

"To get where we want to go with our children we need to take a longer route, teaching them with our heads and hearts rather than with our hands and belts."

Penelope Leach

# EMPATHIC PARENTING

Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

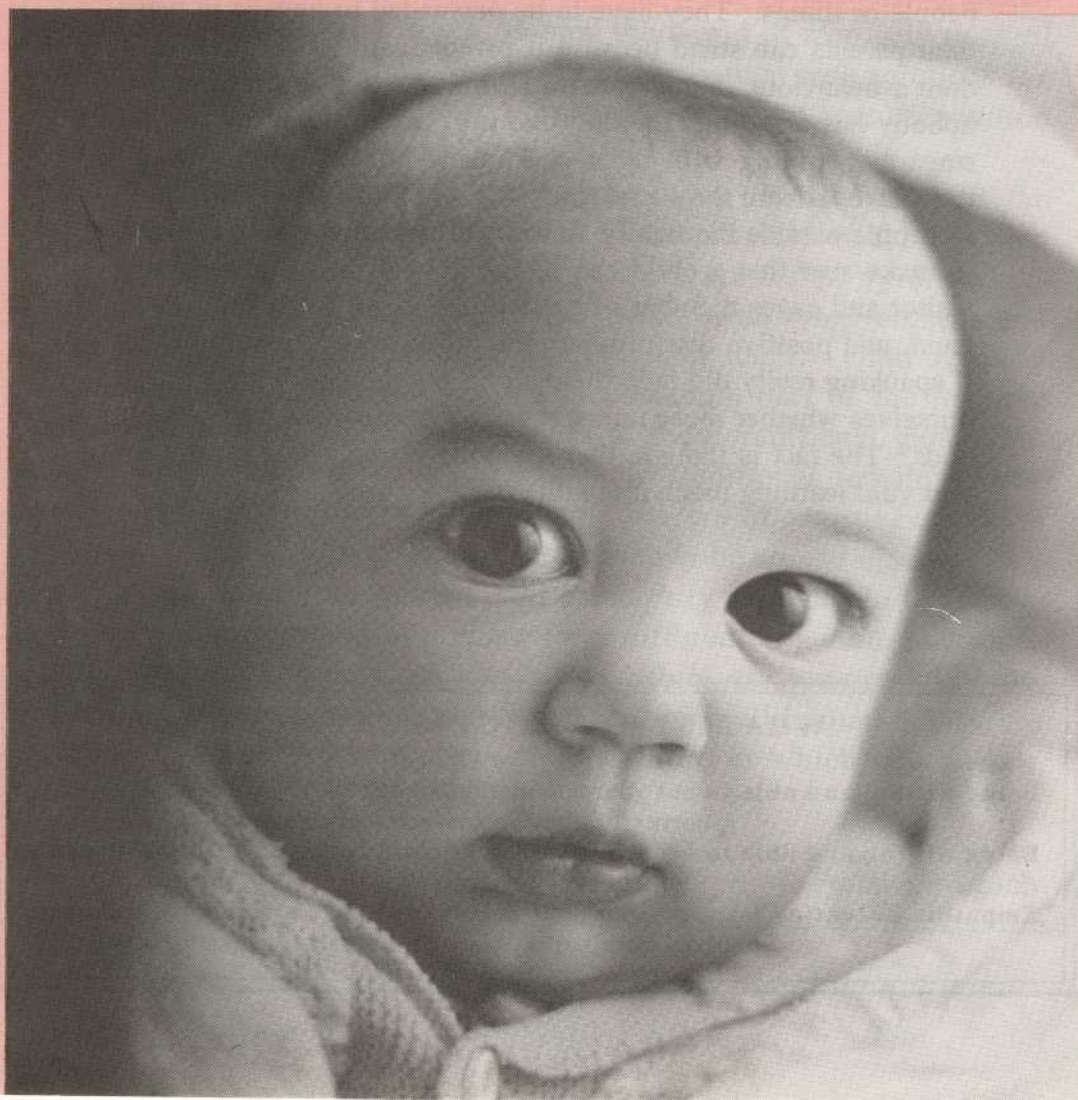
Volume 17

Issue 2

Spring 1994

# *SPANKING*

- a short-cut to nowhere...



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for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

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## Why Do Parents Spank?

Bringing up children is the most important job in the world and one of the most difficult. Teaching children how to behave is a vital part of that job and parents spank because they think short sharp punishments will teach children not to do things that are forbidden; stop them short when they are being generally tiresome and encourage them to do what they should.

Children cannot be allowed to endanger themselves or other people or things. They have to be persuaded to behave in ways their parents can stand because if parents can't stand their children's behaviour, homes are full of frustration and anger and nobody has any fun. By the time they are through the toddler stage and mixing with other children at nursery and at school they have to learn the social rules that will make them acceptable to people outside the family as well. It's part of good parenting to make sure that a child can be a beloved playmate, welcome visitor and eager member of a class. So clear limits on the one hand, and positive discipline on the other, are so important that if spanking really did help them along we should all have to ask ourselves whether those unjust means were justified by desirable ends. The fact is though, that spanking doesn't help but makes that vital learning much more difficult.

Penelope Leach

### WHAT IS EMPATHIC PARENTING?

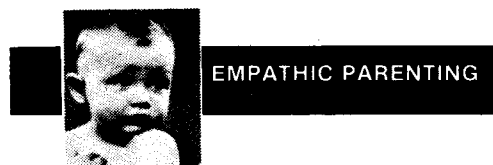
**Being willing and able to** put yourself in your child's shoes in order to correctly identify his/her feelings, and

**Being willing and able to** behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.

**Empathic Parenting** takes an enormous amount of time and energy and fully involves both parents in a co-operative, sharing way.

**EMPATHIC PARENTING**  
Journal of the Canadian Society for the  
Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Volume 17 Issue 2 Spring 1994  
(Date of Issue - April 1994)



Editor: E.T. Barker, M.D., D.Psych., F.R.C.P.(C)

Editorial Assistant: Jan Hunt, M.Sc.

Printed by Midland Printers, Midland, Ontario  
on recycled paper

With Vol. 7, Issue 3, Summer '84, EMPATHIC PARENTING became the official title of what was formerly the Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISSN 0705-6591)

EMPATHIC PARENTING, official publication of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, is published four times a year (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall) and is mailed without charge to all CSPCC members.

Annual Associate Membership	\$10.00
Annual Supporting Membership	\$25.00
Annual Sustaining Membership	\$100.00
Annual Endowing Membership	\$250.00

All Membership fees and donations are income tax deductible. Registration No. 0457960-09-13.

The Editor welcomes letters, suggestions for content, articles, photos, drawings, etc. for consideration. Opinions expressed in EMPATHIC PARENTING are not necessarily those of the CSPCC or the Editor.

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Subscription orders, undeliverable copies, and change of address notices should be sent to CSPCC, 356 First Street, Box 700, Midland, Ontario, L4R 4P4. (705) 526-5647. Fax (705) 526-0214

Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index, the Canadian Magazine Index, and available on-line and on CD ROM through Canadian Business and Current Affairs.

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# Spanking and Non-Spanking Parents

## Most parents in Canada spank their children.

A lot of parents take spanking for granted and don't give it much thought. They got spanked for being naughty when they were children. Now they've got children they hand the spankings out. What's the big deal?

Some parents feel more strongly than that about spanking. There's a group that feels spanking is an important part of bringing children up: not only a parental right, but a duty. There's also a group that doesn't really approve of spanking; wouldn't ever plan to spank, or do it in cold blood, but can nevertheless be driven to spanking and then regret it.

Finally, there are a few parents who feel that spanking is a very big deal indeed and wouldn't lay a finger on their children however maddening they were. Some of them have spanked a child once or twice and never forgotten it. Some have literally never done it. Non-spanking parents aren't especially saintly or especially patient; they aren't all middle-class people with (or without) nan-

nies; they don't all have loving partners, supportive families, nice homes or good jobs and they don't only have little girls or just one child each. In fact there isn't anything special at all about parents who don't spank. They are just people who have thought about hitting children and decided it's got no place in their family relationships, because it's unjust, and because it doesn't help 'discipline' either.

Those parents care just as much as everyone else about their children's behaviour. In fact a lot of them are rather strict parents who set clear limits.

I am part of that non-spanking group, both as a mother and as a psychologist. I believe that spanking - or tapping, or slapping, or cuffing, or shaking, or beating or whipping - children is actually wrong. I also believe (and hope to show) that far from producing better disciplined people, spanking makes it much more difficult to teach children how to behave.

Spanking is a short-cut to nowhere. To get where we want to go with our children we need to take a longer route, teaching them with our heads and hearts rather than with our hands and belts.



# Spanking is Wrong and Doesn't Help Discipline

*Spanking has to be wrong because we all agree that hitting people is wrong and children are people - aren't they?*

When a bigger child hits a smaller one in the playground, to get his candy or his turn, we call him a bully...

When a youth hits an old lady to get her purse, we call him a mugger...

When a parent hits a child to make him or her obey, is it really any different?

Maybe you will say it is different because that parent's motive is good. She spansks her child 'for good reason'; maybe even 'she does it for the child's sake'. But our society doesn't accept that 'good motives' can make hitting people right. A policeman who hits a suspect behaves wrongly, however keen he may be to solve a crime.

Maybe you will say that spanking children is different because it's in the family and therefore part of a relationship which is both loving and stressful. But that would make it perfectly alright for your partner to end arguments with you by giving you a good slap. And that isn't all right at all. If your partner did that he'd be called a 'wife-beater'.

Under Canadian law, parents (and other caregivers) can hit children as much as they like, short of doing them serious injury, but hitting anyone else is a criminal assault.

*If any spanking is wrong, all spanking must be wrong. Lots of parents agree that hitting children and causing real pain is wrong but believe that what they do doesn't count because 'I only give a little tap'.*

Of course there are degrees of wrongness. It's worse to murder someone than to mug her and worse to thrash a child with a belt than to spank with your hand. But that doesn't make the 'little tap' all right because it isn't the degree of pain that makes the difference, it's inflicting any pain (or 'sting' or 'smart') on purpose. Every parent will sometimes have to grab a child at the edge

of the road or snatch a small hand before it can touch the iron. Sometimes that kind of safety action will hurt a child and lead to tears. But it wasn't meant to hurt, it was meant to prevent hurt.

One mother said, 'Don't talk about hitting and pain. You're making an ordinary slap sound cruel and horrible on purpose...' But when her two year old bothered her while we were talking she slapped him, and she chose his bare legs rather than his diaper-padded bottom. She did hurt him on purpose and it was horrible.

## So Why Do Parents Spank?

Bringing up children is the most important job in the world and one of the most difficult. Teaching children how to behave is a vital part of that job and parents spank because they think short sharp punishments will teach children not to do things that are forbidden; stop them short when they are being generally tiresome and encourage them to do what they should.

Children cannot be allowed to endanger themselves or other people or things. They have to be persuaded to behave in ways their parents can stand because if parents can't stand their children's behaviour, homes are full of frustration and anger and nobody has any fun. By the time they are through the toddler stage and mixing with other children at nursery and at school they have to learn the social rules that will make them acceptable to people outside the family as well. It's part of good parenting to make sure that a child can be a beloved playmate, welcome visitor and eager member of a class. So clear limits on the one hand, and positive discipline on the other, are so important that if spanking really did help them along we should all have to ask ourselves whether those unjust means were justified by desirable ends. The fact is though, that spanking doesn't help but makes that vital learning much more difficult.

# The Evidence That Spanking Doesn't Help

If spanking and other physical punishments worked, you'd expect children who are slapped or spanked 'when they need it' to learn to behave better and better so that they needed punishing less and less often. But that's not the case.

Families who start spanking babies before they are a year old (and 63% of mothers surveyed in 1985 said they did this) are just as likely to spank them very frequently when they are four year olds as families which don't start spanking until later. In fact almost all four year olds are spanked (97% of a big random sample of British children), so spanking babies and toddlers clearly does not produce better-behaved pre-school children.

Plenty of spankings at four don't make for better behaved seven year olds either. Although some children are spanked less by that age, three quarters of that British sample were still spanked regularly 1 - 6 times a week and one in eight were spanked at least once a day. For some, 'ordinary spanking' has clearly not produced behaviour the parents found acceptable because by their seventh birthday a quarter of all boys and nearly as many girls have been hit with a belt or a strap, a cane or stick, or with any 'suitable' object that came to hand such as a slipper or a wooden spoon.

Whatever lessons those parents are trying to teach, their children clearly are not learning them. There is even some evidence from the British study that they may be less able to learn because physical punishments reduce children's IQ.

If caning or strapping in school had worked as the 'last resort' or 'final sanction' which teachers argued that they needed, you'd expect that one or two beatings would have been enough to 'teach a lesson' to any child. But until physical punishments were banned by law in state schools in 1987, their own

punishment books told the opposite story. In every school that used the cane it was the same handful of pupils who were hit with it, again and again, sometimes as often as 10 times over a school year. Even if those were the 'naughtiest' pupils who 'needed the cane' most, being beaten with it certainly did not make them into better pupils who 'needed' it less.

But the clearest evidence that physical punishments don't help to produce well-behaved, socialized people comes from studies of murderers, rapists, muggers and other violent criminals who threaten the lives and security of ordinary people. The life histories of notorious individuals - Adolf Hitler amongst them - record excessive physical discipline in childhood. Studies of whole prison populations all over the Western world show that criminals who use violence against their victims almost invariably had violence used against them when they were children. If our society is becoming increasingly violent it is certainly not because parents 'spare the rod'.

## Try Some Research of Your Own

If you still feel all that is somewhat different from what goes on in your family and that spanking, as you do it, really does help your children learn how to behave, try a small piece of research for yourself. Next time you spank a child who is old enough to talk fluently, wait until the row is over and then ask what the spanking was for. You will almost certainly find that s/he hasn't the least idea. The child will remember every detail of what happened, for weeks and maybe for life, but the nearest s/he will get to why it happened will be "you were cross" or perhaps "I was bad". However carefully you tell a child why you are spanking, reason always gets lost in the feelings the pun-

ishment produces. A baby or toddler is as amazed and horrified when a beloved parent spansks as you would be if the family dog suddenly turned around and took a chunk out of your leg. At that age a child will often turn to you to make the hurt better.

A child of four or five is overwhelmed with rage which s/he dare not show to you and must bury until it can be taken out on someone or something else.

An older child is angry too but also deeply humiliated. The blow may hurt self-esteem much more than it hurts a backside.

Those feelings leave no room for remorse or determination to do better in future. Spanked or beaten children cannot think about what they have done because they are full of what parents have done to them.

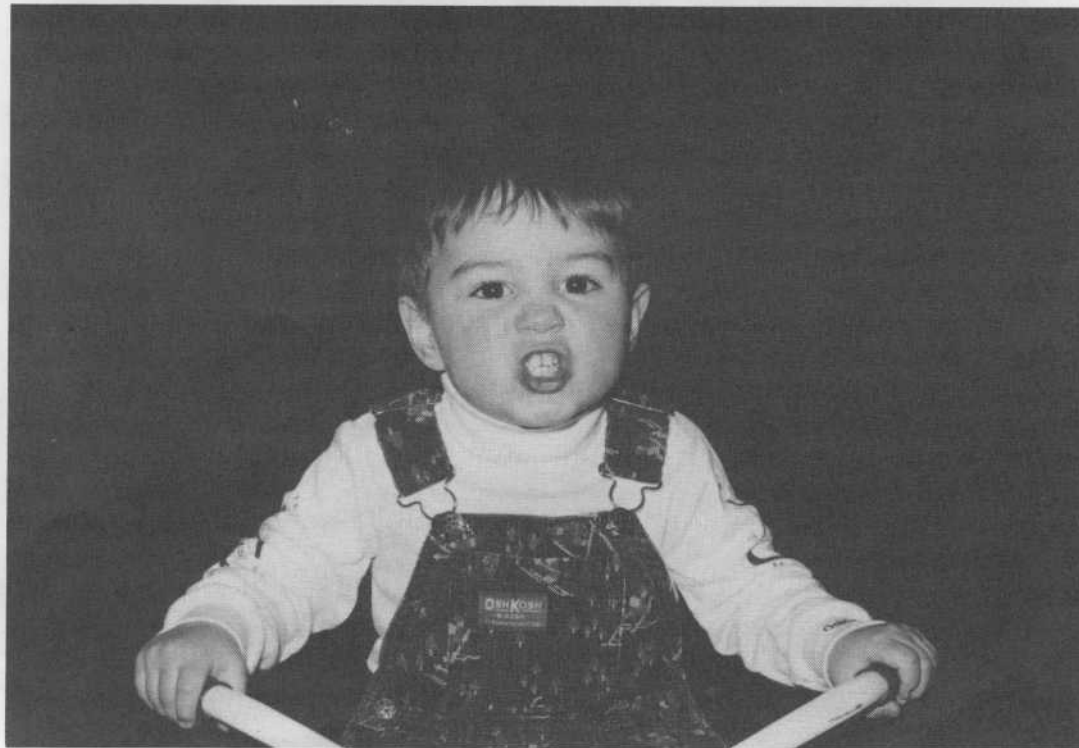
***Do you, in fact, always know what you spanked your child for? In a lot of families most slaps are not really given to punish one behaviour***

***or encourage another. They are given to relieve the feeling of parents who have been driven "too far"...***

### **See if you recognize these as spanking situations:**

**A couple with a tired four year old are shopping. She whines, clings to her mother's coat and gets in her father's way. The third time he trips over her she bursts into tears and her mother's patience snaps. She grabs the child's arm and slaps her legs.**

We all know how maddening it can be to try to finish a chore against a child's whining. But could that child possibly understand that she was hit for "being maddening"? As far as she was concerned, she got hurt for crying. And of course her parents didn't get what they wanted either. Stinging legs didn't turn that child into a cheerful, trouble-free companion. They made her bawl.



A mother with a five year old and a toddler struggles onto a crowded train. She finally gets children, bags and coats organized into seats but neither child gives her a moment to relax. The older one asks a stream of loud excited questions while her embarrassed mother tries to hush her. The toddler explores everything including the arm-rest ashtray. Suddenly the ashtray turns itself upside down; ash spills everywhere and the mother wallops the toddler on the hand.

That child wasn't really slapped for touching the ashtray. He couldn't possibly have known that it was an ashtray, let alone that it would spill. He was slapped because the ash was the last straw for a harassed parent. Understandable? Oh yes. A useful piece of 'discipline'? Oh no.

If whining can be maddening, so can the particular noise brothers and sisters make when they are squabbling and fighting. That noise is often the real reason for slaps that

parents think of as "punishment" for hurting little sister..." A lot of parents who don't spank often do think it's right to spank when children hurt each other, or hurt animals, so:

Pinned under his father's arm, the seven year old gets a spanking and as he spans the father says "I will not have you hitting people..."

Does that child really get the message 'hitting people is wrong'? Or does he get a different message such as 'hitting people is a good way to make them do what you want but you'd better be sure they're littler than you...?'

A mother tells me: 'I used to spank Joe quite a lot but once the baby was born I found that every time I spanked him, he spanked her. I spanked him for that too, for a bit, but then I realized I was doing to him exactly what I was telling him not to do to her. So I changed my tune. I said, 'nobody in this house is to hit anyone'.





# The Dangers of Slapping and Spanking

Parents who take 'a little tap' for granted, or use 'a quick slap' as part of their planned discipline, naturally don't like to think that their behaviour has any connection with the behaviour of cruel parents who actually abuse their children. But like it or not, we all have to face the truth which is that hurting a child on purpose is hurting a child on purpose, whether it's a little bit occasionally or a lot, quite often.

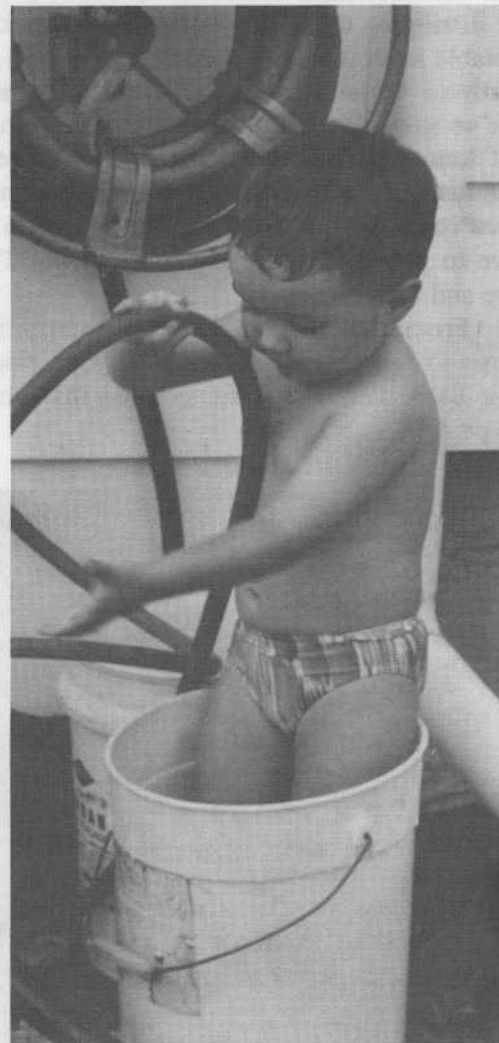
The difference between 'reasonable punishment' and 'cruel abuse' is only a matter of degree. It's a thin line and, wherever you choose to draw that line in your family, it is easily overstepped.

The risk of overstepping that line lies in the ineffectiveness of slapping as a means of teaching your child, combined with its effectiveness in relieving your feelings.

A 'little tap' doesn't stop your child doing whatever is irritating you so you give a 'quick slap'. One slap doesn't work for more than a minute or two so you try a couple and it's because those slaps don't work either that they can so easily become the spankings which then tip you over that line into beatings or whippings and the headline horrors that turn all our stomachs.

You probably feel that it simply could not happen to you: that there is no way you could ever seriously hurt or injure your child. But do remember that even 'mild' punishment can cause serious injury simply because your child is so much smaller and more fragile than you and because young children's heads are big and heavy in relation to their bodies. A blow aimed at a bottom can catch a child off balance so that s/he falls and hits that head on something. A boxed ear can mean a burst eardrum. A good shaking can rattle the brain inside the skull so that the child you never meant to hurt ends up with concussion. It happens somewhere every day.

Do also remember that most of the parents who are prosecuted for cruelty would once have rejected the suggestion that they might 'go too far' as indignantly as you do now. They saw themselves as ordinary parents. They meant to do a good job for their children. They got caught up in a vicious circle of trying to discipline those children by force, failing and trying more force. A spiral of violence within the family, along with varying stresses outside it and within themselves, eventually pushed them over that thin line so that now they find themselves beyond the pale.



# How Children **Do** Learn to Behave

Babies are born human but they aren't born knowing what it takes to be people. To find that out they need a long apprenticeship to people who have already made the grade as adults: parents or the permanent caregivers who stand in for parents.

Like other kinds of apprentices, children learn by being with you; watching and listening to you, imitating you, trying things out and getting them wrong, trying again and getting them right.... One day each of your children will have learned so much that s/he will be ready to function as an independent adult and maybe pass all that learning on to your grandchildren.

Bringing up a child to be a socially acceptable adult is harder work than teaching a youth to be a Master Carpenter because you've got to teach your child everything you know or feel about everything, rather than just your craft skills. But it's easier and more rewarding as well because you don't have to prove yourself to earn your child's love and loyalty.

From the earliest months when s/he learns to tell you apart from everyone else, your baby will take it for granted that you are perfect.

Indeed you can't help being perfect for your own child because you're the only Mom or Dad s/he is ever going to have. You don't have to earn his or her love: you have it. You don't even have to work at hanging on to it because, during the first years at least, it's almost impossible to lose it. Your child is totally dependent on you emotionally as well as physically and that gives you such enormous power that you can, and must, use it gently.

Children want to learn because wanting to know is built into them. They particularly want to learn how they should behave because (whether it looks that way today or not!) they want to please you. But children can only learn at the pace their individual development, mental, physical and emotional, allows. So trying to teach them to behave in ways they can't yet manage, or expecting them to grow up faster than they can, stores up unnecessary misery for everyone. The very quickest way to lose the co-operation which is the foundation of good and easy discipline is to ask the impossible of your child and imply that unless s/he performs it s/he will lose your love.



Photo: Sally & Richard Greenhill

## Babies

Your baby cannot learn any social behaviour because she does not yet know that there is a world full of people who are separate from her. She cannot learn to respect your feelings (such as your desire to spend the night asleep!) because she can't understand that you might feel differently from her. Her waking and crying, her desire to play or suck at 3:00 a.m. certainly will displease you but equally certainly are not meant to. Whatever your baby does or does not do, it is not to get at you.

## Toddlers

A young toddler finds it difficult to learn rules and regulations, like leaving the TV alone or not dabbling in his food, because the curiosity which he needs to keep him finding things out is much more developed than his memory. If you keep showing him and telling him what he must do, he will learn. But don't expect him to learn from ten tellings in a day. It may take hundreds of tellings over months.

At two or three your child does know that you and he are separate people but he isn't at all sure that he welcomes that. One bit of him wants to get on with growing up and become independent but another bit of him finds it scary and wishes he were still a babe in your arms. That's why you get shouts of 'me do it' one moment, and floods of tears the next because you've taken him at his word and left him to struggle on his own. Giving him room to grow up but not enough space to feel lonely makes this a difficult stage for you, but it's much worse for him. He gets angry and frustrated and afraid. He may throw tantrums, bite and kick. But it's himself he's angry with: his own smallness, incompetence and fearfulness. The more competent, in control and able to manage he can feel, the calmer and easier to handle he will be. And it's your constant calm and kindly control that will give him those feelings.

Two-year olds cannot be 'good' or 'naughty' on purpose because they do not yet know right from wrong or understand what makes the difference.

Why is it clever to turn out a sandcastle and naughty to turn out your pudding? Why is it 'dirty' to dabble in wee in a potty and 'clean' to dabble in soapy water in a basin?

Your toddler will be 'good' whenever you can arrange for her to want to do what you want her to do. Want those toys picked up? Tell her she must and she may easily refuse because she doesn't want to pick them up nor understand that she should do things just because you want them done. If she says 'No!' you can scold, shout, slap, reduce her to a jelly of misery, but you'll still have to pick up the toys yourself. But say 'I bet you can't pick all those up before I've tidied your bed...' and there's a good chance she'll do the job with no tears for either of you. And while she's doing it, she's learning that toys live in the toy cupboard rather than on the floor.



## Pre-school children

The payoff for helping toddlers want to do as they ought is a pleasanter time for all of you. And that's enormously important. But the payoff later on is more important still.

Toddlers grow up. By the time yours is three or four s/he will be capable of understanding most of your feelings and your rights, will be able to remember most of your instructions, and will be able to foresee the results of many actions. When s/he reaches that stage s/he will be able to be 'good' or 'naughty' on purpose but which s/he chooses



## Schoolchildren

At five, six, or seven your child can 'behave', but don't expect that s/he'll always do so because s/he isn't a saint. Children have periods of moodiness - don't you? They make mistakes, as we all do. And they sometimes do what they want, rather than what they know they should, just as everybody does. In fact children are people, just like the rest of us, but people with a lot still to learn about being grown up.

This is often an age for filthy clothes and filthy language, for defiance, and dumb insolence as well as for real sympathy, generosity and caring. Your child needs you to sort out the bad bits from the good bits and

will mostly depend on how s/he feels about you.

If your child reaches that stage of development feeling that you are basically loving, approving, and on his side, he will want (most of the time) to please you and he will behave (with many lapses) as you wish. But if he reaches that stage feeling that you are overpowering, incomprehensible and against him, he may decide that trying to please you is hopeless because you never are pleased; that minding when you are cross is too painful because you are cross too often and that loving you is too dangerous because you have so often seemed not to love him.

to tell him or her which is which. S/he doesn't just know that 'f...' is worse than 'fiddle' or that calling an adult a 'silly cow' is quite different from yelling it in the playground. Tell him or her. S/he doesn't just know that the trouble s/he took over your Mother's Day card lit up your whole week either. Tell him or her that, too.

Children need parents to explain to them about grown-up behaviours and feelings but they still need to be allowed to be children. They need assurance that one day they will graduate from apprentice to adult person but that in the meantime, however idiotic their behaviour may be, they themselves are loved and valued and everything you could want in a child.



# Positive Discipline -- Without Violence

Positive discipline requires confidence from parents: confidence that you really are the most important people in your children's lives; confidence that you can measure up to that as 'good enough parents' and therefore confidence to see bringing children up as a matter of family co-operation rather than adult authority and childish obedience to it.

## Rewards and Punishments

People learn much more through co-operation and rewards than through coercion and punishments. Think of adults at work. A stake in the management together with piecework raises productivity because people understand why they're doing what they're doing, and the more they do the more they earn. But a bossy boss who docks wages

every time someone is late or goes to the dentist doesn't have at all the same effect. Punishments don't motivate people to try harder or do more; they make people angry and obstinate instead.

Your child is a person and also learns more from rewards than punishments. The rewards don't have to be tangible things like money or sweets because what children really want is parental attention. They want you to notice them, talk to them, share your life with them.

At some stages, of course, a child will want all your attention and whine and cling because s/he can't have it, but at almost every stage children will do whatever they must to get your attention, and if certain behaviours guarantee that you'll ignore the child until they stop, they will stop pretty quickly.



# Your attention is your child's reward

Unfortunately parents don't always use their own attention to encourage 'good' behaviour and discourage 'naughtiness'. In fact parents quite often get it all the wrong way around. While children aren't doing anything bothersome parents leave them alone on a sort of 'let sleeping dogs lie' principle. They don't volunteer companionship. They don't even join in with any enthusiasm when the children try to share a game or a joke. Eventually those children begin to feel lonely and neglected so they make a bid for attention by interrupting, reciting rude words or fighting. They're right, of course; that's when the parents do pay attention. Perhaps they don't realize that children would always rather have cross attention than be ignored.

Who gets not just attention but candy in the supermarket: the child who is whining or the one who is helping? It's usually the tiresome child who is bribed to co-operate but if there are sweets on offer at all, they should really go to the one who is co-operating already. Who gets taken out to play football on Sunday afternoon: the child who plays quietly while you read the paper or the child who will not give Dad a moment's peace? It's usually the child who is being a pain but it should be the child who is being a pleasure.

Some parents deliberately ration attention and treats for 'fear of spoiling'. And that's sad because it's impossible to 'spoil' a child with too much talk, play and laughter, too many hugs or even too many presents, provided you give them because you want to. 'Spoiling' isn't about indulgence and fun, it's about power backed by blackmail. The child who may be at risk of turning into a selfish, 'spoiled' person with no consideration for others isn't necessarily the one who is given a great deal but the one who gets whatever s/he does get by bullying parents to give in against their better judgment. So if you enjoy playing with your children and enjoy their pleasure in the things you do for

them and give to them, don't hold back. You only have to think about 'spoiling' when you give in to prevent a scene or give things to make up for a shortage of love or time.

Your child-apprentice makes good use of all the time you can possibly give because as well as enjoying your company, s/he learns from being with you. However busy you are, try not to take shortcuts all the time.

It's quicker to suggest TV to a bored nine-year old than to play a board game with him. It's quicker to close a five-year old's mouth with candy than to listen to her story. It's quicker to give them a slap instead of explanations, too. But while all those shortcuts may help you through a rushed and stressful evening, they will not advance the real journey you are making with your children.

Teaching children how to behave doesn't really mean ensuring that they obey you and behave as you want while you are watching them; it means helping them grow into people who will one day do as they should and behave as they ought when there's nobody watching them and no chance that they will be found out if they do wrong. That means that you aren't just disciplining them from outside, but trying to help them build the kind of self-discipline we call 'conscience'. To build that, children need to understand each tiny everyday instruction or scolding so that they can fit it into the bigger pattern of how people should 'behave' which is forming inside them.

While you keep children safe, and protect others from them, you are teaching them to keep themselves safe and to care for other people. While you control them, you are helping them to control themselves. And while you explain the moral values - like honesty, justice or respect for others - that lie behind your orders and exhortations, you are offering those values to your children so that they can take them in and make them part of themselves.

# Children model themselves on parents

Young children are so focused on parents that even if they spend a lot of time in daycare, or don't see much of one parent, they still do most of their social learning from parents. Your child -- let's say a son -- will take in every detail of what you are like as a person. He won't only take notice of what you say and do to him but of how you are with everybody else. And he won't only do what you say, he'll do what you do. So don't expect to operate a double-standard, just because you're a grown-up and he's only a child.

## Do as you would be done by:

You will not get much more politeness, co-operation and honesty from your child than he sees you giving.

## Be honest:

He needs to know when and why you are angry or distracted. When there is a row he needs to know what really caused it. When you are wrong, he needs you to admit



it and, far from losing respect for you if you say 'I'm sorry I was cross, it wasn't really your fault', he'll respect you more and be the more inclined to apologize himself when he does wrong.

## Always explain:

Unless it's an emergency, it's an insult to a child's intelligence to expect him to carry out unexplained orders and it's a waste of opportunities for learning, too. It's only knowing why you want him to do something today that lets him apply the same idea tomorrow, so he can only learn if you will explain.

## Be positive:

Just as rewards work better than punishments, so 'do' works better than 'don't' and requests for action work better than forbidding any. 'Don't take that cookie in there' makes him bristle with argument; 'please stay at the table until you've finished your cookie' gives him a positive course of action that he controls and you approve.

## Ration 'don'ts':

Or he simply will stop hearing them. 'Don't' works best for actual rules that you want him to keep whatever the circumstances, like 'Don't climb in that tree; it's dangerous. Try not to make rules that vary with circumstances and therefore sometimes have to be broken. 'Don't interrupt while I'm talking,' for example, is a silly rule because you'd want him to interrupt if he needed the toilet or the baby was crying. Turn it into a positive request instead: 'please wait a minute until I've finished talking'.

## Remember:

**He can't keep your rules if you don't.** 'Never cross the road without a grown-up' is an excellent safety rule until the day you ask him to 'run over and get my paper...'

# Practical Ideas for Avoiding Spanking

## Babies

Remind yourselves that you spend half your time trying to stop your baby crying so causing crying is against your own interests.

\* **You don't have to slap hands** that get into danger. Grabbing them is quicker and attracts just as much attention.

\* **Force isn't the best way** to get something from a baby who will hold on tighter the more you pull. You don't need a slap, though. Offering a swap always works.

\* **Baby-proofing living space** is really worthwhile. In Sweden all young families get free safety-gadgets to 'reduce family friction'. In North America you'll have to buy and fit them yourself but every stair-gate, fire-guard or cupboard lock is worthwhile. If there's nothing dangerous or breakable in reach, there's not much to quarrel about.

\* **If you ever feel your temper going**, make sure the baby's in a safe place like a cot or playpen and leave the room until you've cooled down. The baby may cry at being left but that's better than crying at being hit...

## Toddlers

Try to avoid direct clashes. They teach toddlers nothing and bring you down to toddler level. Stay adult and remember that you are much cleverer than your child. You can almost always find a diversion or distraction.

\* **Use your superior size and strength** to defuse situations rather than to hurt. A child who won't come out of the bath can be lifted. A child who won't walk with you can be carried. A child who hits out at you or the dog can be safely held and told 'No. That hurts ... hitting's horrid...'

\* **If you're driven to distraction**, your child will not listen to you and you've started to deliver a slap, divert the blow to the table or your own knee. The sound will interrupt the behaviour and the child will hear what you say far better than if s/he was crying.

\* **Try not to join in tantrums**. If you are at home, try turning your back to the child and ignoring the scene. Singing to yourself may help distract you from the noise and your own desire to yell back. If you're in public and embarrassed, bodily remove the child to the nearest private screaming place. Do be ready with comfort when the yells change to tears, though. Real tantrums terrify toddlers.

\* **Don't even hope** that your toddler will play safely without adult attention for more than a few minutes. Instead, cultivate eyes in the back of your head, the ability to do two (or five) things at the same time and at least some adult company for yourself. Then ask yourself 'Has today had any fun bits in it? How often have I heard that gurgly laugh?'

## Older children

Everybody gets angry or fed up with children sometimes. Keeping your hands off your child doesn't mean that you have to bottle up your feelings. If a child's driving you crazy, try clapping your hands together as loudly as you can. The noise will interrupt whatever's going on and the only person you may hurt is you!

\* **If you've started** to say 'stop that this minute or I'll...' you may have time to substitute 'scream' for slap you'. Do it, as loudly as you can. Your child will be surprised and impressed and your tension will vanish.





Photo: Sally & Richard Greenhill

\* **If you're child is being silly** -- teasing, provoking, going too far, and refusing to listen or take you seriously, don't waste energy on a crescendo of unheeded shouts that end up in a slap. Crouch down so your two faces are on the same level; grasp the child firmly by the upper arms so s/he cannot avoid looking at you and then talk. If the 'conversation' starts out with a yell, well, that's a lot better than a blow.

\* **If you feel irritation building inside you but your child hasn't really done anything**, try removing yourself for five minutes' peace and self-indulgence. You could turn on the radio, put on some makeup, gaze out of the window or run around the garden. It doesn't matter what you do as long as it enables you to simmer down into a 'let's start again' frame of mind.

Removing yourself means that your child loses your attention so unless s/he's playing with friends that may be a kind of punishment just as it is with younger children. You're saying 'I just don't want to be in here with you until you can be nicer/quieter/gentler or whatever.'

\* **If you still feel you must punish your child**, do make sure that it follows directly from the 'crime' so s/he has a chance to learn the lesson you mean to teach. If a child rides a bike onto a road you've forbidden, it's logical to take the bike away for the afternoon or longer. You're teaching that bikes can be dangerous, that you're concerned

for the child's safety, and that you'll enforce safety rules for as long as they're needed. A different punishment, such as 'no TV' has nothing to do with safety or bikes. Hours later when the programs begin and the row is forgotten, the punishment will teach nothing. As for a spanking, nothing will make your child believe that you do it for his or her sake. 'I hurt you because I don't want you hurt' is too devious a message for any child or adult.

You won't often need these formal punishments, though. When your child's being tiresome, you ignore him or her. When you can't ignore the behaviour it makes you cross and you say so. Children want your approval, so honest disapproval is usually effective, especially if you follow it with a chance for the child to wipe the slate clean and start again: 'All right then, let's clear up the mess together and then we'll say no more about it....'

**Above all -- do talk.** The people who say that children prefer quick slaps to boring lectures don't realize that children aren't bored when parents tell them what they think and feel and want. They want adults to treat them the way other people treat each other -- and they don't want to be hurt any more than adults do. Much is made of the fact that other animals control their young with nips and blows, but are you rearing a lion cub or a person? Human beings have the unique advantage of being able to talk. Let's do it.

Funds for the publication of 10,000 copies of this special issue of

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**made this charitable fund-raising event so successful.**

## The Shift from Seeing Child-care as a Womens' Problem to Seeing Child-care as Society's Problem

...If we want **real** solutions (to the working parent's dilemma) we must try to solve the **real** problem which is not "how can this woman pursue her chosen working life **and** rear her chosen family?" but "How can the vital people-function of parenthood be re-integrated into our society of workers?"...

...The most radical social change such a scheme would require is the change that would take us from the belief that children are the business of women-who-are mothers to the realization that children are the business of us all, and specifically of all people-who-choose-to-be parents. As long as the work/parent dilemma is seen as a woman's problem solutions will continue to be sought, or scratched together, in a woman's world, leaving the world of men, still the real world of work, untouched. However honestly men seek solutions **for women**, a division between the sexes will prevent a true recognition of parenting as an issue for all people.

I believe that there are many men who genuinely accept the concept of equal responsibility for children and who would welcome the opportunity to act on it. Most of them are foiled by the work-ethic; by the pressures on them to perform as wage-earners and career-people and, sometimes, by feminism itself. Until recently children's needs have not formed a substantial part of the feminist platform; women have fought males at their traditional games but have scarcely sought to involve them in traditional female games. There is a growing recognition of the dangers of sexism both ways round and this is a trend which must certainly be encouraged.

In the meantime, women, still principally responsible for young children, can do much to prepare for a different, a gentler and more child-orientated society. Today's boy-babies are tomorrow's men. Their education is critical to a future in which all human beings are people first and workers afterwards; a future in which new people take priority over any other product.

Penelope Leach





Recognizing that the capacity to give and receive trust, affection and empathy is fundamental to being human.

Knowing that all of us suffer the consequences when children are raised in a way that makes them affectionless and violent, and;

Realizing that for the first time in History we have definite knowledge that these qualities are determined by the way a child is cared for in the very early years.

# CREDO



## WE BELIEVE THAT:

- The necessity that every new human being develop the capacity for trust, affection and empathy dictates that potential parents re-order their priorities with this in mind.
- Most parents are willing and able to provide their children with the necessary loving empathic care, given support from others, appropriate understanding of the task and the conviction of its absolute importance.
- It is unutterably cruel to permanently maim a human being by failing to provide this quality of care during the first three years of life.

## THERE IS AN URGENCY THEREFORE TO:

- Re-evaluate all our institutions, traditions and beliefs from this perspective.
- Oppose and weaken all forces which undermine the desire or ability of parents to successfully carry out a task which ultimately affects us all.
- Support and strengthen all aspects of family and community life which assist parents to meet their obligation to each new member of the human race.