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Positive Parenting & Discipline

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The Path to Positive Parenting

Parenting is complicated work that calls us to use all of the tools we can, in order to guide and support our children. There is no “right way” to parent; how you choose to parent will dictate how your children learn, grow and experience the world. Some parenting techniques are destructive to esteem and undermine children's well being. Other parenting techniques help nurture children's self esteem, and empower them to be healthy individuals.

The following are some quick reference terms and tools that support parenting that is both empowering and nurturing of your child's esteem.

Differentiate See your child's behaviors, needs and desires as separate from you. Your children are NOT a reflection of you, they are separate beings.

Detach Avoid getting emotionally triggered by your children's behaviors.

It is normal to feel resentful, angry, embarrassed, furious, exhausted, exasperated (and other feelings) when your children behave in ways that you don't like. One of the hardest parts of parenting is being able to differentiate and detach. The more a parent can detach and/or differentiate from whatever feelings may be triggered by a child's behavior, the better able that parent will be to use that moment to teach something positive.

Self-Care Meet your own needs first, so that you are a resilient parent.

Time away from your children, in order to refresh, get perspective and renew is one of the most important tools for effective parenting. Self-care is different for everyone: reading, journaling, exercise, creating art, spending time with a partner or friend, or taking a nap are all types of self care. Make taking care of yourself, meeting your own needs, and doing self-care a priority. If you are feeling out of energy, overwhelmed, tired or unable to cope, it will be much harder to use a teachable moment to you and your child's advantage. Self-care is not optional, it is imperative...whatever the cost, however difficult, create space for yourself.

Temperamental Differences- Inherent differences each person has based on their personality types.

Each person has a unique temperament. Some people are intense and focused, some are relaxed and seem to “go with the flow”. These differences are seen as “hard wired, ” meaning, they are permanent characteristics that cannot be changed. Knowing your child's temperament is important when considering how to manage your child's behaviors.

Start from Normal- Normalize your children's behaviors. First assume that your children are acting exactly as they should -- like children.

Knowing some developmental information about your child's age helps normalize behaviors that can seem strange, hard to deal with, or surprising. Each age has specific characteristics and stages. These characteristics are moderated by your child's temperament, but are generally the same for most. For example, 3 is the age of “opposition”. It is a year when experimenting with power is very intense.

Emotional recognition The ability to name your feelings.

Validation Having a sense that you are understood and that your needs are recognized.

Validation is a powerful and important tool in parenting. Often, children feel powerless and unheard. During times when your child has a need or want that you are unwilling or unable to fulfill, try validating the need. Then, validate your child's feelings by naming what you see them experiencing. Often, children are given the message that feelings such as disappointment, sadness, resentment and frustration aren't ok. Give your child language to describe their feelings, and the freedom to have all of their feelings, however "negative" they may seem. There is a "feelings list" at the end of this pamphlet. Place this list somewhere where you can refer to it throughout the day. Try using a few new feelings words each week, to describe your children's emotions.

All feelings can be accepted.
Certain actions must be limited.

Respectful Action Behave in a way that is respectful of other's feelings, thoughts, bodies and things.

Teaching your child respectful action is not the same as teaching respect, the *feeling*. Respect the feeling is earned. Respect the action is due to all people, regardless of their actions. The most powerful way to teach this is to model it.

Respectful action involves the following:

1. Trust in the ability of another.
2. Interest in the point of view of another (you don't have to agree).
3. Recognize and own your part of the problem.
4. Recognize and accept that others have feelings that differ from yours (even if you share the same experience).

When you want to listen:

Be fully present
Be empathetic
Reflect back what you hear/see
Listen without blaming/judging
Refrain from lectures or advice
Listen with an open heart

When you want to be heard:

Describe what you see
Express what you feel
Express what you want, need, hope for, desire
Make a request

Developmental Information

In order to discipline effectively, it is important to know what your child is capable of, developmentally. Sometimes, parental expectations don't fit with children's developmental abilities. Understanding your child's developmental abilities can affect the way you react to your child and vice versa.

Impulse Control Children do not have impulse control until around the age of 4.

Asking your 2 year old to stop hitting the dog can seem like talking to a brick wall. That is because at 2, she can not resist the impulse to experiment with power. Discipline tools like redirection, distraction and changing the environment work especially well in managing children who are still learning impulse control.

Predicting Consequences Children can not predict consequences before the age of 7 or 8. They can learn consequences, though. Learning a consequence takes time and repetition of outcome.

Sometimes, parents hear their children saying “It was an accident” after a behavior. Because of their inability to predict consequences, they are often telling the truth. Sally may know she threw the block, but she could not predict it would hurt Tommy when it hit him in the head. Jason may know that the VCR is broken, but he could not predict a piece of banana stuck inside of it would break it. Henry may see the carpet is wet, but he could not predict that dumping out his milk would make a wet stain. Avoid language such as “You know better” and “I already told you.” when dealing with this issue.

Generalizing Children can not generalize. They are literal. If you tell your daughter that throwing a rock at a dog hurts the dog, she believes exactly that. She doesn't know it will also hurt you, the cat, her sister, the mail carrier or another child.

Sharing Sharing is both a behavior and a value. Developmentally, children do not have the tools to be able to share until around the age of 4.

Before the age of 4, they can not understand the moral concept of sharing, nor can they understand the view point of another. Forcing a child to share will not “teach” them to share. It will create resentment and frustration in your child. Instead, offer trading and taking turns as solutions when sharing is a point of conflict.

Disequilibrium - A predictable developmental period of acquiring new skills, change and growth, usually accompanied by intense behavioral changes.

Equilibrium A predictable developmental period of calm in which a child practices newly acquired behaviors.

Children move through stages of equilibrium and disequilibrium roughly every six months. Although temperamental differences will affect how intense the behavioral changes are, these stages are generally predictable.

When a child is in disequilibrium, she is hard at work learning new skills. It is a period of huge intellectual and emotional growth. She will be more intense and have more behavior disruptions. Things that didn't bother her a few months ago may now be very disruptive. Behaviors such as sleep disruptions, transition difficulty, eating difficulty, aggressive behaviors, and separation anxiety will intensify or will become disruptive.

Tantrums will increase, and your child will seem less resilient.

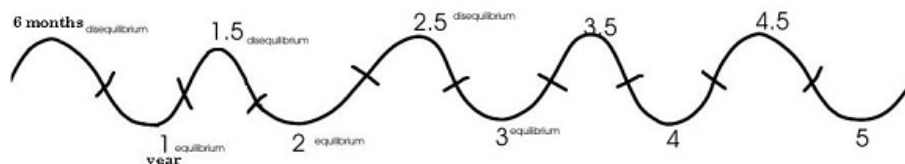
When a child is in equilibrium, he is busy practicing all of the skills he acquired during disequilibrium. He is easier to get along with, and seems “at peace” or “calmer”. He will sleep better, eat better and generally have an easier time interacting with the world.

Knowing where your child is in terms of dis/equilibrium can help you get creative about what you expect from your children behaviorally. Try to make choices that will support rather than aggravate the stage your child is in.

Avoid places that your child will have difficulty behaving appropriately in. Restaurants, movies, grocery stores are usually very difficult for the child in disequilibrium.

Get a lot of self care during disequilibrium. The more resilient you are, the better able you will be to deal with intense behaviors.

Here is a graph that shows the periods of equilibrium and disequilibrium:



Exploring Discipline

Discipline - a tool or technique that parents use in order to teach their children to develop certain characteristics or qualities.

Discipline, in all of its forms, is a teaching tool. When behaviors occur that require discipline, it is important to see them as “teachable moments”.

If you were to create a list of qualities or characteristic that you would want your children to have, at the age of 25 (when adolescence is over) what would those qualities be? Below is a general list of qualities that people might want their children to have as adults. You can add to the list below, or mark out the qualities that you don't agree with:

compassion	emotionally intelligent	spiritual
critical thinking skills	communicative	resourceful
sincerity	generosity	creative
honesty	integrity	confidant
respect	positive self esteem	balanced
intelligence	self directed	assertive
ability to self moderate	self supporting	empathic
delay gratification	thoughtful	independent

Discipline is simply a tool to teach the above qualities. Every time you discipline your child, you are choosing to teach one, some or none of the above (or your desired) characteristics.

Commonly used discipline techniques and what they teach:

Punishing and Punitive Measures - punishment is not an effective behavior modifier. It is not good at teaching any of the qualities listed above. Punishment is good at teaching children shame, fear and avoidance.

Hitting and Spanking - hitting only teaches negative qualities: “might makes right”; violence solves problems; the person with the most power makes the rules; it's ok to hurt someone to get what you need.

Hitting can be effective in the moment, but the negative, long lasting effects of hitting children far outweigh the desired immediate effect.

Criticizing - criticism is a sign that a person is feeling resentful for some reason, or that something needs to change. Criticism teaches shame, and lowers self esteem. It also teaches that it is ok to “hit with your words” to solve a problem.

Time-Outs - Time out teaches the least of any discipline technique. It removes the child from the situation, but it doesn't elicit any lasting change in behavior.

Positive Discipline Techniques

1. Gather all of the facts

Before acting, do some fact finding. What is motivating the undesirable behavior in your child? Is she feeling powerless? Bored? Hungry? Tired? Has his attention span reached its limit? Is he resentful?

By taking time to first address why your child is having an undesirable behavior, you can reduce the amount of time you actually spend in conflict with your child.

2. Give Choices

Give your child a choice in their daily routine, which allows them to experience personal power and decision making. Always give a choice that is acceptable to you. *Note: before the age of 5, children generally choose the last choice you give them.*

Example:

Instead of “it's time to go to bed”

try “would you like to go to bed in 5 minutes or 10 minutes?”

Instead of “Stop spitting on me!”

try “Would you like to spit on the grass, or in the bathtub?”

Instead of “Clean your room!”

try, “Would you like to clean your room in an hour or half an hour?”

Instead of fighting a screaming toddler to change a diaper,

try, “Would you like to change your diaper in one minute, or three?”

3. Logical Consequence

Logical consequence is a consequence that is related to the behavior. Logical consequence can easily become a punishment, depending on your tone of voice. Staying

neutral and detached ensures that a logical consequence will have the most effect.

Example:

Your child throws their food on the ground, during dinner. The logical consequence is they don't get to have their food anymore, at that time. You calmly tell them that, and remove their food.

Your child hits another child at the park. The logical consequence for hitting someone is that you can't be around that person. You say, "When you hit someone, you can't be near them." and you pick up your child, and move to another area of the park.

Your child hits you. You say, "I don't let anyone hit me. I am going away from you." and you walk into another room.

Your child draws on the wall with crayons. The logical consequence is your child can't use the crayons unsupervised, anymore and/or you put the crayons away immediately.

4. Natural consequence

A natural consequence is something that happens naturally, as a result of your child's behavior. Allowing your child to experience this consequence, without any feedback from you, is often a powerful lesson.

Example of Natural Consequence:

After asking your son not to throw his toys, he breaks his toy by throwing it on the ground. The natural consequence is that the toy is broken.

After telling your daughter not to throw her favorite ball over the fence, she does it again. The natural consequence is that the ball stays on the other side of the fence.

5. Making Amends

Making amends is a powerful tool that both parents and children can use. Making amends means going back to an issue, talking about it, and then choosing to do something in order to make up for something that happened. It supports the development of compassion, empathy, creative thinking skills, accountability and ownership of a conflict. It is very important for parents to model making amends for their children. If you have chosen a discipline technique or a behavior that you later realize was destructive or felt unhealthy, go back and talk about it with your children. Making amends can happen quite a while after the incident occurs.

Example:

Your child hits their friend in the head with a toy car. he chooses to make amends by drawing a picture for that child.

Your child breaks another child's toy. She can buy another toy, fix the broken one, trade for one of her own.

Your child screams loudly and wakes the baby. He can sit with you and gently stroke the babies arm while she falls back asleep.

You choose to spank your child because she was about to run in the street. Later you say to her, "I made a bad decision to hit you. I was scared. I don't want anyone to hit you. The next time you run in the street, I will take you inside. Then, you give her a hug.

6. Change the Environment

Changing the environment could be literally changing the physical environment of your and your children's surroundings. Children, like adults, get "locked" into behavior patterns. Often a change in their surroundings has an immediate effect of allowing them to release some of those behavior patterns.

Changing the environment can also be changing something in the immediate environment to avoid or reduce conflict.

Example:

Your child is going from one thing to the next, doing things that they shouldn't: pulling books off shelves, then throwing a cup of water on the floor, then drawing on the wall, then breaking a toy. You put your child's coat on and go outside, to the park, to the mailbox, to the store, etc.

Your child is throwing blocks at you. You put the blocks up, out of reach.

7. Reinforcement

Reinforcing positive behavior is a powerful way to ensure the positive behavior will happen again. DO NOT use food or objects (toys, presents etc) to positively reinforce.

Use:

praise
hand gestures (thumbs up)
facial signals (big smiles)
signals (clapping hands)
affectionate physical touch (ruffling hair, hugging)

The more specific the reinforcer is, the more specifically it will reinforce a certain behavior.

8. Focus Time/Emotional Rapport

In order for any discipline technique to work, there must be some emotional rapport between the two parties involved. Building emotional rapport with our children seems easy, after all, they are our children! Sometimes, though, rapport building can be the thing that slips through the cracks. Especially considering many families have busy lives and busy schedules. Rapport building should happen *at least* 3 times a week, for 20 minutes at a time.

Building rapport simply means spending uninterrupted, one-on-one time with our child. This can be playing puzzles or games together, going to the movies or toy store, riding bicycles together or even just talking. Whatever it is, to ensure you are actually building rapport, remember the phrase "no fail fun". Make sure that what you choose is absolutely your child's favorite thing to do. Allow them to choose the activity if possible.

Make sure rapport building time is unconditional, meaning, DO NOT tie rapport building time with your child to any consequence or expectation. Don't tell your child that because they had a certain behavior they no longer have the option to spend time with you. That also means, you can not tell your child that your time together will only happen if they _____ (do their homework, clean their room, do chores etc).

Remember:

At least 3 times a week, for 20 minutes
No fail fun
Unconditional

9. Foreshadow

Foreshadowing is a technique that uses information to help get your child "ready" for a change of some sort. Often, transitions are difficult for children. Changing from one place to another or one activity to another can create conflict. Children often feel powerless and angry when a change occurs that they had no time to prepare for.

By foreshadowing, or talking about the change before it happens, you give your child a

sense of power in choosing how to react to the change, and also time to get used to the idea of the change itself.

A timer is a great way to foreshadow. Bring a timer with you to play dates, the park or wherever there seems to be a conflict about when change should occur. Use the timer to indicate when the change will happen, while foreshadowing what the change will be.

Foreshadow Example:

Your child is terrified of dogs and throws a tantrum whenever you arrive at your sister's home, where there are 2 dogs.

The night before leaving for your sister's house, you explain where you are going, and that the dogs will be put in the backyard.

Before you actually leave to travel to your sister's home, repeat the foreshadow. When you arrive, before getting out of the car, repeat the foreshadow.

There is a train table at your doctor's office that your child loves to play with. She always throws a tantrum when it is time to stop playing with the trains and leave.

The morning of her doctor's appointment, you explain that you will be going to the doctor, and that you will be sure to make time for her to play with the train table for a while. Also tell her that you will remind her a few minutes before you leave, that you are getting ready to go.

Once there, you remind her that you will let her play with the train table for a while, but that you will remind her when it is time to go.

About 5 minutes before it is time to leave the doctor's office, you say "We will be leaving in 5 minutes."

After 5 minutes, you leave with her. (*Note, this is a great time to use a timer!*)

10. Point Out Positive Options

In order to help your child understand what your expectations are for behavior, try to give information as often as possible. In a respectful way, say exactly what you would like your children to do, regardless of whether they are doing it or not. Try to offer information in a positive way rather than a negative way. Remember that too many words can cause children to "tune you out", so be as concise as possible. Most importantly, take nothing away without replacing it (this applies to objects or behaviors).

Example:

Instead of "Don't stand on your chair."

try "I think you might fall if you stand in your chair, please sit down."

Instead of "Stop hitting me with that toy hammer"

try "You can hit the floor or the chair with your toy hammer."

or "Hitting me with the hammer hurts. You can hit the floor instead"

Instead of "Stop yelling!"

try "Please use your quiet voice."

or "Yelling hurts my ears. Please use your quiet voice."

Instead of "Stop jumping on the couch"

try "You can jump on these floor pillows."

or "Jumping on the couch seems dangerous. You can jump on these floor pillows."

If you take a fragile item away from your son, explain "You can play with a different toy, but this is fragile" and hand him a toy that he can play with.

11. Preempt the Undesirable Behavior

Try to predict when your child is likely to have a behavior that you want to avoid or change. Then, try to distract, redirect or problem solve BEFORE the behavior happens. It requires a lot of parental/caregiver attention, and you might need to follow your child around like a shadow for a while. This is especially effective for toddlers who are hitting or biting.

Example:

Sam is 2. He has begun biting other children at daycare and playdates. Sam usually bites when he is trying to communicate frustration about wanting a specific toy. You (parent or caregiver) follow Sam around, and as soon as he shows signs of frustration toward another child, you move in closely and name his feeling, making sure that he does not have a chance to bite the other child. You redirect him by offering him a different toy, moving him away from the child he was in conflict with.

12. Focus On Solution

Focus on solution is a technique that becomes useful around age 7 or 8 (the developmental age that children can predict consequences). But before that, it is ok to present as a learning tool. When your children have the ability to understand the concepts of this technique, they will already be familiar with it.

Focus on solution means exploring how your child can change his own behavior, with your child. It involves brainstorming and trial and error. Most importantly, focus on solution does not offer any “consequence” for behavior, other than creating a solution for how to avoid the behavior the next time it may arise.

Many people feel “unfinished” when implementing focus on solution. That is often because discipline is frequently associated with punishment. Children react very strongly to focus on solution and feel empowered to change their own behaviors.

Example:

Sally is late coming in to the classroom, after the bell rings at recess. This is the 3rd time this week she has been late. When the students are all seated, the teacher respectfully asks Sally, “Why were you late?”

Sally replies, “I didn't hear the bell.”

The teacher says to the class, “Class, we have to solve a problem together. How can we help Sally come in on time from recess?”

One student says “Remind her when she goes out to play.”

Another student says “Assign Sally a buddy to help her come in.”

Another student says “Ring a louder bell.”

The teacher asks Sally, “Which solution sounds like it might work the best?”

Sally says “A buddy would help remind me to go in.”

The teacher asks another student to be a “reminder buddy” for Sally. The class continues with the lesson.

Other Behavior Modifying Tools

Other tools that support positive behavior modification are:

Redirection/Distraction

Redirection behavior means offering a different choice to a child that is doing a behavior that you dislike. It is particularly good for toddlers, who do not have the ability to benefit from logical consequence or can't make their own choices.

Example:

Your toddler is trying to put a cracker into the VCR. You intervene by offering a different toy, or activity, in a different area.

Your toddler is desperately trying to pull food off of every shelf, at the grocery store. You offer her a small toy or activity to do while she sits in the grocery basket.

Granting Wishes/Joining

Often, when children express a desire for something, what they really crave is validation of their feelings, or to know that you hear their desires, and understand them. In instances like this, when you are not able or willing to meet their need, you can grant your child whatever they need in a wish. This is a powerfully validating, and can often disarm an oncoming tantrum or outburst.

Sometimes, joining your child by matching their intensity can often diffuse escalating behavior (behavior that is getting more and more intense).

Example:

Your son says "I want a cookie!!" 10 times and you don't have a cookie and/or you don't want to give him a cookie. You respond by validating his feeling, "You really want a cookie!" then grant it to him in a wish, "I wish I could give you a cookie right now!"

If your son continues to escalate, you can try to match his intensity and say "I REALLY want a cookie too!! Right now! I want one! this minute!! I want one!"

Humor

Humor is a great tool for reducing escalating behaviors. Try responding with a silly face, noise, movement or words.

Sing-Song

Talking in a sing-song voice, or singing as you talk to your child can also reduce a behavior that is escalating.

Power/Boundary Grid

Accommodate relationship more important than goal	Collaborate relationship and goal equally important
Avoid relationship and goal of little importance	Compete goal more important than relationship

HEALTH/SAFETY ONLY

This grid shows 4 choices for reacting to your child (although, it can be used in any situation or relationship). In each square, you have a choice to place more importance on the relationship, or the desired outcome, or goal. It is helpful to think of moving “around” this grid all day; spending ¼ of your time accommodating, ¼ of your time collaborating, etc. etc.

Most importantly, it is **Consistency of Value** that matters, NOT consistency of rule. Setting boundaries with your child should happen in the moment.

Example:

*My **value** is that Henry eats healthy foods, and a moderate amount of sugar each day.*

After lunch, Henry asks for a cookie. He has had very little sugar that day, so I **accommodate**, and give him a cookie.

The next day, it is 5 minutes before dinner, and Henry asks for a cookie. He has had some sugar that day. I **collaborate**, and let him pick out a cookie for after dinner.

The next day, it is one hour before dinner, and while I am sitting on the couch, I hear Henry in the cookie jar, getting a cookie. He hasn't had much sugar that day, and I don't want to get up. I **avoid**, and ignore him.

The next day, Henry has had lots of sugar. After lunch he asks for a cookie. I **compete**, and say, no.

Remember: Only compete for health/safety issues. Issues like sitting in a car seat when riding in a car, not playing with electrical outlets or not running/playing in the street will always be competing issues. They are never appropriate for collaboration, avoiding or accommodating.

Developmental Resources

“Your ____ year old” by Frances L Ilg and Loise Bates Ames.

A great series of short books (one for each year) focused on the developmental stages of each year of childhood.

“The Baby Book: Everything You Need to Know About Your Baby from Birth to Age Two” by William and Martha Sears.

A complete and compelling guide to the first two years of your child's life.

Discipline Resources

The Discipline Book: How to Have a Better-Behaved Child From Birth to Age Ten by William and Martha Sears.

How to Talk so Your Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

Fundamental guidance regarding communicating and creating boundaries.

Feelings List

Feelings that people have but often fail to identify:

Abandoned	Eager	Jealous	Sad
Adequate	Ecstatic	Joyous	Satisfied
Adamant	Embarrassed	Jumpy	Scattered
Affectionate	Empty	Kind	Settled
Ambivalent	Energetic	Kind	Sexy
angry	Enraged	Kind	Shaky
Annoyed	Enthusiastic	Lazy	Shocked
Anxious	Envious	Left out	Silly
Apathetic	Excited	Lonely	Skeptical
Astounded	Evil	Lost	Small
	Exhausted	Loving	Sneaky
Bad	Exhilarated	Low	Solemn
Beautiful		Lustful	Sorrowful
Betrayed	Fascinated		Sorry
Bitter	Fearful	Mad	
Blissful	Flustered	Maudlin	Spiteful
Bold	Foolish	Mean	Startled
Bored	Frantic	Miserable	Stingy
Brave	Frustrated		Strange
Burdened	Frightened	Naughty	Stuffed
	Free	Needed	Stupid
Calm	Full	Nervous	Stunned
Capable	Furious		Supported
Caring			Sure
Challenged	Glad	Nice	Sympathetic
Cheated	Good	Nutty	
Cheerful	Gratified	Obsessed	Talkative
Childish	Greedy	Off	Tempted
Clever	Grieving	Opposed	Tense
Combative	Guilty	Outraged	Tentative
Competitive	Gullible	Overwhelmed	Terrible
Concerned			Terrified
Condemned		Pained	Thankful
Confused	Happy	Panicky	Tired
Conspicuous	Hassled	Peaceful	Trapped
Contented	Hateful	Persecuted	Troubled
Cruel	Helpful	Petrified	
Crushed	Helpless	Pleased	Ugly
	Hesitant	Pressured	Uneasy
Deceitful	High	Pretty	Underappreciated
Defeated	Homesick	Proud	Unhappy
Delighted	Honored	Put down	Unsettled
Despairing	Hopeless		Used
Destructive	Horrible	Quarrelsome	
Determined	Hurt		Violent
Different	Hysterical	Refreshed	Vehement
Diminished		Rejected	Vulnerable
Disappointed	Ignored	Relaxed	Vivacious
Discontented	Immortal	Relived	
Discouraged	Imposed upon	Remorseful	Wicked
Distracted	Impressed	Resistant	Wishful
Distraught	Infatuated	Restless	Wiped out
Disturbed	Infuriated	Reverent	Wonderful
Dominated	Inspired	Rewarded	Worried
Divided	Intimidated	Righteous	Worthless
Dubious	Isolated	Run down	
Dumb			
Dumped on			