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5 Tips for Practicing Positive Discipline

You have just entered into a disciplinary arms race in which there are no winners—only hurt feelings, sore throats and soaring blood pressure. But parenting doesn't have to be a battle. Proponents of positive discipline teach that kids can—and will—behave without threats, bribes, yelling and physicality. Here are seven tips that will set you on the path to better behavior—and a stronger, more peaceful connection with your child.

- 1. Understand the meaning behind the behavior.** Naomi Aldort, the author of "Raising Our Children, Raising Ourselves," says that children want to behave well; if they seem to miss the mark, it's not without a valid reason. "The most important [thing] is to realize that whatever a child does, we may label as bad, [but really] the child is doing the best he can. It's our job as parents to find out why [he is] doing it," says Aldort. "Once we know the valid root of the behavior, we can easily remove the cause or heal the

emotions, and the child won't be driven to behave in that way anymore."

So ask yourself: is your child hitting her sibling in a desperate bid for your attention? Maybe you stayed on the phone too long or ignored her as you rushed to get dinner on the table. If so, what correction can you make to your own behavior that will satisfy your child's need? "A lot of what we expect of children is unreasonable," says Aldort.

2. **Focus on controlling yourself—not your child.** It's hard to keep cool in the heat of the moment, but Dr. Katharine C. Kersey, the author of "The 101s: A Guide to Positive Discipline," says that parents need to model the types of behavior they want their children to emulate. Remember, yelling begets yelling, hitting begets hitting. " We should not do anything in front of [our children] that we don't want them to do," she advises. In the case of an extreme behavioral flare-up, this may mean counting to 10, taking a deep breath or simply walking away until you've had time to collect yourself.

Jim Fay, the founder of the organization Love and Logic, agrees. "Anger and frustration feed misbehavior," he says. Fay offers an unusual tactic for keeping your voice in check: instead of yelling that your child is doing something wrong, try singing it. Fay teaches parents what he calls the "Uh Oh" song. If a child throws a toy after he's been asked to stop, you might sing, "Uh Oh, that's sad you threw your truck again. I think it's time the truck went away."

3. **Be consistent with your expectations.** Aldort says that parents often overlook a certain behavior in the hope that it will pass. "But guess what?" she says. "It doesn't pass." If your child bites another child, for instance, you should hold her arm and tell her that the behavior is not acceptable. If she continues, then it is time to remove her from the situation.

Sometimes a child might try to test the limits by arguing with the rules. When this happens, Fay suggests neutralizing negotiations by repeating one simple mantra as often as necessary: "I love you too much to argue."

4. **Give attention to the behavior you like—not the behavior you don't.** Children often act up because they want your attention, so sometimes it pays to ignore those actions you don't want to see more of. Kersey calls this the "Rain on the grass, not on the weeds" principle. Tantrums and whining? Play deaf or walk away, and your child will quickly learn that there's a better way to communicate.
5. **Redirect, redirect, redirect.** Kids who hear "No" or "Don't" all the time tend to tune those directives out. So instead of telling your child what *not* to do, Kersey recommends instead offering a positive behavior to replace the misbehavior. For instance, a child acting up at the grocery store could be enlisted to help pick out oranges or rearrange the items in a grocery cart, or a kid running around a swimming pool might be challenged to walk "as if on marshmallows."

Services in Your Community

Look to statewide programs and philanthropic organizations for assistance with food, shelter, education, health services, and even transportation.

Find services in your community:

- Call your town's 2-1-1 or 3-1-1 number to find out about services available in your area. (These numbers do not require dialing an area code.)

Government services:

- Contact the Federal Citizen Information Center (www.info.gov) for answers about government services. You can call toll-free 1-800-FED-INFO or find information posted on the FCIC's family of Web sites: www.USA.gov; www.pueblo.gsa.gov or call toll-free 1-888-8PUEBLO; www.kids.gov; or www.consumeraction.gov.
- Visit www.Govbenefits.gov to get help in reaching out to federal agencies for government assistance.

Help with housing:

- Call or e-mail Hope Now (www.hopenow.com, 1-888-995-HOPE or 1-888-995-4673). Created by the U.S. Department of the Treasury Department and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), it's an alliance of reputable counselors and companies that provide assistance to homeowners in distress.
- Contact the HUD Approved Housing Counseling Agencies (www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/hcc/hcs.cfm, 1-800-CALL-FHA or 1-800-225-5342) to get information about counseling agencies around the country that can provide advice on housing issues.

Financial counseling:

- Check out MyMoney.gov (www.mymoney.gov or 1-888-MYMONEY or 1-888-696-6639), a government Web site dedicated to providing financial education.
 - Visit the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (www.nfcc.org) to find reputable credit counseling services.

Food assistance and health services:

- Contact the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (www.fns.usda.gov/fsp or 1-800-388-8887), which is the federal government's food stamp program.
- Contact the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program (www.fns.usda.gov/wic), where you can find contact

information for WIC state programs and general information about WIC.

- Call 1-877-KIDSNOW (1-877-543-7669) or visit www.insurekidsnow.gov to get help on health insurance for your children.

Childcare and education:

- Get in touch with the Child Care Aware program from the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (www.childcareaware.org/en or 1-800-424-2246), which helps parents locate childcare programs in their area.
- Find out about the Head Start programs in your area by visiting www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices.
 - Contact the National Center for Homeless Education (www.serve.org/NCHE or 1-800-308-2145), which provides resources to address the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.