



A POSITIVE APPROACH TO CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

A Guide to Encouraging Positive Reactions



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Dear readers,



Raising a child can be compared to looking through a kaleidoscope. With every turn, we see a new image, a different play of shapes and colors. Yet, the content of the kaleidoscope always remains the same. The differences come from our perspective, from the way we choose to view reality. This metaphor perfectly captures the essence of the volume *A Positive Approach to Child Behavior: A Guide to Encouraging Positive Reactions*.

Our role as parents and educators is not merely to manage children's behaviors but to learn to view each situation through the lens of understanding, love, and patience. Even the behaviors that challenge us the most can, when seen from another angle, reveal opportunities for connection, learning, and growth.

This volume invites you to explore this positive approach, guiding you step by step in cultivating a relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and open communication.

With the help of the 4D principles - love, availability, guidance, and balance - you will discover how to shape your child's behavior without losing sight of their emotional needs.

This guide serves as both a practical tool and an opportunity for reflection. The methods presented will not only help you prevent or manage challenging behaviors but also shift your perspective on the difficulties encountered. By viewing them through the "kaleidoscope" of appreciative thinking, you will see that every difficult moment hides a growth opportunity—for both your child and yourself.

I encourage you to read this book with openness and curiosity, to turn the "kaleidoscope" of appreciative education, and to uncover the wealth of possibilities before you. Raising a child is not just their journey but also ours - a path toward our own depths and understanding.

With hope and confidence in the power of perspective,

Prof. Dr. Ștefan Marian COJOCARU

President, HoltIS Association



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WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?



This guide is intended for teachers and professionals who interact with children.

The guide promotes the importance of a positive approach and offers ways to positively influence and guide children's behaviour.





MOTTO



It is not a mind, it is not a body that we are training; it is a man, and he ought not to be divided into two parts.

(Montaigne)

KEY MESSAGES



- Taking a positive approach to children’s behaviour is an effective way of showing the love you have for your child.¹
- A positive approach to children’s behaviour implies teaching and encouraging desirable behaviour.
- In a world full of the unknown, boundaries provide safety.
- Values are not innate in children. But they can learn them gradually through many trials and experiences.
- Giving attention to children when they act normal can stop them from “showing off” to get our attention.
- Although prevention is the best cure, intervention strategies are often needed to address children’s challenging behaviour.

Authority means striking a balance between permission and restriction.

¹ This material represents a selection, synthesis and adaptation of the information published by Holt Romania - Iași branch in the volumes Cum să devenim părinți mai buni. Manualul Educatorului Parental, vol. 2 și 3, (2011). Iași: Expert Projects.



OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDE

- Acknowledge the role of a positive approach to children's behaviour.
- Understand that taking a positive approach to children's behaviour is a way of showing the love we have for our child.
- Learn specific methods and techniques to positively influence and guide children's behaviour.
- Learn constructive ways to manage children's undesirable behaviour (hitting and tantrums).

Being a parent is one of the most complex, challenging yet rewarding experiences that life has to offer. Raising a child into a healthy and well-balanced adult who can take their place in the next generation is a great responsibility (Adler, 2011).

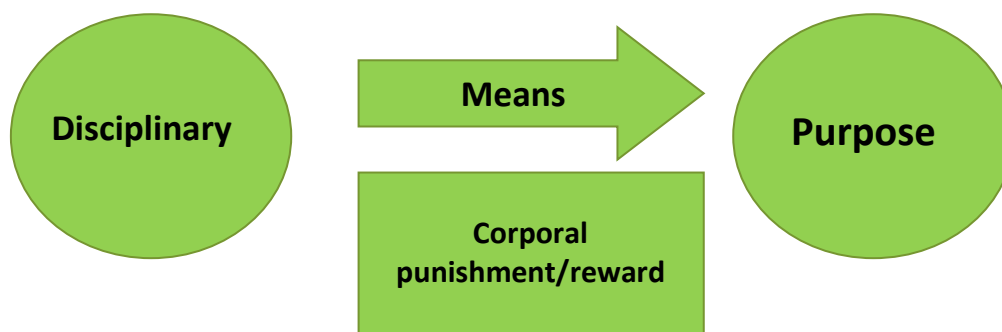
The challenge is even greater in a fast-changing social context, as family and educational policies are being reformed and the adults who raise and educate children are flooded with so many educational methods whose effectiveness is not certain as they need to be tested and confirmed (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Taylor-Greene et al.1997; Walker et al.1995). As far as child education principles and methods are concerned, we could say that this is a transitional time. We are instinctively attached to the traditional methods that today's adults learned as children, but at the same time we are trying out new methods meant to create an individual typology that is different from what society demanded some 20 years ago. However, while the current social context mainly requires us to display personal qualities other than obedience, submission, or uniformity, we evaluate the individual using the same principles: character, balance, social adaptation and integration and respect for the surrounding world.

Therefore, the challenge we are facing is how to raise today's children in these changing times so that they will be able to adapt as adults to the context in which they will live. Both family and school have to respond to modern challenges by setting rules and values for children and young people (Greepsan, 1995). In today's society, family increasingly needs external support to adapt to these demands, as parents either show an inability to manage the relationships with their own children or stick to traditional values which they believe provide viable models for intrafamily relationships (Cojocaru, 2008).

During parent education courses, some of parents' answers to the question "What does a positive approach to children's behaviour mean?" were: "positive discipline", "giving rewards", "praising children when they do something good" as well as "fair punishment" (Holt Romania, 2011). The positive approach to children's behaviour is discussed in close relation to child discipline because it is considered a principle of discipline.



Sometimes, parents/educators wrongly associate discipline with punishment and, choosing to ignore the actual situation, they give all kinds of harsh and violent punishments to children for their mistakes, which are often small. Adults can overreact, disregarding the seriousness of the mistake or the circumstances and forgetting that children make mistakes out of ignorance, not because they want to (Skiba & Peterson, 2003). Nonetheless, discipline must be associated primarily with child development, instruction, and education. Educational actions must be entirely positive, aiming to support learning and to help the child choose the right path for them (Kohn, 2006).



The positive approach to children's behaviour is closely linked to the goals we set in the child discipline process. It is tempting to think that the main purpose of discipline is to make the child listen to the adult and do as they are told without any resistance; in other words, to control the child. When we use new discipline methods, such as replacing corporal punishment (when the child does something wrong) with rewards (when the child does something good), we do not have a new purpose (Kohn, 2006). The purpose does not change, namely getting the child to do what we want. A positive approach to children's behaviour helps us shift discipline towards the child. The four-question technique helps us set the purpose.

1. What do I want my child to learn from this experience?
2. Does what I do help my child learn that?
3. Does my behaviour have adverse effects?
4. If so, what can I do differently?



Discipline should focus on children's best interests, not on making them do what adults want them to do. For example, a study conducted in Washington D.C. on children under 5 found that "frequent compliance [was] sometimes associated with maladjustment" and that "a certain level of resistance to parental authority" can be a "positive sign" (Kohn, 2013). The author also argues that, in order to help children, become good people, it is important to abandon authoritarian strategies in favour of a cooperative approach. It is impossible to offer advice that is suitable for all children; so, it is necessary to provide guidelines that can be adapted to each family or classroom. Our commitment to a collaborative educational style requires us to also pay attention to what we ask of children, not just to the techniques we use to get children to do what we ask. It also requires us to change our assumptions about what motivates children and perhaps even those regarding human nature; it urges us to have the courage to see things from children's perspective and allow them to have a say in their own lives as we give up some control. All collaborative strategies are based on the need to make it clear to the little ones that they do not have to earn our approval, that we love them not for what they do but for who they are. After all, this is the basic principle of unconditional parenting (Kohn, 2006).

A child who listens blindly to their parents will do the same with other people who are not always well intentioned.



KEY INGREDIENTS OF THE POSITIVE APPROACH TO CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR



The positive approach to children's behaviour has four key ingredients:



LOVE

Love is the key ingredient in supporting children to grow into healthy and well-adjusted individuals (Gerhardt, 2006). This feeling makes us forgive them whenever they get into trouble, find the courage and motivation to carry on regardless of circumstances, act in a way we don't like for the sake of the child, or get filled with joy when we look at them.

No matter how informed adults are about the best ways and most effective methods to discipline their children, if they apply what they learn without making the child feel loved, they will only manage to send out technical, mechanical messages that the child is unlikely to internalise.

Children should be loved unconditionally. Moreover, they should feel that they are loved unconditionally. This is a feeling that should know no boundaries and should remain a constant in their lives, no matter what they do. Love does not depend on "how good you are" or on whether "you are the best student in your class". Love just is it is the finest ingredient that ultimately shapes the future adult.

When children feel unconditional love, they accept themselves more easily as good people, which is a prerequisite for harmonious development.



The child is loved both for who they are and for what they do. We can say that the first kind of love is unconditional and is found in the family, while the second kind of love is conditional and is more likely to be found in the school environment (Kohn, 2013).

It is important *how much* we love them as well as *how* we love them.

You can love them so much that you tolerate and accept everything they do, you find excuses for their behaviour, even if it is harmful to them and to others, you do not question any of their decisions and you don't actively involve them in any action. Or you can love them very much and – because of that – you set boundaries to keep them safe, you explain to them the consequences of what they choose to do, you challenge their opinions with arguments, etc.

When we talk about the love we have for our children, the relationship we build with them is also very important (Reynolds & Miller, 2003). Very often, parents/teachers say that they are “friends” with the children. There is nothing wrong with having a closer relationship with the child, but if you want to be friends with them, with everything that involves, you also have to accept the fact that there will be times when they will treat and judge you as a friend.

If you want to be friends with your child, you have to accept the fact that there will be times when they will treat and judge you as a friend.

Especially since sometimes, as you want to get close to the child and make them open up to you, you tell them more about yourself than the child should know.

When it comes to how much we should “think like a child”, we walk a very fine line. Up to a certain point, the adult and the child get closer, which instils trust in the latter, but respect is lost beyond that point (Kohn, 2013).

It is more advisable for the adult to want to be the child's parent, the person to whom the child turns trustingly and fearlessly whenever they feel the need to talk to someone, rather than being their friend.



AVAILABILITY

Availability means:

- Paying attention to your child.
- Finding time to spend with them, to care for them, to communicate with them and to educate them.
- Being always open to learn the best ways to spend quality time with your child;.
- Having a positive attitude towards the child.

Paying attention

During the parent education courses carried out by the Holt Romania Foundation - Iași Branch, some mothers talked about how they had found out about their (teenage) daughters' pregnancies only when they were already seven months pregnant. This triggers an avalanche of questions like "How was that even possible?", "How come you didn't notice it sooner?", "Didn't you find it suspicious that she was putting on weight all of a sudden?", etc. All the answers point to the same conclusion: lack of attention (Holt Romania, 2011).

Of course, you can easily get caught up in everyday worries and devote your time to other activities with the excuse of "working hard for the children", being somewhat relieved at the thought that they are big children now, they can manage on their own and you don't always have to keep an eye on them. The family takes a backseat and is sometimes just a "setting" where you get to rest in the evening and gain new strength to be able to cope with the "hustle and bustle" the next day (Holt Romania, 2011).

But there is a very high price to pay for this chronic lack of attention.

Attention is the best prevention.

By paying attention to the child and noticing the little things that change in their behaviour (diet, communication style, habits, physical appearance, etc.), we can learn much more about them than if we talked for hours. Paying constant attention to children can help the adult notice early on any physical, emotional, and behavioural changes in their development (Kohn, 2013).



Still, such attention should not be smothering. It is useful for the child to know that someone is paying attention to them, but when that turns into total control, it has the opposite effect. The child will start hiding, concealing things, and drifting away.

Give positive attention.

Most of the times, we tend to focus exclusively on problems. As parents or teachers, we can easily get into the habit of only noticing behaviour that upsets us, thus giving mostly negative attention to children. The key to taking a positive approach to behaviour is to lay the foundation for positive attention and encouragement early on in our child's life. We all like to be appreciated by the people we care about. Acknowledging positive behaviour encourages the repetition of that behaviour and a sense of self-worth. The attention children get from adults is extremely important to them and most children want to please adults. They feel good about themselves when they manage to do that. Of course, we all know that positive attention doesn't always work. Sometimes, children misbehave, and we need effective techniques, strategies and special programmes to prevent children's emotional and behavioural problems (Sanders, 1999).

Ways to give positive attention

Devoting special time

- Adults should devote special time to each child every day.
- Special time needs to be regular enough so that the child can count on it.
- Special time should focus on the child's wants and needs.

Showing approval

- The adult needs to show approval when the child engages in desirable behaviour. Children should not be "seen" only when they make mistakes.
- Desirable behaviour needs to be explained. Why it is important and what are the consequences of doing things a certain way; for example: "If everyone helps to clean up, we will finish faster and we will have more time for stories".
- The aim of showing approval is to encourage the child to maintain a certain behaviour.



All of us need attention, including our children. Giving and getting attention is a vital part of human existence. It is so important that children would rather misbehave to get negative attention than not get any attention at all. You can help children behave properly if you acknowledge their positive behaviour. Showing approval is an important ability for adults and a positive way of managing children's behaviour. The aim of showing approval is to encourage your child to maintain a certain behaviour (Holt Romania, 2011).

Finding time

Raising and educating a child require physical time. Time to attend to their basic needs, to answer the question "Why?" repeatedly, to try out different discipline techniques in order to find the right one, to listen to them, to understand their point of view and to monitor their actions (Guryan, Hurst & Kearney, 2008). The amount of time one spends with the child varies according to age. A young child requires more physical time to meet their basic needs, while an adolescent requires more physical time for communication.

Taking a positive approach to children's behaviour is a process that starts *now*.

Child discipline cannot be delayed. The days and years go by very quickly and postponing child discipline will reflect in children's undesirable behaviour (Kohn, 2013).

When disciplining the child, it is better to waste time *now* to save time later! (Kohn, 2006)

Also, special time plays a very important role in child discipline. Regardless of the child's age, not a single day should go by without that special time. Sometimes, adults can very easily make time for a guest who shows up unannounced or for a chat with a friend who has "news" by devoting less time to the child and saying to them that "we will talk later because we don't have time now". Child discipline is a long-term process which rests on the premise that it is better to waste time now to save time later (Kohn, 2006).

Spend 15 minutes *alone with the child* every single day.



In those 15 minutes you spend alone with your child, without any external distractions (TV, radio, etc.), you can listen to your child, talk about their concerns, play or just cuddle. Also, it will be easier for us to find time for ourselves if the child knows that they have that special time with you (Hallberg & Klevmarken, 2001).

It is important for the child to know that they have your undivided attention. When the child is not used to that kind of attention from the adult, the best way to start this is by just sitting with the child while they are playing peacefully. We don't ask questions or give instructions, but we let the child set the tone (Kohn, 2013).

Being always open to learn

Availability also means that the adult is open to get informed, to test out discipline methods, to take parenting classes and to learn more about child rearing and education.

Adults' self-sufficiency undermines the positive approach to children's behaviour.

If we believe that we must constantly learn how to be the best parents or educators for our children, that can actually happen. We need to learn how to care for our children in the best possible way when they are little, when they are adolescents and when they become parents themselves. We can be the right people to look after our children only if we accept this.

Being patient

An adult's availability also means patience to allow the child to grow and develop at a normal pace. Children don't understand things the first time you tell them. It is not that easy. You have to repeat, rephrase and remind them everything with a lot of calm and patience. Time availability also includes the time you need to prepare before you tell them something, to think about their needs, to simply enjoy the process of discipline (Kohn, 2006).

Discipline depends heavily on the child's development. In the long term, the adults' impatience and pressure on the child to do things that are beyond their understanding will lead to frustration and fear.

Both the adult and the child need to first understand and then internalise the rules, boundaries, experiences. And this can only happen over time and with a lot of patience.



DIRECTION

Discipline focuses on specific objectives. Direction means setting those objectives. Practically, every adult has to ask themselves what they want their child to be like when they grow up and shape the process of discipline according to that answer.

If they want the future adult to be “responsible”, “determined”, “independent”, “full of initiative”, “capable of making the right decisions”, they need to embrace a discipline style that allows their child to practise and develop these skills and abilities and that focuses on active participation and listening.

BALANCE

Discipline involves asking and giving certain things to your child. We give them love, attention, time, financial resources, opportunities, answers, freedom, etc. In return, we ask them to respect the boundaries we have set, the rules we have agreed upon, etc. Balance means how much you ask of them compared to how much you give them. These two aspects shape the parenting or child-rearing style and, eventually, the child discipline process (Frost, 2005).

PARENTING STYLES

Based on these two variables, namely how much the parent asks of the child and how much they give to them, Elisabeta Stănciulescu mentions that most authors use the classification proposed by the psychologist Diana Baumrind, which features three main styles: permissive style, authoritarian style, “authoritative” style (Stănciulescu, 2002, p. 91).



Permissive style

How it is manifested:

- The adult makes few demands on the child.
- The adult gives a lot of support to the child.
- There is a low level of parental control.
- The child is generally allowed to do whatever they want, based on their child status.
- The adult believes that freedom of expression is the greatest value.
- The adult shows high tolerance.
- The adult consults with the child when making decisions and is very sensitive to everything the child does.
- The child is rarely punished.

Long-term effects on the child:

- They develop their own identity.
- They have a creative and original personality.
- They have high self-esteem.
- They have great decision-making skills.
- They show little resistance to temptation.
- They have modest achievements.
- They have low aspirations.
- They have difficulty adapting, as they are not used to respecting rules and boundaries.
- They may give the impression of being a problem child or naughty.
- They can control the adult who raises them.
- They lack self-discipline.
- They can become insecure precisely because they lack rules in their lives.



Authoritarian style

How it is manifested:

- The adult sets very high expectations and demands for the child.
- The adult shows little understanding and offers very little emotional support to the child.
- The values on which the adult focuses are docility, obedience, and compliance.
- Parents blame children for family problems.
- The parent does not respect the child's independence and individuality.
- The parent stifles the child's creativity.
- The parent sets lots of rules and harsh punishment for breaking them.
- The parent doesn't give explanations to the child and doesn't negotiate with them.
- The adult believes that they know best as they are the parent/educator.

Long-term effects on the child:

- They become orderly and disciplined and show respect for authority.
- They tend to be perfectionists.
- They are inflexible and lack initiative.
- They are always dissatisfied and afraid they might do something wrong.
- They show little empathy and no forgiveness to those who make mistakes.
- They have low self-esteem.
- They are ill-tempered.
- They have difficulty setting boundaries for themselves as adults and show no self-tolerance.



Authoritative style

How it is manifested:

- The adult sets realistic expectations for the child.
- The adult offers the emotional support the child needs.
- The adult explains to the child the reason for setting rules and boundaries.
- The adult sets the rules and consequences for breaking them together with the child.
- The adult is firm, yet they encourage the child to be independent.
- The adult is consistent with the child.
- The adult encourages the child's active participation in decisions and actions that concern them.

Long-term effects on the child:

- Positive and better outcomes regarding the child's personality development.
- Higher level of socialisation than in the case of authoritarian and permissive styles.
- The child is responsible and accepts the consequences of their actions.
- They cultivate self-respect and self-esteem.
- They show confidence and take initiative.
- They gradually gain the freedom they need, but they are always aware of the boundaries.
- They are emotionally balanced.
- They can make decisions and manage on their own.
- They communicate well and are creative and positive.
- They are self-confident and respect the others.



These parenting styles do not manifest in their pure form. They depend on the context, the child's development, or the parent's mood. We can say that an adult has a certain parenting style based on their recurring attitude (Stănciulescu, 2002).

A responsible adult who has to raise and educate a child needs to know prevention methods for unwanted behaviour as well as intervention methods (Holt Romania, 2011).

PREVENTION METHODS

This first set of "methods" are techniques which help adults and children manage behaviour before things escalate into conflict or get out of control (Holt Romania, 2005).

- Check basic needs.
- Communicate clear expectations.
- Relieve boredom.
- Plan transitions.
- Change the environment.
- Model appropriate behaviour.
- Use humour.
- Offer a choice between two alternatives.

Check basic needs:

Is the child hungry, tired, or sick? Any of these problems or other issues can make the child unhappy and cranky. Some children become irritable at predictable times of the day.

Communicate clear expectations:

Children need to know how their parents expect them to behave. Instructions should be as simple as possible, using words that the child understands, speaking clearly and maintaining eye contact to make sure you have the child's attention (Becker, Madson, Arnold, & Thomas, 1967). Tell the child why that behaviour is important. After expressing your expectations clearly, try to practise the desired behaviour with the child if the situation is appropriate. For example: "When we go shopping, I want you to stand by my side and help me out by holding the dog food bag. Please don't insist on buying things that are not on the list."



Relieve boredom:

Some children get restless when they are bored. Engaging them in an interesting activity or conversation will redirect their energy.

Plan transitions:

Many people, especially children, find it difficult to change activities without warning (Fishbein & Wasik, 1981). Preparing the child for the change (“When you finish your homework, please go and buy a few things”) and involving them in the next activity (“You can choose what you want for yourself: whipped cream cake or chocolate cake?”) can relieve stress.

Change the environment:

The environment can be changed (removed, added, or rearranged) to avoid inappropriate behaviour. For example, if a child watches TV while doing their homework, you can move the TV to another room. Make sure the environment adapts to the child’s needs (Kohn, 2006).

Model appropriate behaviour:

Children imitate other people’s behaviour. Show children how you want them to behave. Children learn from what they see. If they see appropriate behaviour, they will behave properly.

Use humour:

Many times, potentially difficult moments can be eased by humour, a joke, or a hug. Sometimes, we need to lighten up.

Offer a choice between two alternatives:

Giving children a choice helps them feel in control of their lives and helps us gain their cooperation. Ask your child: “What would you like us to take to the park: the bike or the ball?”



INTERVENTION METHODS

Prevention techniques help the adult address and support the child's behaviour before it causes problems. Intervention techniques help the adult correct the child's behaviour after the child has behaved inappropriately (Holt 2005).

- Replace.
- Physically remove and redirect.
- State the reasons.
- Ignore.
- Express your feelings.
- Natural consequences.
- Logical consequences.
- Listen to feelings.

Replace:

A child who plays with an object that is inappropriate for their age can get something else to play with. For example, if a 10-year-old child plays with a drill that has been left unattended after being used, take away the drill and allow them do another activity they enjoy, such as playing with the ball.

Physically remove and redirect:

Physically remove the child from the dangerous situation or remove the object, then redirect the child's play. Many parents use this method when the child is in a dangerous situation.

State the reasons:

The child will be discouraged from repeating an undesirable behaviour if you just explain it to them and present the danger to which they are exposed: "Knives are used for cutting, not as swords." Sometimes, giving simple information will be enough to change the behaviour.

Ignore:

It is sometimes best to ignore brief disruptive behaviour that is not dangerous or destructive. However, in order to be effective, a parent has to use this method consistently. If a child throws themselves on the floor and starts screaming every time they hear the word "No", you can choose to ignore this behaviour. When the child does something that upsets you and you want to ignore that, you will need to walk away – as discreetly as possible. You should not show that this behaviour is affecting



you. If you react differently to the child, they may escalate the unacceptable behaviour to get you to react as they expect you to. If you find it difficult to ignore certain behaviour, you can try to indirectly get the child's interest in another activity. You can do this by engaging yourself in an activity that you think they would enjoy. Let your interest in that activity draw your child in. Don't look at the child and don't try to engage them directly.

Express your feelings: Use "I" messages

The statement "I get upset when I see your clothes all over the floor because it's hard to tidy up" will get a more cooperative response from the child than "You didn't pick up your clothes again! How many times do I have to tell you to do it?"

Natural consequences:

Natural consequences are the actual consequences of Nature that we are familiar with, but that the child is still learning. If it rains and we don't have an umbrella or a raincoat, we will get soaked. If we leave a tricycle outside, it may rust. If we leave a cookie on the floor, the dog will eat it. If we run on a slippery floor, we might fall. Our children need to learn that their behaviour has both natural and logical consequences.

If a consequence affects the safety of our children, our main duty is to protect them.

Logical consequences:

In this case, parents control the consequences. If a child does not want to go to bed when their parents tell them to because they are still playing, parents can cut down playtime before bedtime. If the child is frequently late for school, they can wake up earlier.

Listen to feelings:

Your son comes home, throws his coat on the floor and starts quarrelling with his brother. You could say "You seem upset" (rather than "Mircea, get over here right now and leave Dan alone!"), which will lead to a constructive discussion and will help solve the problem. This shows the child that you are on their side.

Behavioural control requires patience, tact and creativity. Adults can make mistakes, too. If a certain method doesn't work, just stop, reassess the situation and try another approach.

- Re-examine your values and beliefs regarding that behaviour;
- Ask yourself if your child is capable of doing what is expected of them, taking into account their age and developmental stage;



- Are there any family circumstances or sources of stress to which the child reacts?

Children give us plenty of opportunities to deal with their behaviour. When you make the wrong move in a certain situation, next time use the four questions to re-evaluate your actions so that your child can learn the message you want to send them.



DISCIPLINE METHODS

Discipline is the process of learning appropriate behaviour, which requires a lot of time, patience, tact, and attention from the adult (Nelsen, Escobar, Ortolano, Duffy & Owen-Sohocki, 2001).

Discipline methods help the child to:

- Learn new behaviour.
- Reinforce acquired behaviour.
- Be motivated to adopt desirable behaviour.

LEARNING NEW BEHAVIOUR

According to Botiș & Tăraș (2004), learning new behaviour involves several stages:

- Defining the behaviour that we want the child to learn: “We need to wash our hands before we eat so that we don’t get sick”.
- Breaking the behaviour down into very small sequences: “We roll up our sleeves, we wet our hands with water, we apply soap on our hands, we rinse, we wipe, and we roll down our sleeves”.
- Guiding children by providing physical support and verbal explanations and showing them how to do it; we guide them less as they acquire the new behaviour.
- Offering rewards, even if the child does not do things perfectly, to encourage them to repeat the behaviour; as the child acquires the behaviour, rewards will become less and less frequent until they stop altogether.



REINFORCING DESIRABLE BEHAVIOUR

Parenting is always challenging, and almost every adult who takes care of a child feels the need to find a one-size-fits-all solution that works like magic. But there is no magic trick and all we can do is to be constantly prepared to respond appropriately.

“It is important to *always* notice and *properly* acknowledge your child's achievements and adopt the right attitude according to the situation.”

(Dolean & Dolean, 2009)

When we want a child to repeat certain behaviour, one of the most common methods is to offer rewards.

Rewards are given immediately after the child displays the behaviour that we want to encourage (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2008). They are tailored to each child. Some see receiving a piece of candy as a reward, while others enjoy getting a toy or watching a TV programme.

Rewards can be (Dolean & Dolean, 2009):

- Food: sweets, favourite meals etc.
- Distinctions: certificates, reward stickers, emoji pins etc.
- Temporary possession of certain objects.
- Stimulating activities; watching a TV programme; computer access; going to a place where the child wants to go etc.
- Social rewards; praise, smiles, hugs etc.



A reward is an effective tool if certain rules are followed:

- It should be given to shape the child's behaviour and education and it should not be used as a means of permanent conditioning.
- It should be offered after the behaviour is displayed (because you have been patient and have waited for me without bothering anyone, we will go to the playground for an hour), not promised in advance (if you wait for me without bothering anyone, we will go to the playground for an hour); when the reward is communicated in advance, children focus more on what they are about to receive than on what they are doing;
- It is relevant to the child; there is no point in suggesting to the child to go to the park if they are not interested in that.
- It is offered immediately after the desirable behaviour; the reward loses its value if it comes long after the behaviour: "If you get very good grades, I will buy you a bike in the summer".
- It does not overlap with the child's motivation; if the child wants to draw and is excited about it, we don't reward them anymore to make sure that they continue to enjoy doing that (which is basically the purpose of the reward) and that they don't focus on the benefits of doing that activity (as a means to an end).
- It comes with a clear indication of the behaviour which has led to it: "Because you have cleaned up your room, you can go out with your friends".
- It is available and real; promising the child that you will buy them something that you know from the start you can't afford will only make your child feel disappointed and distrustful.
- It is given right away when the child learns new behaviour and only occasionally in the reinforcement stage.
- It is used sporadically so that it doesn't become predictable to the child; if the reward becomes predictable, the child will be less motivated to do that thing once the reward is removed.

Seven steps for encouraging positive behaviour (Holt 2005, p. 242):

- Observe.
- Give attention through physical closeness.
- Establish good eye contact.
- Smile.
- Praise the behaviour.
- Show affection (this may include signs of affection, such as a hand on the shoulder or a hug).
- Repeat the message in a different way.



Observe. If we really want to encourage positive behaviour, we need to start by observing it. When you acknowledge and appreciate positive behaviour, it is more likely to continue.

Give attention through physical closeness. Physical closeness makes approval more personal (Dolean & Dolean, 2009). Even something as simple as a “thank you” is amplified by physical closeness. Try this experiment at home: ask your partner or a friend to sit across the room from you and say something nice. Then ask them to sit close to you and say the same words. You will feel the difference. A good rule is to stand about a metre away from your child when you talk to them. This means that you will have to look for them in the other room or in the backyard. Do it – it is worth the effort.

Establish good eye contact. This is a basic rule, but it is surprising how often we forget about it. Let your child know that you are talking to THEM and no one else. Sit face to face with your child and even turn your whole body towards them, if possible. This communicates to the child that you have something special and important to say to them alone.

Smile. Our facial expressions often communicate the most important message. It is crucial to reinforce what we say with the right facial expression – for example, a smile.

Praise the behaviour, not the child. Show your approval for what the child has done. Children need to know what they are being praised for, what they have done to deserve the attention they are getting. For example, “I like that you picked up your clothes and put them in the closet” is better than “You are a good boy”.

This need is very different from the child’s need to know that you accept and love them unconditionally for who they are, no matter how they behave.

- Show affection. Your child will feel praised, appreciated and rewarded when you give them a pat on the back, a hug or a kiss.
- Repeat the message in a different way. Repeating the message in a different way keeps it fresh, new, and clear.

Give positive attention as soon as possible after the behaviour.

In order to be effective, positive attention must be given almost immediately after acknowledging positive behaviour. If you pass by your son’s room and see him folding his clothes or putting his books away, praise him straight away. The child will immediately know how you feel about what he is doing and that will enhance learning. Don’t postpone appreciation, not even for five minutes. Make sure you don’t make sarcastic or inconsiderate comments.



MANAGING UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOUR

Discipline does not mean punishing the child but introducing and enforcing fair rules. When we punish children, we penalise them for their inappropriate behaviour. Punishment harms the child both physically and mentally, making them lose their self-esteem and feel fear, anxiety, or guilt. It belittles the child as a human being. Punishment may be temporarily effective in stopping inappropriate behaviour, but its negative effects on the child's emotional health makes it an inadequate "tool" for efficient parenting. Moreover, punishment techniques are increasingly difficult to apply as the child grows up and starts to "react".

Scenes where parents punish children for their intentional or unintentional mistakes and problem behaviour by hitting or insulting them are not exactly rare; they are perhaps less visible in public and occurring more often in the privacy of the home, where the child becomes the target of parental outbursts and overreactions which teach them nothing constructive and leave them scared and humiliated.

Beating is never an option.

What happens if the parent overreacts to a small mistake that the child makes, like when – curious to find out how the toy car is made – he disassembles and breaks it or breaks something else in the house because they are careless or clumsy? The disproportion between cause and effect scares the child. This is a primitive, black-and-white way of thinking which conveys to the child that the world is made up of oppositions that we cannot control. If you don't have a value scale, if you don't assess the seriousness of the child's action and make a big fuss about every little thing, you act in a primitive way (Holt Romania, 2011).

The child, too, doesn't manage to assess the seriousness of their actions. Whatever they do, out of curiosity or natural clumsiness, it is obviously impossible for them not to make any mistakes. So, they are doomed to be imperfect and scolded; and they will soon learn this so well that they will no longer care if they are wrong, because whatever they do, they will be admonished, scolded, belittled. They will end up believing that there is no point trying anymore.

Punishment has negative effects, such as: resentment, fear, retaliation (revenge, eye for an eye) and insecurity.

However, if punishment is required as a last resort when all the other discipline methods have failed, it would be really useful to ask ourselves the four questions again as those answers will certainly help us choose the right punishment without negative/harmful consequences for the child.



When taking a positive approach to children's behaviour, setting, and knowing the consequences of undesirable behaviour can be used as a tool **only if** certain rules are followed:

- Consequences are set in a way that respects and protects the child's health and physical integrity; under no circumstances should punishment involve beating, starvation or any other action that can harm the child. The aim is to correct the child's undesirable behaviour and to make them aware of the natural consequences of that behaviour.
- They match the seriousness of the child's action; a small consequence for the child's undesirable behaviour teaches them that "it is not a big deal" if they behave like that again, whereas a consequence that is too harsh can lead to frustration. The child should not be grounded for a month for not doing their homework once.
- They are used to correct a type of behaviour that can be harmful to the child and not to punish the child for disobeying the adult (Kohn, 2006).
- They are according to the child's age and developmental stage; they can range from an angry facial expression, an ignoring attitude or reproach to a restriction.
- They are applied immediately after the undesirable behaviour; the child cannot truly learn the consequences of undesirable behaviour if they are punished long after their action and for several mistakes. It is ineffective to remember every mistake the child has done in the last month and punish them for all of them when they do something wrong.
- They are negotiated with the child as much as possible; in calmer moments, the adults should talk to the children and agree on the consequences of certain behaviour. That way, the child knows what to expect and has the chance to choose a type of behaviour or another.
- They are applied to the behaviour, not to the child; we do not judge and label the child negatively, but we help them realise that they have behaved inappropriately; we explain the behaviour and talk about its implications, without saying to the child "you're stupid", "you're worthless", "you always do this", etc. We analyse the behaviour and talk about its consequences.
- When that behaviour stops, we discuss it with the child so that they can correctly associate the behaviour with the consequence; after the child has faced the consequences of their behaviour, we talk to them once more, focusing on what they should do rather than on what they should not do.
- The adult always reassures the child that they are loved; whatever the undesirable behaviour, it is important to show the child that they are accepted and loved and that we sometimes need to act in a way that will help them in the long run.
- They are individualised; the same undesirable behaviour will be punished differently, depending on the child's age, temperament, and ability to understand the effects; the challenge is to choose the right consequence for every type of behaviour your child adopts.



PROVIDING A ROLE MODEL

The adults who educate and raise children are often the role models that children look up to. When they grow up, today's children will mirror the self-control displayed by the adults in their lives and will promote the lifestyle to which they were exposed in their families.

Children internalise and perpetuate the way in which their families communicate, make decisions, and manage stress, anger, and crisis as well as every family member's approach to self-care. In order to avoid vexing and confusing the child, the adult should act on their words. It is no use explaining to the child how hard you have worked to clean up and how important it is for them to keep the house clean and show some respect for your work if you come in with your shoes on or leave your clothes all over the place. Just like there is no point in explaining to the child that they should not shout when they have a problem, if that is how you react when you are facing challenges.

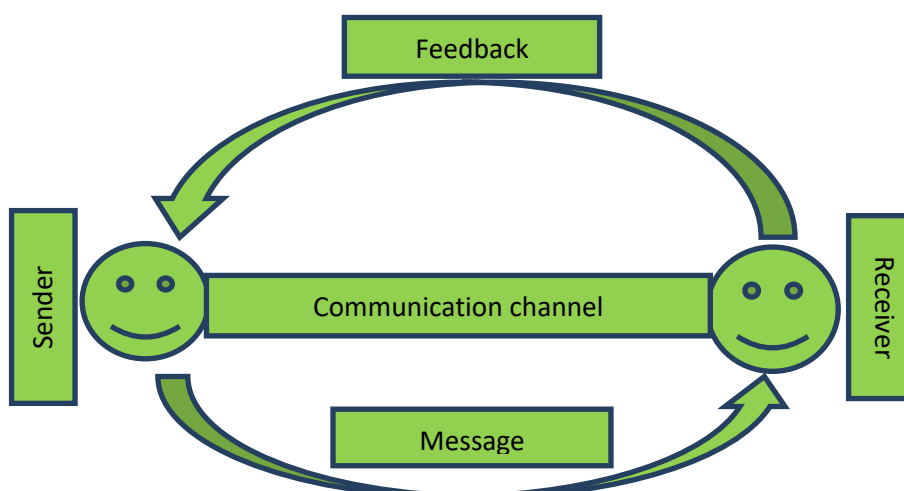
The positive approach to children's behaviour is closely linked to:

- The way in which the adult communicates with the child.
- The adult's emotional state.
- The adult's behaviour.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHILD

Children internalise and imitate their parents' behaviour, including how they communicate. The way in which parents send out messages, listen and give feedback is automatically and unconsciously picked up by the child and guides the child's behaviour.

COMMUNICATION DIAGRAM





This diagram illustrates the communication process, which this time we want to analyse based on neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) theories which argue that the responsibility for successful communication lies with the communicator (Dilts, 2008). Of course, this document does not contradict traditional communication theories (according to which the sender and the receiver share the responsibility for successful communication), but it only suggests a different approach to adult-child communication.

The message

Thus, according to NLP theories, when two people communicate and one of them gets the message wrong, it is not their fault, but the fault of the person who has delivered the message, because they have not chosen the best way to communicate that message (Bandler, 2008).

If we were to apply this principle of communication to the adult-child relationship, when the child does not get the message right, the main culprit is the adult.

Basically, when the child is repeatedly told to do something and they don't do it, it means that the adult has not conveyed the message to the child in a convincing manner.

In order to change the child's behaviour, one should change the way in which they convey the message.

When the adult asks their child every day "How was school today?" and they always get the same answer – "Fine", if they want to get a different answer, they should ask "Which of the activities you did at school today did you enjoy the most?".

According to Cooprrider & Withney (2008), "even the most innocent question evokes change". So, the way in which the parent or teacher asks the questions conditions the child to think in the terms expressed by those questions and thus give feedback using the same terms.

The positive approach to behaviour focuses on sending appreciative messages as well as on valuing successful moments and the human and creative potential (Cojocaru, 2005).

Hence, the messages conveyed concentrate on what the child has done well, on what they can do, on evolution and the progress made and, last but not least, on feelings.

What matters is the message that children get, not the message we think we are sending.



DOMINANT LEARNING STYLE

The child's behaviour depends greatly on the communication channel the adult chooses to convey the message. The listener's response to stimuli is influenced by physical factors that are auditory, visual, and tactile (Price et.al, 1976; 1977; Dunn et. al., 1989, apud Rayner & Riding, 1997). Unless they are impaired, every person has all three filters or channels developed to some extent, but one of them is dominant. The development of these channels also influences the child's dominant learning style (www.copilul.ro; www.suntpărinte.ro). The learning style is the preferred way of receiving, processing, storing, and updating information and it develops through education (Day, 1998).

The kinaesthetic child easily recounts or remembers feelings and experiences, learns by writing things down, uses mainly their sense of touch and movement to explore the world, engages in dexterity activities and uses objects around them to learn numbers, letters or how to write, prefers nonverbal language to express themselves, uses body movements and gestures to solve problems, prefers to engage in physical activities, likes sports and may get nervous when people talk to them.

The auditory child remembers best the information they hear. They have highly developed hearing and the ability to concentrate and retain information through listening. These children can do their homework or study with music in the background and learn the lessons better if they read aloud. They use their hearing to explore the world.

The visual child retains most of the information through images and learns easily by watching pictures or videos and through spatial orientation. They like to draw, build, and make different things. They are good at Lego or puzzle games, and if these are used to teach them different things, they will have no problem understanding and remembering the information. They are good at solving crosswords or reading and interpreting written documents.

Precisely because the responsibility for successful communication lies with the adult, it would be useful for us to convey the message to the child using their most developed channel or filter.

This makes it easier for the child to understand us and ultimately adapt their behaviour to the context.

How the adult's state influences the child's behaviour

In order to look at the child's behaviour from a positive perspective, the adult needs to be – first and foremost – self-appreciative.



Approaching situations, people and behaviour from a positive perspective is not innate (Cojocaru, 2005). It is something that is learned through constant practice. A relaxed adult who feels good will certainly be more willing to show appreciation to the child. Self-care is one of the ways in which the adult can get filled with positive energy and share that feeling with their child. Taking time for yourself to do what you like is not a selfish gesture, but a gesture of love for yourself and those around you. Moreover, when children get used to such a ritual, they learn to respect it and seeing us do that teaches them that they too have the right to do the same.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

The feedback the child gives us after receiving the message tells us if they have understood exactly what we wanted to convey. But in order to decipher their response, once again we have to pay a lot of attention. Feedback can be expressed verbally or non-verbally.

Taking a positive approach to children's behaviour means that we have to give positive feedback to children whenever possible. They are always looking for adults' appreciation and being appreciated is good for them.

Still, there are times when we have to explain things that are not so good. In such cases, we should use the sandwich principle, which means wrapping negative feedback in positive appreciations. By doing so, we relieve tension, and we keep the discussion on a positive note.

Rules for sandwich feedback (Baban, 2001):

- The addressing manner should be personal. Speaking in the first person shows that the feedback expresses a personal opinion, and that the speaker takes responsibility for what they say.
- Feedback should be given in a timely manner. The behaviour must still be fresh in our interlocutor's mind.
- On the other hand, right after an action, we are still ruled by emotions. We have to wait for things to "cool down" before giving feedback.
- Feedback should be clear and to the point. Vague or overly general assessments should be avoided.
- Exaggerations should also be avoided. Words like "always", "never" lead to subjective exaggerations.
- Feedback should focus on the behaviour and action, not on the child's character.
- It is preferable to objectively describe the situation than to assess or judge.



- Feedback should match the needs of the person to whom it is addressed. It should not serve other interests.
- It is useless to provide feedback on behaviour that cannot be changed. Don't judge someone with a lame leg for the way they walk.
- The feedback given should also provide an alternative solution. This should be suggested and not imposed.

Through discipline, we teach children our values and rules and why they are important. One of the goals of discipline is to prepare children for life. Hence, we teach them to respect the rules of their community and society. We explain to them the reasons behind those rules so that their self-discipline can be based on their understanding of what is important and why. Without self-discipline, children cannot reach their goals and make their dreams come true. If we want to successfully teach children, we have to be on their side. We must help them. We want things to go well for them. Through discipline, we prepare them to be successful and well-adjusted individuals who are integrated in society (Jay, 2011). Children need to learn that they have to believe in themselves, that they can push their boundaries and that they are efficient and capable individuals.

When we look at children, we must realise that there comes a time when they have to make it in the big world on their own, without us. And they will have to prove their worth and show their feelings to those around them. They will have to earn people's trust and believe in themselves.



THE RULES OF POSITIVE DISCIPLINE



- Teach them how to build a relationship and work with others, not to destroy and win at all costs.
- Teach them that being strong doesn't mean hurting others.
- Teach them to feel good when they make others happy and when they are happy with those around them.
- Teach them how to gradually control their anger and turn it into constructive actions and deeds.
- Teach them to stand on their own two feet and not be afraid when things get tough, to be independent and self-confident.
- Teach them to give support and love and to receive support and love from others.
- Teach them to be friendly and to understand the feelings of those around them and, most of all, their own feelings.
- Teach them to pay attention to what they do and to the consequences of their actions.



THE NEED FOR BOUNDARIES

Children need boundaries that are not set in a rigid manner, but in a flexible and loving way, according to their age and abilities. Children's sense of security is based and built on the idea that they have a parent they can trust, who gives them strength and guidance. Children who have no boundaries in their family will have great difficulty coping with the limitations of life. Almost every child with a discipline problem has a parent who is too permissive and inconsistently applying the rules and boundaries they have set for the child and for themselves. Boundaries are important for the child from an early age because they make them understand the rules of the world, of nature and of relationships with others (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2008). If you communicate to them from an early age what and how much is allowed, you turn the chaos of the unknown into an orderly and meaningful world. It is important for them to learn when they are very little that you expect certain things from them and that there are things one shouldn't do. You can't expect them to know these things unless you tell them clearly every time you have the chance.

In a world full of the unknown, boundaries provide safety.

With their behaviour, children are actually challenging you to set boundaries for them. Does it look like they do it on purpose, that they don't want to listen to you? They are actually just asking you – in their own wordless way: *"Do you agree with what I'm doing right now or not?"* Normally, every child tries to test the boundaries of what they are told. If they are one of those people who like to always test the boundaries, give them two options: obedience or consequences.

Ways to set boundaries

- First, tell them clearly what happens if they don't listen, then give them the chance to do what they are told.
- If they finally listen to you, show them that you appreciate that: "You did well!"
- If they fail to do what you ask, point out the consequences. They must be reasonable and connected to the incident.
- If the child doesn't like a particular consequence, it means that the parent has made the right choice.
- When your child argues, begs you or pleads with you, don't let them manipulate you. This is not the time to feel sorry and give in.
- Consequences have been set and need to be enforced.



MISTAKES YOU SHOULD AVOID!



The purpose of discipline is to teach children how to discipline themselves.

Self-discipline means moving from external control to internal control based on understanding. How parents interact with and encourage children in the first years of life helps shape the way children see themselves and their world. If children are excessively criticised and punished, they will come to see themselves as people who need (deserve) to be punished and criticised. Consequently, they will find themselves in positions where they will be punished and criticised. If we treat them with respect and kindness, using constructive discipline instead of punishment, our children will tend to look for and create positive and “winning” situations. They will gain self-confidence instead of self-hatred and self-contempt. Like mirrors, they will reflect the ways in which they have been treated. Children who are punished learn that this is how they should treat other people, including their own children.

Now think about what your child did today. What kind of behaviour do you want to encourage? How can you make your child behave “properly”? How will you show them your approval?



CHILDREN'S CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR



TANTRUMS

Apparently, there are two types of tantrums.

- The first one is the reaction of a child who is very tired and overwhelmed due to a very challenging situation. Holding them in your arms, giving them a snack or a drink, offering love and attention or finding another way to make them feel safe will help, as will putting the child to sleep. Some children just need to be left alone for a while. The aim is to help them restore their physical and emotional balance.
- Sometimes the child is not too tired or overwhelmed, just frustrated because they don't get what they want. This kind of rage reflects the child's internal struggle – a fundamental struggle between independence and dependence. In this case, keeping calm and carrying on without giving additional attention to the child can calm the tantrum. Getting down to the child's level can sometimes help. Sympathising with the child – "I can see you are having a hard time" – while maintaining a firm and equidistant stance is very helpful. This gives the child the chance to deal with their distress. Adults find it very difficult when these tantrums occur in public. Children are very restless. They want undivided attention and they know they can get it if they have a tantrum (Gordon, 2011).

SCREAMING

We are worried when the child screams. Raising a child who screams all the time is no easy task. To some children, screaming is the most powerful way of expressing their needs. Screaming is often associated with overstimulation when a child feels out of control. We can be tempted to shout at children to calm them down. But that is not the right message. We need to teach children that certain behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable and give them appropriate alternatives. Screaming can also be a way of expressing the anger the child feels because of school workload or the challenges they are facing and have to deal with. Naturally, we need to find the cause of that anger and help the child properly understand the array of emotions they feel (Gordon, 2011).



HITTING AND GETTING HIT

Hitting is another type of behaviour that worries almost every parent. Like screaming, hitting can be a kind of behaviour children use to express a need. It can also be associated with overstimulation. Adults often tend to overreact, beating or yelling at the child (Carr, Taylor & Robinson, 1991). We need to think of hitting the same way we think of screaming. What do we want the child who hits others to learn? We want them to use words instead of hitting, to ask the adult for help or to hit something else instead of people. Once we have chosen a suitable replacement, it is important to resort to positive attention and boundary setting:

- Establish good eye contact.
- Use simple and straightforward words, in a low voice.
- Make it clear that you understand and accept your child's feelings, but you cannot allow them to behave like that.
- Think of a behavioural alternative or consequence that you can use. Consider the logical consequences of hitting. For example, playing alone is a logical consequence for inappropriate play behaviour.

It is important for a child who hits to engage in activities that allow them to release their anger. Vigorous physical play, playing in the water, painting, modelling playdough and clay are good options for releasing tension. We need to show understanding to the person who hits as well as to the person who gets hit. If children manage to resolve their conflict without adult intervention, it is a positive learning opportunity for them. If that does not happen, how do we handle things so that both children can learn something positive? Also, what do we want them to learn? Some parents feel that it is important for their children to learn how not to get beaten by other children. How can a parent teach this to their child in a positive manner? Some parents want their offspring to walk away from the hitting child without saying a word. The parent can teach the child how to do that (Gordon, 2011).

Beating between myth and reality

Beating should be discouraged for several reasons. Firstly, it can very easily turn into maltreatment (Carr, Taylor & Robinson, 1991). It is often used blindly, with no regard for anything and on a whim. Secondly, it hurts the parent-child relationship and the child's self-worth. We want to stress the fact that beating is not an effective way of correcting behaviour.



Some parents say that beating is effective because it instantly stops the inappropriate behaviour. Nevertheless, although it can release tension, parents often say they feel guilty after beating their children. They also complain that their children continue to misbehave even after the beating.

Concerns about beating

- Children imitate us. We don't want them to learn that, if you are older, you can hit someone else without being held accountable for it.
- Beating can prevent a child from developing a proper sense of responsibility or guilt for their behaviour.
- Parents need to establish early on a discipline system that they implement throughout childhood. Many parents who relied on physical discipline in early childhood feel helpless when their child reaches adolescence. "What should we do? He is a teenager now and we can't beat him anymore!".
- It is important to know the negative effects of physical punishment.

Some parents beat their children because:

- They don't know other discipline methods.
- They think that beating will put an end to misbehaving for a while.
- They lose their self-control.
- They are older and can get away with it.
- The child needs to know who is in charge.
- Children learn through first-hand experience.
- Their parents did the same thing.

Some parents don't beat their children because:

- They don't want to traumatise the child.
- It hurts too much.
- The child will also learn to hit back.
- Beating doesn't always work.
- They don't think they will be able to stop.
- They can feel guilty.
- They can send the wrong message to the child.
- It is not worth it – the immediate outcomes
- Do not outweigh the long-term negative effects.

Children observe and imitate the behaviour of those around them. They will use their parents' methods with their siblings and even with their friends. The explanations parents give to clarify rules and expectations encourage the child to behave in a social manner. A key factor in a child's development is understanding what is going on around them and making sense of the rules and behaviours they observe (Piaget 1980).



There is a contradiction between hitting our child and telling them not to hit other children. The purpose of discipline is to teach children self-discipline. Beating can trigger the child's external control, not their internal control (self-control).

One of the aims of the discussion is to help the adults who take care of children to reach the conclusion that beating should not be used as a discipline method because it has negative effects. If we look at beating in terms of what the child learns from that experience, we find that it only creates problems and can become a habit.



POSITIVE REACTIONS TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Positive reactions to children's challenging behaviour:

- Hugs can help.
- Time-out, which can be time-out for children and time-out for adults.

HUGS CAN HELP

Children and adults need love, especially when they find themselves in a difficult situation caused by them or by others. It is good to establish family rituals for more difficult times (Jay, 2011). Most of us tend to walk away from someone who is in a bad mood, or we send them away. Sometimes, getting closer to that person has better outcomes. You can say: "You look like you are all out of love. Would you like me to give you a hug?" It is an invitation to feel better. When one hug is not enough to fill the "void", the person might say "That wasn't enough. I need a kiss as well..." and so on; you can continue hugging the child until they feel better. We can admit that we are in a bad mood and need a hug by just saying "Who loves me right now?".

TIME-OUT

Using time-out as a discipline method is quite controversial. We have included it here because many families use it inappropriately or ineffectively. There are two types of time-outs: for children and for parents.

Time-out for children

A short break from others or from an activity can be beneficial when the child is misbehaving. If the child does not behave properly and does not learn the desirable behaviour, the adult can put the child in "time-out", such as sitting in a chair or somewhere else – away from the conflict-generating situation – in order to calm down (avoid humiliating punishment like sitting on nutshells or isolating the child in a dark place). It is very important for the adult to stay neutral and clearly state the reason for time-out. If the child gets emotionally involved in the process, they will learn that this is the way to get attention (Jay, 2011). The adult will choose the duration of time-out according to the child's age and the seriousness of their action. Time-outs should be short, and the child should be kept safe. After their "time-out", the child can come back and will have another chance to play or cooperate.



This is a short, relatively non-punitive and learning-focused version of the old-fashioned “naughty corner”. It is the adult’s logical consequence for the child’s behaviour. *“If you can’t sit here and follow the rules, you have to sit somewhere else now.”* Time-out is a bit like a suspension in a handball game and should not be used if the child just needs a rest, a snack, or to be alone for a while. If the child continues to misbehave after their needs have been met and despite our efforts to teach them otherwise, then “time-out” is recommended.

Common mistakes related to children’s time-out:

- Excessive use of time-outs. Time-out should be used only when the child does not respond to other discipline methods, such as distraction, redirection, humour, choices, or change of environment. Some adults need benchmarks to know how much is enough. *Most experts believe that one minute per year of age (seven minutes for a 7-year-old child) is enough.*
- Reinforcing negative behaviour. If adults show that they are angry or upset when they use time-outs, they give a kind of attention that can reinforce/encourage the child’s negative behaviour.

Time-out for adults

Both adults and children need a change of pace or activity to stay in a good mood. It is wise to take a break from each other in different rooms if the parent is emotionally exhausted or “has had enough”. Whatever the parent chooses to do during their time-out, the rule of thumb is to make sure the boy/girl is safe. Listening to a nice song, taking a relaxing bath, going for a walk or reading are all good ways to change the pace and have a break. The child’s “time-out” and the adult’s “time-out” have different purposes, but they are both useful.

When adults or children are upset, they should talk later about what happened and try to reconnect. This is a good opportunity to find strategies to make things better for both of you in the future and to admit that we all make mistakes, that we can learn from those mistakes and that we can do better.



IN LIEU OF CONCLUSIONS



Just like adults, children learn from experience. It is perfectly normal for them to make mistakes or show inappropriate behaviour in certain contexts. A positive approach to children's behaviour helps the adult see these situations as opportunities to teach the child something and not as "offences" that need to be "punished". Children don't try to drive us – the adults who are in charge of their education and care – crazy or to "test our limits". They are just experimenting, learning how to "do things" based on their instinctive behaviour. We decide what new tools we give them to help them cope with other challenges.

A positive approach to children's behaviour starts from the premise that there are no bad children. They have a good base which needs to be shaped with care, love, and patience. *We waste so much energy focusing on the mistakes they made and what they did wrong!* Why not use the same energy to see *what they did right*, how different their perspectives are and how beautiful they are? Children are good or less good, depending on the lenses through which we see them. They are a multitude of actions and feelings, and we are responsible for what we choose to see. It has been proven that, in the long run, a negative approach to children's behaviour will result in naughty children, whereas a positive approach will raise good children. So, what do we have to lose if we choose the latter approach?



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