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Positive Parenting or Positive Discipline

(Excerpts taken from caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts. For full version visit their website and search Positive Discipline)

The **goal** of discipline is to guide and teach, not to punish. The **foundation** of discipline is a warm and trusting relationship, where you help children learn to:

- behave appropriately for their age in different situations,
- recognize, express and manage their emotions,
- communicate,
- get along with and trust others,
- solve problems,
- explore the world and learn appropriately.

Discipline should be fair and consistent. If you respond differently in similar situations or to similar behaviours, children will be confused. They won't know what to expect.

Physical punishment—spanking, slapping, hitting, or shaming—can hurt children both physically and emotionally, and should never be used. There are much more effective ways to discipline children.

Positive parenting is definitely easier said than done as it relies on parents managing their responses to challenging behaviour. However, there is growing evidence that this approach supports positive emotional development and mental health in children. No parent is going to be able to react “perfectly” every time their child is acting out. Don't get discouraged! Any efforts you make are going to benefit your child.

Connect and Redirect

For young children, behaviour is a way to communicate. When a child behaves in a challenging way, it's important to understand what led to the behaviour. Ask yourself:

- Do they need something—food, a nap, or some down time with you?
- What happened before and right after the behaviour?

- Is your child responding to something in their environment? Examples include noise, other children, or a perceived threat.
- Are they stressed in some way?
- Are they expected to do something that is beyond their skill or developmental level? For example, asking toddlers to share.

Understanding the cause of your child's behaviour will help you decide how to respond.

Connect

Connecting emotionally with your child builds a healthy relationship. It's the foundation of positive discipline.

Consider how you react and respond to your child's behaviours and emotions.

Here are some suggestions to help you respond to challenging behaviours in ways that strengthen your relationship with your child:

- Use "I" statements such as: "I don't like it when you do that," instead of "What's wrong with you?"
- Acknowledge your child's feelings ("I can see that you're upset"), even when they're misbehaving. It shows you respect them.
- To avoid saying "no" too often, find other ways to express what you're trying to communicate. For example, if a child hits, say: "Hands to your side"; if a child yells, say: "Use a quiet voice."
- Be comforting. For example, get below or at a child's eye level, offer a gentle nod or touch, or an empathetic look.
- Listen, and do not argue. Then repeat what your child says back to them. It shows you're paying attention and have heard what they have to say.
- Be consistent: Say what you mean; mean what you say; and follow through on what you say you were going to do.

Redirect

Redirection—switching from one activity to another—works well with toddlers and sometimes older children.

You can also use "REDIRECT" to remember some helpful parenting habits:

- **Reduce** the number of words you use when disciplining your child: Make your message clear, firm, and brief.
- **Embrace** emotions: Acknowledging your child's feelings is validating for them.
- **Describe** the behaviour you want to see, without lecturing.
- **Involve** your child in discipline.
- **Reframe** a 'no' into a 'yes' (with conditions). Wherever possible, tell your child what they *can* do, as opposed to what they *cannot* do.

- **Emphasize the positive things your child does.** If you only pay attention to negative behaviour, you will actually reinforce that behaviour.
- **Creatively approach the situation with humour and imagination:** “I can see you’re angry about having to leave the park. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could stay all day? Let’s think of all the things we can do next time.”
- **Teach your child how to recognize and name feelings** such as frustration, sadness, anger, or disappointment. It will help them learn how to deal with strong emotions.

Time out or time in?

“Time-in” is an alternative to a time-out. With a time-in, you invite your child to sit and talk with you about their feelings and behaviour in a way that they can understand. With a time-in, you connect with your child and provide comfort

Time outs can be used after you’ve tried other forms of positive discipline. A time-out should:

- Be short.
- A break from all attention including demands and explanations
- In a distraction-free spot such as a safe, quiet chair or corner.

Generally time outs are not effective for children under 2-3 years old as they lack the ability to understand why they are having a consequence. In that age group redirection to another activity is a more effective approach.

Interested in reading more?

Books

- “No Drama Discipline” by Dr. Daniel Siegel and Dr. Tine Payne Bryson
- “How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk” by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish
- “How to Talk So Little Kids will Listen - A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 2-7” by Joanna Faber and Julie King
- “Raising Your Spirited Child: A Guide for Parents Whose Child Is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, and Energetic” by Mary Sheeny Kucinka
- “Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child” by Ross W. Greene

Websites

<https://www.caringforkids.ca>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting>

<https://www.triplep-parenting.ca/>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Time-Outs-101.aspx>

Local Resources

- Local Parent Link centre (www.parentlinkalberta.ca)
 - o Look for information on Triple P Parenting on this website.
- Children's Link (www.childrenslink.ca)