitations:** Children develop at different rates and have different strengths and weaknesses. When your child misbehaves, it may be that they simply cannot do what you're asking, or they don't understand what you're asking.

**Remember that children do what "works":** If your child throws a temper tantrum in the grocery store and you bribe them to stop by giving him candy, he will probably throw another tantrum the next time you go. Make an effort to avoid reinforcing the kinds of behavior, even with just your attention.

## The Importance of Play with Children in Crisis

- When Children are experiencing difficulties in their lives, play is often one of the only safe, therapeutic ways to explore feelings and emotions.
- Play is such a valid form of exploration and expression for children.
- Play gives children the power and freedom and expression.
- Children are watching us for clues. We can give them permission to have fun.
- Be silly, have fun; even the most resistant children give into silliness if you aren't afraid to be silly yourself.
- Joyful moments are incredibly important for children who have grown up fast.

(For the whole family)

- 1. Practice.** Learning to settle problems peacefully takes practice. Role play with family or friends different ways to resolve conflicts.
- 2. Talk about Problems Before they Become Conflicts.** Try to resolve minor disagreements before they grow into major disputes.
- 3. Use “I-statements”.** When you say, “You make me so\_\_\_”. It’s blaming the person and putting them on the defensive. When you say, “I feel \_ when you\_”. It’s talking about your feelings, not the other person’s failures or mistakes.  
**Example:** Instead of “YOU are always interrupting,” try, “I feel frustrated when someone interrupts me, because I lose my train of thought. I need you to wait until I’m finished speaking.”
- 4. Talk about the Possible Reasons Behind the Conflict.** Try to find out where it started. Try to identify any “accidental messages”.
- 5. Talk about the Problem Without Placing Blame.**  
**Example:** “I don’t like to be treated that way,” or “I hate being late to movies.” Maybe she didn’t mean to insult you. Maybe he couldn’t help being late. Give the person the benefit of the doubt.
- 6. Be a Good Listener.** Acknowledge what others are saying by nodding saying “yes” or “uh-huh”. Ask questions. Don’t interrupt. Give him/her your full attention.
- 7. Be Willing to Cooperate.** When you are in a conflict, you both have a problem. If you work together to solve the problem, you’ll both benefit.
- 8. Be Willing to Compromise.** Decide what is really important to you and what you’re willing to sacrifice to resolve the conflict. Give a little and you might get a lot.
- 9. Choose People to be Mediators.** When a conflict arises, a mediator/peace keeper steps in and helps the people involved in the conflict to talk, listen, cooperate, compromise, and look for solutions.
- 10. Identify Adults you Trust and Respect.** Call them if you need them. If you can’t get help from a peer mediator, ask an adult for help.
- 11. Agree to Disagree.** Some conflicts simply can’t be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction, but you can still respect each other for having different opinions. Don’t let your disagreements escalate to verbal or physical fights.
- 12. Learn from your Experiences.** After each conflict, review in your mind what happened, why it happened, and how the conflict was resolved (if it was resolved). Write in your journal. Was there anything you could have done differently? Should have done differently? Did you learn anything that you might be able to use to resolve future conflicts? Did you learn anything that you might be able to use to prevent future conflicts?