

Week 21: Handout A
HELPING CHILDREN MANAGE THEIR BEHAVIOR

GIVING CHILDREN CHOICES

Giving choices is the most powerful way of building personal power and self-esteem in children. Children, like teens, want to feel they have control in parts of their life. Power, for most healthy people, is the ability to influence some aspects of life by making choices. Saying no, refusing to go to bed, or not taking a bath may be ways children exert control. Temper tantrums are another way. To help children use their power in a positive way, give them decisions they can make in parts of their lives they view as important. Choices...

- provide a good way for children to use positive power
- help children learn to manage their own behavior
- let children know they have some control
- help defuse potential power struggles
- help children take responsibility for their behavior

Giving children choices can begin at an early age. Some examples are:

Dressing: "Sean, would you like to wear your blue shirt or your green shirt today?"
Your example: _____

Eating: "Ann, would you like to have your milk in your red or your blue cup?"
Your example: _____

Bath time: "Jill, do you want to read stories first or take your bath first?"
Your example: _____

CONSISTENCY

Children need to know what will happen next. A child needs to know his/her interactions with parents will be predictable. If the rules change constantly, a child becomes uncertain or confused. Only make rules that you will enforce. Have as few rules as necessary and then consistently follow through.

- Consistency brings order to children's lives and they can relax knowing what to expect.
- Benefits include less hassle and fewer arguments.
- Routine helps develop consistency, like: regular bedtimes, meal times, wake-up times, and caregivers.
- Only say something about a child's behavior if you intend to follow through with helping the child make the correction.
- Do not ask a child over and over to do something, especially from another room. Come to where the child is, make connection with the child, and then make the request.
- Give explanations if there will be some change in the child's routine

Week 21: Handout B
DISCIPLINE RATHER THAN PUNISHMENT

DISCIPLINE is helping a child to build an internal set of controls. It requires rules that the child understands, and follow-through by parents. The result is a child who will monitor his/her own behavior. Discipline includes:

- Teaching and instruction
- Consistent correction
- Setting limits
- Keeping healthy boundaries
- Setting rules the family follows

PUNISHMENT causes the child to respond to an external set of controls by imposing penalties, pain or loss, or other harsh treatment. Punishment motivates children by fear and intimidation, and includes:

- Angry verbal or physical reactions
- Threats of harm
- Threats of loss
- Removal of affection
- Calling the child names

WHAT DOES PUNISHMENT TEACH CHILDREN?

- That it's okay to hurt people when you are angry.
- That bigger, more powerful people can hurt you.
- That you can do what you want if you are willing to be hurt.

OTHER POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

- An already fragile self-esteem may be further damaged.
- If it doesn't appear to be working, it may become severely harsh.
- It teaches children to fear rather than respect authority.
- Children become focused on the punishment and forget why the adult is punishing him/her.
- Other children observing the punishment may become frightened.

The most important reason for any type of discipline is to help the child develop an internal focus of control so that actions are independent of external influences.

LISTENING... Good discipline practices require adults willing to listen to children. Like most people, children can find their own resolutions to their problems if they have a chance to talk and express their feelings in an environment where they feel heard, understood, loved and respected. Communication skills that work for adults—paraphrasing, purpose-stating, I-statements—also work for children. Being attentive (eye contact, face-to-face talk), accepting the child's feelings, and letting the child know you understand, communicates unconditional love and care. ALL human beings thrive in such an environment...big and little people, parents and children.

Children and Domestic Violence

Listening and Talking to Your Child About Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior that one person in a relationship uses to control the other. The behavior may be verbally, emotionally, physically, financially, or sexually abusive. You as a parent may have left an abusive relationship or you may still be in one. This fact sheet is #4 in a series of 10 sheets written to help you understand how children may react to domestic violence, and how you can best help them to feel safe and valued and develop personal strength. For other fact sheets in the series, visit www.nctsn.org/content/resources

When children see, hear, or know about abuse by one parent against the other, they may have many feelings, thoughts, and questions. As a caring parent, you are the most important person to your children as they try to sort things out. It may not be easy for you to talk about what's happened. In some families' culture and religion it is not the custom to talk to children about adult problems. However, your communication and support can help your kids do better in the aftermath of their experiences.

If you still feel unsafe at home, you may worry that talking with the children will put the family at greater risk. If this is the case, talk to a domestic violence advocate or someone else you trust to help you increase the family's safety. Let your kids know that you are taking steps to make them safer. And remember, if you are in immediate danger, call 911 for emergency assistance.

HOW TO TALK, WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Conversations with children can't always be planned—sometimes they just happen. The following tips will help you make the most of the conversation whether it's planned or spontaneous:

- ▶ Take the lead: when you open the conversation, you're telling your child it is safe to talk and that she doesn't have to be alone with her thoughts and worries.
- ▶ Open with messages of support, like "I care about you and I will listen to you."

Helpful Messages for Kids About Domestic Violence

- Violence isn't OK.
- It isn't your fault.
- I will do everything I can to help you be safe.
- It's not your job to fix what is wrong in the family.
- I want you to tell me how you feel. It's important, and I can handle it.
- It's OK to have mixed feelings about either or both of your parents.

The Co-chairs of the NCTSN Domestic Violence Work Group Betty Groves, Miriam Berkman, Rebecca Brown, and Edwina Noyes along with members of the committee and Futures Without Violence developed this fact sheet, drawing on the experiences of domestic violence survivors, research findings, and reports from battered women's advocates and mental health professionals. For more information on children and domestic violence, and to access all fact sheets in this series, visit www.nctsn.org/content/resources

Jonathan's mother and stepfather were quarreling, and the stepfather started shoving. Jonathan, who is 12, stepped in to stop it. When things calmed down his mother said to him, "I understand and appreciate your concerns about my safety, but it isn't your job to stop the fighting. I want you to stay safe."

- ▶ Ask what your child saw or heard or already knows about the troubling events in the home.
- ▶ Support and acknowledge your children's feelings, experiences, and their version of the story.
- ▶ Expect that your children will know more than you think, no matter how young they are. Sometimes when adults assume children are asleep or not paying any attention, they are actually listening to everything. If they are too young to get what's going on, they may fill in the gaps with their imaginations and end up worrying about something that's worse than reality.

- ▶ Let your child know it is always OK to ask you questions. Often the ideas or questions that trouble children are different from the ones that adults think about. Listening to your child's questions helps you know what is really on his mind.
- ▶ Talk to your children in a way that's right for their ages. Use words that you know they understand. Be careful not to talk about adult concerns or at an adult's level of understanding.
- ▶ If your child asks a question you're not ready to answer, you can say, "That's a really important question. I need some time to think about it and then we can talk again."

Seven-year-old Janet was at home when her parents began shouting. Her father threatened to take Janet away from her mother. Afterward, Janet's mother told her, "I will always be there for you. What Daddy said wasn't true. Even when you are angry, it isn't OK to scare other people."

- ▶ Monitor your own feelings. If you are able to talk calmly and confidently, you convey a sense of security. A calm tone sends the message that you are in charge and capable.
- ▶ Be alert to signs that your child is ready to end the conversation. Children who have heard enough may get restless or silly, stop listening, or stop asking questions.
- ▶ Have other adults for your own support so your children are not your only support system. You don't want to put undo worry or stress on your children.
- ▶ Be mindful of the age of your child. For younger children, sharing too much of your worries or fears may make them more worried or upset.

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