

The Parenting for Life Series Presents:

# YES, YOU CAN!

Positive discipline ideas  
for you and your child





The Parenting for Life Series Presents:

## Yes You Can!

*Yes You Can!* is the first in a series of booklets and other materials for the PARENTING FOR LIFE education program.

PARENTING FOR LIFE is an award-winning, non-profit public education program promoting positive parenting skills and the well-being of families. This unique initiative includes booklets, *a parenting program Facilitator's Guide* and posters prepared by the writers and editors of *Today's Parent* in collaboration with **Strong Minds Strong Kids**.

Additional Resources available from PARENTING FOR LIFE

- LET'S PLAY! A Child's Road to Learning
- Hands On Dad: A Guide for New Fathers
- You and Your Preteen: Getting Ready for Independence
- Focus on Self Esteem: Nurturing Your School-Age Child
- Kids Can Cope: Parenting Resilient Children at Home and at School
- Parenting the School-Age Child 7-12 years old- Facilitator's Guide
- The Parenting for Life Poster Series

To place bulk orders of the booklets and posters, please visit our web site at [www.StrongMindsStrongKids.ca](http://www.StrongMindsStrongKids.ca) to download the booklet order form, or, call Strong Minds Strong Kids at 416-644-4944.

Our Mailing address is:

4773 Yonge Street, Suite 4D, North York, ON M2N 0G2

E-mail: [info@StrongMindsStrongKids.ca](mailto:info@StrongMindsStrongKids.ca)



THE PSYCHOLOGY  
FOUNDATION  
OF CANADA

LA FONDATION  
DE PSYCHOLOGIE  
DU CANADA

# First Words

We all bring our own history, our own strengths and human weaknesses to raising kids. Our children, too, have individual temperaments and needs. That's why effective discipline is so challenging: there's never one simple solution that works for every child and every situation. This booklet offers many useful, positive approaches to discipline, but in order to turn "techniques" into effective parenting, you also have to understand your own individual child.

Positive discipline - discipline that will help your child grow into a healthy, responsible, caring adult - does take time and effort. But it's one of the most worthwhile efforts you can make. We hope these suggestions help.

Writers:

*Holly Bennett and Teresa Pitman, of TODAY'S PARENT magazine*

Consultant:

*Parent educator Kathy Lynn of PARENTING TODAY*

*Updates written by John Hoffman, Advisory Committee of Strong Minds Strong Kids*

*John Hoffman writes on parenting issues for TODAY'S PARENT and other publications. He is the father of 3 boys.*

*We would like to thank the many people who shared their expertise with us during the writing and design of **YES, YOU CAN!***

Dr. Joan Grusec, Dr. Sarah Landy, Vicki Lazier, Dr. Jane Margles, Claire McDerment, Dr. Harold Minden, Dr. Debra Pepler, Dr. Zophia Radziuk, Dr. Ken Rubin, Dr. Peter Stephenson and Dr. Otto Weininger

Dr. William Mahoney and Dr. Norman Goldberg  
of THE CANADIAN PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY;

and the dedicated professionals of HEALTH CANADA.

Special thanks to Joanne Tee for her advice on anger management.

# Yes, You Can!

## Positive discipline ideas for you and your child

### CONTENTS

#### **The discipline challenge**

What does it mean? . . . . . 5

Positive discipline is about teaching and guiding kids,  
rather than just forcing them to obey.

#### **Setting the stage for success**

You can help your child behave . . . . . 12

When you help set the stage for good behaviour  
you don't have to discipline so often – and that's better  
for both of you.

#### **Discipline that teaches**

Your positive discipline tool-kit. . . . . 20

Nine ideas for guiding children's behaviour that many  
parents have used and found effective.

#### **From words to action**

How to make good discipline happen . . . . . 36

Learning to use new discipline skills is a challenge  
But you can do it!

# The Discipline Challenge

## What does it mean?

Positive discipline is about teaching and guiding kids, rather than just forcing them to obey. As parents, we need to think through our approach to discipline to make sure it is a positive, effective influence on our children and on our family relationships.

## Start with a Loving Relationship

Discipline is important – but it's not all there is to parenting. Before you can build a house, you have to lay a solid foundation. Before you can work on discipline issues with your child, you have to build a relationship of love and trust. That's the solid foundation that everything else — including effective discipline — is based on. And it has to be continually renewed as the child grows.

How do you build that relationship? Well, it takes time. There really are no shortcuts when it comes to being a parent.

It starts when they're babies. Every time you pick up your baby and cuddle him, every time you respond to her cries and feed her, you are letting the baby know you care.



*"When I think back to when I was a kid, a lot of times I didn't do things because I knew it would disappoint my parents if I did. It wasn't that I was afraid of being punished, it was that I knew they loved me and I didn't want to hurt them or worry them."*


*"Sometimes when Jenny was a baby she'd cry and cry and nothing seemed to help. I'd change her diaper and feed her and rock her and she still cried. So I'd just hold her and talk to her. I figured that even if I couldn't solve whatever was making her cry, I could at least let her know I was here and I cared."*

It gets more complicated, of course, as the child gets older, but the principles are still the same. Your child needs to know that you are listening to him and paying attention to his feelings.

### **SOME WAYS TO BUILD THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP:**

- **LOVING TOUCH.** Give your child hugs; cuddle up close while you read a story. Physical affection is always important to children, even when they get old enough to be embarrassed by hugs in public. Don't embarrass them, but show your affection in small ways, like a pat on the back.
- **TIME TOGETHER.** Spend some time alone with each child when you can give him your undivided attention. It doesn't have to be a long period of time — maybe ten minutes a day as you are tucking him into bed.
- **RESPECT YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS.** Even if they don't seem very rational to you, they are real to your child. One mother said, "I used to get really angry when Jeremy was scared of monsters under the bed — until the day he killed a spider for me. My fear of spiders isn't rational, either, but it sure doesn't help if people make fun of me for it."
- **BE TRUSTWORTHY.** If you make a promise — say to take the family swimming tomorrow — do your best to keep it. If you are not sure, it's better not to make the promise.
- **APOLOGIZE.** Nobody is perfect! Saying "I'm sorry" when you make a mistake or lose your temper will let your child know that you care about her feelings.
- **HAVE FUN TOGETHER.** When you enjoy each other and play together, you rediscover how special your child is. Those good feelings will help you both handle the tough times.



A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a brown zip-up jacket and blue jeans, is smiling and holding the hands of a young boy lying on his back on a green lawn. The boy is wearing a dark green soccer jersey with white stripes on the sleeves and black shorts. A white soccer ball with red and black patterns is on the grass to the left. In the background, there is a wooden fence and some small plants. A pink circular callout box is in the upper right corner.

Good parenting isn't  
*all* work! Having fun  
with our kids is a great  
way to strengthen the  
parent-child bond.



**If you are finding that discipline is becoming a serious problem, that's often a sign that the foundation needs more work.** Perhaps you can set aside an hour to go for a walk together. Avoid discussing the problems — keep your focus on building a positive relationship between the two of you.





# Your Discipline Goals

Why do we discipline our children? Is it to make them do what we want them to? Not in the long run. Kids who are totally obedient may one day find it hard to resist peer pressure, bullies or abuse. Instead, **the purpose of discipline is to teach children about the rules and values of our society, and to help them become self-disciplined so they are happy, responsible adults.**

What do we want to teach our children? Sometime it seems like our only goal as a parent is just to survive the day. We do whatever seems to work at that moment. But if we can remember the longer-term goals of discipline, we make better parenting choices.

Some parents of two-year-olds gave these as their long term goals for their children:

- "When I think of Zach as an adult, I hope he's happy and loved. I want him to be doing something he can be proud of."
- "I see her as a kind, responsible person – able to look after herself but also to care for others and stand up for what's right."
- "I want Katie to be happy, and I think that comes from feeling good about herself and knowing how to behave in any situation that comes up."

**What are your own discipline goals? Try to keep these in mind when you are dealing with a behaviour problem.**

Yes, yelling at your two-year-old and slapping her may get her to pick up her toys, but will it help her to feel loved and good about herself? Probably not.

Love and trust is the foundation on which effective parenting is built. Gentle physical affection helps young children, especially, feel loved and secure.

# What's Wrong with Spanking?

Many of us were spanked as children, and sometimes parents say "I was spanked and it didn't do me any harm." **But there are many reasons why spanking isn't a good idea:**

- When you spank or hit a child, you are giving the message that it's okay to hit another person — as long as you are bigger. Children who are hit are more likely to be violent with other children.
- Parents often spank harder than they mean to — especially if they are angry — and can seriously hurt the child.
- Spanking can damage a child's self-esteem. Being hit by someone much bigger than you makes you feel helpless and weak.
- Spanking can hurt the relationship between parent and child.
- Children often become more concerned about avoiding the punishment — not getting caught — than changing their behaviour.
- As the child gets older (and bigger), spanking becomes even less effective. What will you do when he is sixteen years old and six inches taller than you?

(For lots of practical suggestions on how you can discipline without spanking see *Discipline That Teaches*, page 20)



*"I think my mother expected that I'd feel sorry for what I'd done after she spanked me. But all I remember feeling was angry and resentful."*



*"After Leah whacked Connor with the truck, I grabbed her arm and started to spank her. I was yelling, 'Never hit your brother!' when I realized I was trying to teach her not to hit by hitting her. No wonder it never seemed to work."*

# Words Can Hurt

**Verbally mistreating children can cause the same problems as spanking.** Yelling and screaming make a child feel humiliated and frightened. Name-calling or rejection ("I wish you'd never been born") attacks the child's inner worth; he may come to believe he really is "no good" or a "brat." Children who have taken such messages to heart often begin misbehaving even more — as though to live up to our words.

Name-calling — and other kinds of verbal attacks — can hurt. And because young children tend to believe what their parents say, our "tongue-lashings" can be very painful indeed.



*"Whenever Annie would touch the breakable things in the living room, I'd slap her hand and say 'bad girl.' Then one day I saw her look at herself in the mirror and say, 'bad girl' — and I realized what I was doing to her."*

## Check Your Discipline Methods

How can you tell if you are using positive discipline? You can evaluate your approach by asking yourself:

### **Does this method of discipline.....**

- ☐ teach appropriate behaviour?
- ☐ avoid violence?
- ☐ allow my child to continue feeling positive about himself?
- ☐ keep our parent-child relationship strong?
- ☐ fit my child's stage of development, individual personality and needs?

# Setting The Stage For Success

You can help your child behave

**When your home life ‘sets the stage’ for good behaviour, you don’t have to discipline so often — and that’s better for both of you.**

Imagine that you work in a factory. You want to do a good job, but it seems impossible. Your boss sets the conveyor belt so fast, you can’t keep up. He changes the procedures without explaining them to you. The work area is disorganized, so that things are always getting lost. You never know when (or if) you’ll get a lunch break. With better working conditions, you’d be more productive — and much happier.

As parents, we can help our children behave by providing good ‘working conditions’: expectations that fit their abilities, a child-friendly home and clear communication. We also need to be reasonably consistent and develop family routines that help things run smoothly.

## Check Your Expectations

**Sometimes it looks like a child is misbehaving, when in reality she isn’t able to meet our expectations.**

- “Clean up your room” says Emma’s mom. Emma is five. She looks at the huge mess in her room, and doesn’t know where to start. She needs help in dividing the big job up into smaller ones, and probably someone to help her stick with it by working beside her.

**Learning about children’s normal development will help you set realistic goals for your kids.** It can be very reassuring to spend a half day now and then at your child’s daycare, or volunteer in the

Cub group, and see that other kids act the same way as yours.

**Not all children develop at the same pace**, so it's also very important to accept and work with our child's own individual personality and needs. An active child may need more frequent stops on a long car ride; an excitable child may need a 'quiet time' before bed to help her wind down.

## Toddlers: What to Expect

He's walking, he's talking, he's not a baby anymore — or is he? Parents who expect 'big kid' behaviour from their toddler are in for a frustrating year or two. Here's why:

- **TODDLERS ARE IMPULSIVE.** Self-control is a difficult skill. Think how you have to struggle with yourself sometimes not to eat that second brownie. A toddler may 'know' she's not supposed to touch — but she still needs your help to overcome that strong urge.
- **TODDLERS CAN'T YET UNDERSTAND COMPLEX IDEAS:** If you told him last week not to go on the road, will he know you meant this week and next week, too? Does he know what a road is? Does he realize that you mean any road, not just the one in front of your apartment building? Rules may seem simple to us — but not to him.
- **TODDLERS HAVE INCONSISTENT MEMORY AND ATTENTION:** Maybe she remembers the rule: don't go on the road. She remembers it until she sees the dog on the other side — and then she remembers that she loves dogs! It's hard for her to hold both those ideas in her head at the same time.

Of course we must set limits for our toddlers, for both safety and sanity's sake. But it's also important to understand that toddlers can't help most of their 'misbehaviour.' **Babyproofing, careful supervision, distraction and patience are your most important 'discipline' tools at this stage.**

If your little one is still a baby see *Babies and Discipline* on page 20.



*"I need different strategies to help my two sons get to bed on time. With Juan I can say, 'If you get all ready quickly we'll have time for more stories' and he does it. He can appreciate that reward at the end. But Miguel is distracted by everything! He doesn't think about the story until he's missed it. So I 'check in with him fairly often' to keep him on track, and if he's still not ready on time he has to start earlier the next night."*

## A Child-Friendly Home

**Children — like adults — need to feel comfortable and competent in their own home.**

When babies start to crawl, we 'babyproof' our homes so they can explore with getting into trouble. As our kids get older, we can continue to make their environment 'child-friendly':

- Ari's dad puts waist-high hooks by the back door, and a step-stool in the bathroom. Now four-year-old Ari can hang up his own coat and wash his own hands.
- Melinda and Eric's mom wants them to have healthy snacks, so she makes it easy for them. She leaves prepared veggies, dip, and cheese cubes ready in the fridge, and keeps the chips out of sight in a high cupboard.
- Ten-year-old Danielle is frustrated when her toddler brother gets into her treasures and projects. Her parents install some high shelves where she can keep her things safe.





## Kids Under Stress

As parents, we can't control every aspect of our kid's environment. But we can understand how they may react to certain kinds of stress:

- Three-year-old Carly becomes whiny and demanding just as her dad is trying to make dinner. Is she deliberately misbehaving? No. She's hungry.
- Tyler dissolves into a tantrum when his parents won't buy him a souvenir after an expensive trip to an amusement park. His parents feel he's ungrateful, but Tyler is both exhausted and over-excited from his long, busy day.

When kids are hungry, tired, bored or overloaded, they can't control themselves as well. Lack of exercise can also make them 'bounce off the walls.' So sometimes the best 'discipline' is a snack or a walk to the park.

**Kids who are anxious — perhaps because of a school problem or stress within the family due to a parent's job loss, a serious illness or an upcoming move to a new neighbourhood — may start acting withdrawn, aggressive or clingy. Sometimes misbehaviour is a cry for help.**

# Clear Communication

**Clear communication is basic to effective discipline.** If kids don't hear, or understand, our message, they aren't likely to do what we ask them.

## TO IMPROVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION:

- **MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE CHILD'S ATTENTION.** If her eyes are on the TV, she isn't really listening
- **KEEP THE MESSAGE SHORT AND SPECIFIC.** There's a time for explaining, negotiating, and sharing feelings. But if the issue is a simple one, then a simple instruction is most effective: "Soccer balls belong outside," or "Please feed the gerbils before dinner."
- **CLARIFY YOUR FAMILY RULES.** A few really important, clearly stated rules are usually more effective and easier to enforce than lots of 'picky' rules.
- **WALK WHAT YOU TALK.** Children learn from what we do more than from what we say. Does the example you set support, or undermine, what you tell your kids?



*"I really don't like hearing little kids swear. So I had to clean up my own language. If they repeat something you said, who can blame them?"*

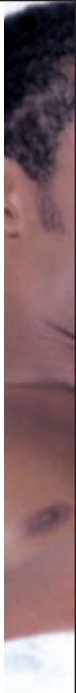
# Be Reasonably Consistent

Parents are often told that being consistent is the key to good discipline. **Consistency is important; without it children become confused, or learn to ignore their parents' directions.**

Nobody seemed to mind when Mei helped herself to a bag of chips yesterday. But today when she opened the new bag of cookies she got a scolding.

"Don't touch the stereo," says Aaron's mom....."Aaron, I said NO!" As Aaron persists, his mother sighs and shakes her head, turning back to her dishes. Because his parents rarely follow through, (for example, by taking him away from the stereo and helping him get involved in something else), Aaron has concluded they don't really mean what they say.

Is consistency always good? Consider this example:





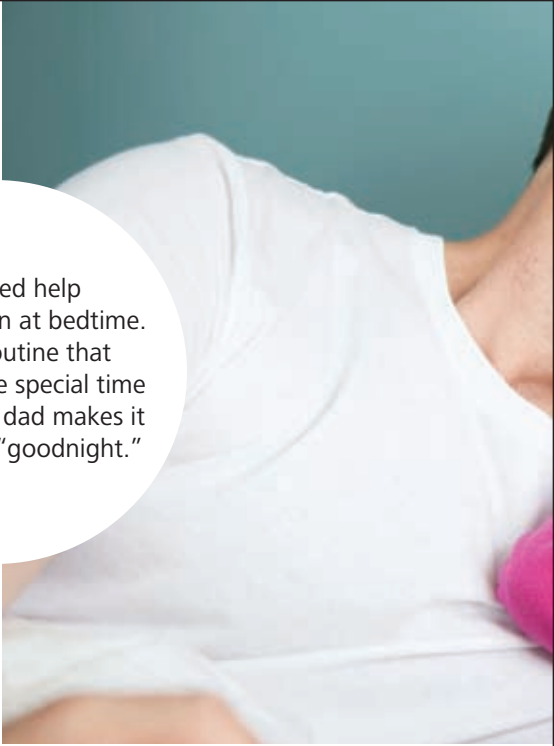
- Felice's cousins are in town, on a rare visit from overseas. Although the whole family has gathered for an evening visit, Felice's parents feel it's important to stick to her regular bedtime routine — so they leave the party hours before anyone else.



*"Suddenly we were having trouble with our oldest over going to bed. She'd be up for a drink, calling down, all that annoying stuff. Then it occurred to me that she'd had the same bedtime for years. We moved her bedtime a half-hour later — and she was able to fall asleep easily."*

In real life, we sometimes have more important goals than consistency. For Felice, a chance to know her relatives might be worth a disturbed bedtime.

**As long as the rules are consistently enforced most of the time, children can also learn that there are sometimes exceptions to those rules.**



Many kids need help winding down at bedtime. A soothing routine that includes some special time with mom or dad makes it easier to say “goodnight.”

## Routines that Fit

What is a routine? It's anything you normally do in the same way each time. Some routines involve family rules (take your shoes off at the door and hang up your coat), while some are just comfortable habits (before going to sleep you have a cup of tea and read in bed for awhile).

What do routines have to do with discipline? **Most families can identify 'trouble times,' when parents and children often clash.** It may be the morning rush, bedtime hassles, or chores. A lot of frustrations can build up over these recurring conflicts.

**Sometimes, a change in routine can solve the problem:**

- Rob is often late for the school

### IS YOUR STAGE SET?

- ☐ My expectations for my child's abilities
- ☐ My home is 'child-friendly'
- ☐ I communicate my rules and expectations clearly
- ☐ I set a good example
- ☐ I am pretty consistent on discipline issues
- ☐ Our family routines work well



bus, running around at the last minute collecting homework and other school stuff. His parents are fed up. But instead of punishing Rob when he misses the bus, they help him plan a new strategy: before he watches TV in the evening, Rob will pack up everything he needs for the next day.

- Alyssa (age four) begs for candy at the check-out counter. Her mother dislikes the nagging, and hates constantly saying 'No.' So she establishes a new routine: "On Saturdays, you will get 50 cents to spend. That will be your candy for the week." Now, when Alyssa asks for candy, she gets a gentle reminder: "On Saturday." It's easier for her to accept the "No" when she can look forward to a "Yes."

**Routines shouldn't be so rigid that there's no flexibility or fun in our lives.** Alyssa's mom may still buy candy on special occasions! **The point is to look at your routines creatively, and use them to help your family run smoothly.**

# Discipline That Teaches

## Your positive discipline tool-box

Of course, even with your best planning, there will be plenty of discipline issues to deal with. **The positive methods below have been used and found effective by many other parents.**

If you have been relying on spanking or other punishments to control your child, he or she may be confused at first by these new approaches. You may feel that they aren't working, because the child's behaviour doesn't improve right away – in fact, it might even get worse at first. **It will take time for you to learn to use these ideas effectively, and for your child to adapt to them, so don't give up. The rewards are worth it.**

### Babies and discipline

In one sense, positive discipline begins when your baby is still small – as you develop a loving, close relationship, babyproof your home, and develop comfortable routines. But babies are too young to understand rules or consequences, and the discipline techniques in this chapter are not intended for babies. As your baby grows into a toddler, you will need to judge carefully which positive discipline approaches she is ready to learn from.





## Catch Her Being Good

How would you like to have a boss or supervisor who was quick to point out every mistake you made but never notices when you did something well? Now think about how good a positive comment or a compliment can make you feel. Your child is just the same.

**When you appreciate your child's good behavior, it encourages him to keep trying.** But to help your child learn, your praise should be specific. If you say to your son, "You're such a good boy," he won't know what he's done that you approve of. Is he 'good' because he used his napkin, didn't fight with his sister at the table, or because he spilled soup on his shirt? He can't tell. He learns more if you say, "You really remembered your table manners tonight, that was great."

**It's also important to be honest – children are very good at knowing when adults are 'faking it.'** And overdone or phony praise can backfire: a child may become dependent on constant praise, or give up trying to do a good job because you seem delighted even with sloppy work.



## Should you reward good behaviour?

For most children, the best reward is knowing they have pleased their parents. Reward programs can sometimes help children learn new skills or change their behavior. But they must be used with care:

- Reward work best if they are used for a limited time to help with a specific problem.
- If the child is not capable of the desired behavior, reward systems can be very stressful. For example, if a two-year-old is offered treats for using the potty – but really can't manage it yet – she may want the treats desperately and be very upset.
- Structured reward programs (sometimes called 'behaviour modification') are often more successful if parents get some advice from an expert – perhaps a school counselor or child psychologist.



A simple, sincere word of appreciation, or a specific comment on the neatly made bed and tidy desk, will 'ring true' with your child and help her to discover the satisfaction of a job well done.

Some positive comments you might use:

- "That was a good idea you had to take turns with the ball"
- "You've been working hard in here – you got most of the toys picked up and all the clothes. Why don't I help you clean the rest of your room, and then we'll have lunch?"
- "That was a really long wait at the bank, Thanks for being so patient."

## Describe the behaviour not the child

When we're angry or disappointed, our reaction is often to criticize or make accusations: "You're so inconsiderate!" or "How could you be so stupid?" But hurtful comments don't help a child to learn from his mistakes. Children (and adults, too) learn from us better if we stick to the facts:

- What they did wrong
- The behavior you expect or prefer
- How you feel

When you correct your child's misbehavior, you might say something like this:

- "You may not play tag in the living room! Tag is an outdoor game."
- "You didn't let me know where you were, and I was worried. You must call home before going to a friend's after school."



*"We were having a real struggle every morning to get Tara to school on time. Finally I just let her go along at her own pace, without nagging. She was ten minutes late, and she had to stay in for recess to make up the time. After that, mornings were much less of a problem — she found out that being late wasn't very pleasant."*



## Real life is the best teacher

You're getting your son ready to go outside and play in your yard.

It's cold and there is snow on the ground, but he insists that he doesn't want to wear his mittens. What do you do?

You might consider doing nothing! Pretty soon his bare hands will get cold enough that he'll come back in and ask for mittens. You could even say, as he goes out: "If you get cold, I have some mittens here in the closet."

That's called 'natural consequences.' Your child has made a choice — not to wear mittens — and then he gets to see how it works out. This kind of real-life experience is very often the best teacher.

**Of course, as a parent, you have to protect your child from danger, so you can't let him do things that could hurt him.**

(If your two-year-old wants to play on the street, for example, you can't just let her experience the natural consequences!) You also have to prevent things that will hurt others or damage property.

**We can't always allow children to experience the results of their choices. But often we move in too quickly, when allowing the child to try something might provide a better learning experience.**

# Logical Consequences

**Logical consequences help children understand the link between their behavior and its results, and encourage them to take responsibility for ‘fixing’ their mistakes.**

Not all lessons can be learned from natural consequences. Some natural consequences are too dangerous to risk. Others may not be very effective: if your child jumps on the couch and ruins the spring, she probably won't care about the damage as much as you do!

In these situations, you might want to create some 'logical consequences' instead. Many parents withdraw privileges, like TV time or outings, to punish behavior. That is one kind of consequence, but logical consequences are quite different.

How do logical consequences work? Imagine you have a family rule that bike helmets must be worn when biking — but your ten-year-old rides home from school bare-headed. You might say, "Chris, you know it's dangerous to ride your bike without your helmet. Since you've chosen not to ride safely, you will have to walk. I'm putting your bike in the garage until Monday. If you decide you're willing to wear the helmet, you can have it back then."

**Thinking of an appropriate logical consequence can be a challenge, It needs to be something you can enforce.**

Sometimes parents will tell a child that if she runs in the store or yells at a friend's house, they will go home. But if you really need to get some shopping done, or really want to visit with that friend, it becomes too hard to follow through. Instead of logical consequences, you are left with empty threats. Then the child begins to think you don't mean




*"Megan wanted to paint, so I gave her paints, water, and plenty of paper. But when I came back, she was painting on the wall. As calmly as possible, I reminded her that she was only supposed to paint on paper. Then I put her paints away and told her she had to help me clean the walls. It probably took longer with her helping than it would have if I'd cleaned up alone, but I think it helped her learn about responsibility."*

Yes, it's easier to clean it up yourself! But when children help 'repair' their mistakes, they learn an important lesson about responsibility.







what you say.

**Remember, too, that consequences are a way of learning, and learning doesn't have to hurt.** Parents sometimes want the consequence to seem like a punishment. But the point of effective discipline is not to make children suffer – it's to teach them about the results of their behaviour.

If four-year-old Kylie dashes ahead into the parking lot, the consequence might be that she has to hold your hand: "because if you don't walk safely by yourself then I have to keep you safe." That may upset her – but even if it doesn't and she walks beside you happily, she is still learning about safety rules. You don't have to look for a harsher consequence.

**Teaching with logical consequences requires more thought than simply punishing a child might, but it is much more effective.**

"Jessica, my 12-year-old, was always coming home late for supper, and I was getting really frustrated trying to keep hers warm or hold up the whole family until she got there. Now I just serve supper at 5:30, and if she doesn't come until later, she has to reheat it herself and eat alone. She's still late once in a while, but it's definitely improved."

#### **Logical Consequences:**

- should be closely related to what the child has done
- should help the child learn about responsibility
- should not be humiliating or painful
- should fit the child's stage of development

#### **Whenever possible, logical consequences should also:**

- be explained in advance
- happen right away, not hours or days later
- give the child a chance to try again after the consequence



## Time Out

Children, like adults, sometimes need to be alone or separated from situations or people they aren't handling very well. If your child is biting, hitting or fighting with other children, she might need some time out to calm down.

*"When David came home from school, he was like a bear — grouchy with everyone and picking fights with the younger kids. Finally I told him he needed a 'time out.' He went up to his room and after a few minutes I took him up a snack. Then he told me about the rough day he'd had at school. By the time he came down, he was okay again."*

Some parents have a 'time out' chair where the child is expected to sit. This approach has been widely promoted on TV nanny shows. However, there can be problems with time out.

- Some parents use it too often or keep preschoolers in time out for too long
- Time out often becomes a punishment rather than a tool to help a child settle down or a defuse volatile situation
- Keeping your child in the time-out chair can become a power struggle which distracts from the original discipline issue

When thinking about whether or not to use time-out, ask yourself, "What is my child learning from this that can help him modify his behaviour next time around?"

Time-outs are not the answer to every discipline problem. It's best to use them sparingly and, for young children, to keep them very short.

Remember that the goal of time-out is to help children learn self-discipline and to manage their own behaviour. Sometimes kids can decide for themselves how long their time out needs to be. You might say, "You can come out when you can play with Kanchana without biting," or "Tell me when you're ready to let other people talk, too, and we'll come back." If your child just walks into his room and comes right back out, that's okay. However, if his behaviour doesn't change, you may have to call another 'time out' or look for a different solution.

You may find that your child goes to his room, gets interested in his toys or books, and doesn't come down for a long time. That's okay. He just needed some time alone. As he gets older, he'll learn to recognize that need by himself.

*"When we went to pick Bianca up from camp, the counselor told me that Bianca had gone for a walk by herself almost every afternoon. She told me later that living with all those kids in one cabin really got to her sometimes, and going for a walk helped her deal with them."*

**Sometimes what children need is not a 'time out' but a 'time in' — a little time alone with a parent.**

*"I babysit two other kids during the day, and Noah doesn't always get along with them very well. When he started pulling Rosina's hair, I guessed he needed a little more time and attention from me. I put on a video for Rosina and Jeffrey, and sat with Noah on the couch. I gave him a hug and told him I knew it was hard to share me with the other kids. Pretty soon he went off to watch the video with the others, but it seemed to help. They didn't fight for the rest of the day. Whenever he seems to be getting too rough with the other kids, I try to find a way to spend a little extra time with him, and it really works."*

Time in isn't meant to be a punishment, either. It's another way of helping a child get control of himself or feel more secure, so that he can behave better.

**It's not always easy to know what will work with a particular child or in a particular situation. Sometimes you just have to try something and see what happens.**

For example, if your four-year-old has a tantrum and is lying on the floor yelling, you might sit close to her and try to help her calm down, perhaps by patting her back or talking gently. But if that seems to infuriate her more, you could try just walking away and leaving her alone — some kids cool down more easily without an audience.

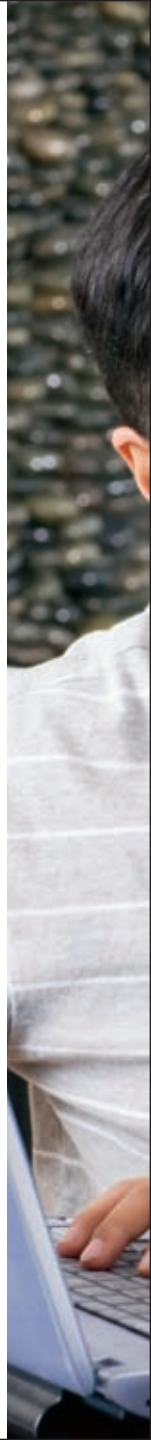
## You Can Have It When.....

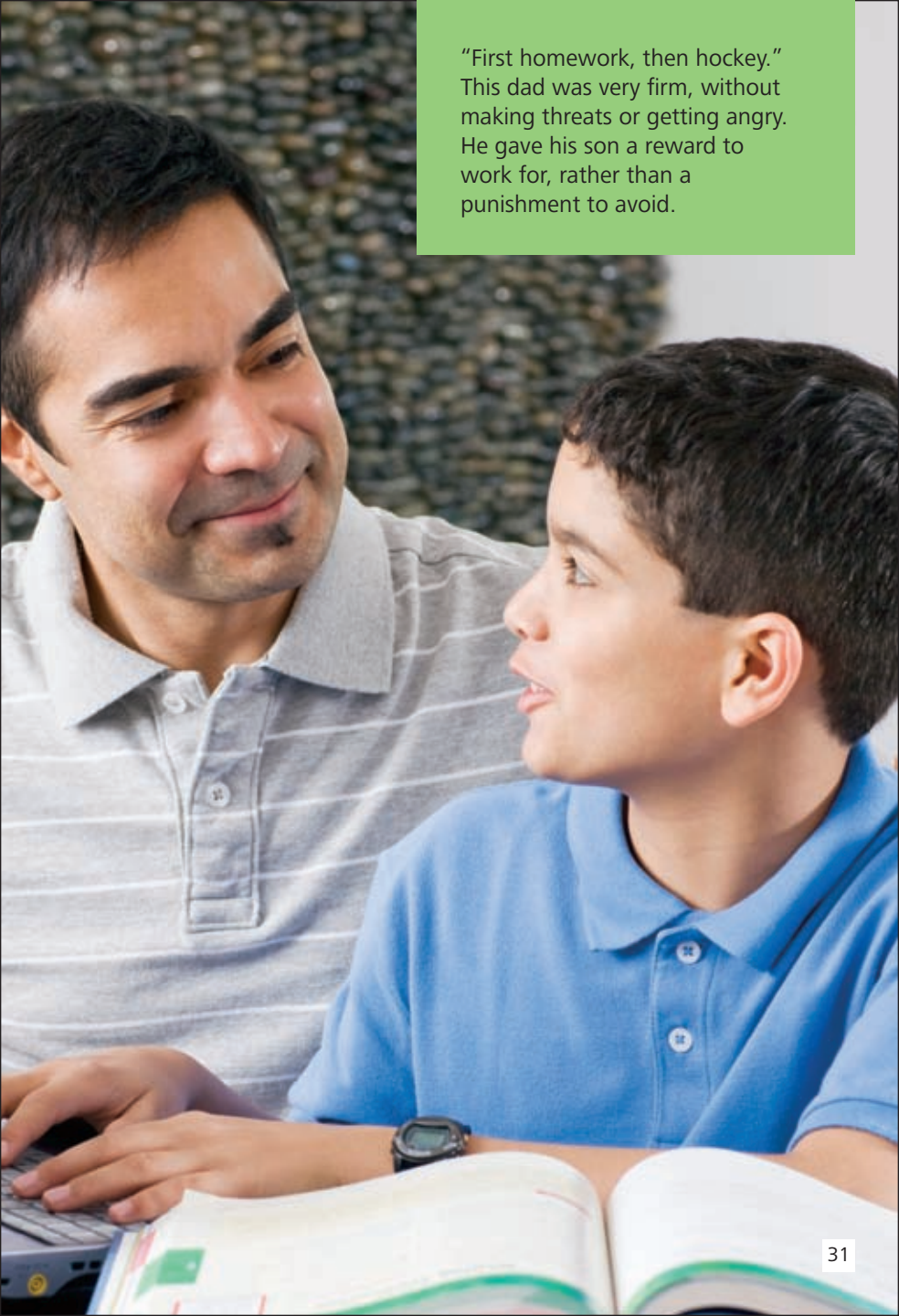
One of the goals of disciplining children is to help them learn to be responsible. **A positive way to encourage responsible behaviour is to link privileges or activities your child enjoys to completion of her work:**

- "When you finish clearing the table, you can watch TV."
- "When we get the vacuuming done, we'll all go out for dinner."
- "Put your toys back on the shelf and then we'll read a story."

This approach is more positive, and usually more effective, than threatening to take away privileges. Think about what happens when you say "Because you didn't clear the table after dinner, you can't watch TV tonight." You know you will have a rather angry evening as you try to prevent the child from watching TV, and you're already annoyed because you had to clear the table yourself. If you leave the dishes on the table and just remind the child that he can watch TV as soon as the dishes are cleared, both of you will feel happier.

When you use this technique, you are also teaching your child a self-motivating skill that she can use herself as she



A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting together, looking at a laptop screen. The man, on the left, is wearing a grey and white striped polo shirt and has a slight smile. The boy, on the right, is wearing a blue polo shirt and a black digital watch. They are both looking intently at the laptop screen, which is partially visible at the bottom left. The background is a textured, dark grey wall.

"First homework, then hockey."  
This dad was very firm, without  
making threats or getting angry.  
He gave his son a reward to  
work for, rather than a  
punishment to avoid.

grows older: "I'm going to study this chapter, and then I'll go for a bike ride." It is important, though, that the reward is something that the child really wants. If you say, "When you finish clearing the table, you can have your bath," the dishes may sit there all evening!



*"I was concerned that Kareem wasn't doing his homework and I didn't want him to end up with bad grades in school. So I decided that he had to show me his completed homework every night before he could go out with his friends or watch TV. It actually worked very well because I would ask questions about what he'd done and I think he got more interested in it that way."*

## Choices for Children?

**Allowing young children to make simple choices often encourages them to be more co-operative, making life more pleasant for all of you.** As the parent, you are in charge and you do make the final decisions. One of the skills children need to learn, though, is how to make good choices, so that they will be prepared for the more difficult decisions they will face as they get older.

**Your task as a parent is to offer gradually more complex choices that are within the guidelines you find acceptable.** For example:

A three-year-old could choose to have brown sugar or raisins on his oatmeal (but not "anything he wants" for breakfast if you're only prepared to make oatmeal).

A seven-year-old could choose what to wear to school from her drawer of winter clothes (but not her summer shorts or party dress).

Three older children could get together and decide who will feed the cat, who will do the sweeping and who will put out the garbage (but all those tasks need to be done).

### Choices Should Be:

- within the child's capability
- within limits you find acceptable
- compatible with health and safety
- real – if you can't accept one of the child's options, don't offer him that choice.





*"Yesterday my preschooler said she didn't want to go to the babysitter's. I just asked, 'Which of your animals do you want to take with you today?' She picked out a teddy and headed off happily."*

# From Choices to Negotiation

As children get older, they can be more involved in decisions.

**Negotiating is a very useful problem-solving skill that your child will use throughout her adult life.**

A simple way of negotiating is to let the child choose when he'll do something (if that's possible).

"I felt like I was always nagging my son about his chores. Finally I said, 'Matt, I really need you to cut the lawn. When could you commit to have it done?' He said he'd get it finished by 7:30. He did, too!"

Some families organize regular family meetings, and these are a good time for negotiating issues like rules, chores, and allowances. Children are much more likely to follow rules if they have had some input into them and understand the reason for them. And they sometimes come up with creative solutions that really work!

Negotiating also means allowing for exceptions and being flexible. If your child normally goes to bed at eight o'clock, you might negotiate letting him stay up until nine for a special TV show or to go to a party. Part of the deal might be that he sets out his clothes and school supplies for the next day before he goes to bed, since he's likely to be more tired in the morning.

**When you treat your child's opinions with respect and consideration, you set an example for her to follow with other people.** Giving your children choices, involving them in decision – making and negotiating with them will help them learn skills they will need as adults.



*"My son wanted to go to a movie alone with his friends. I felt they were too young. We talked it over, and made a deal – I drove them, and waited to make sure they got in okay. And I was waiting at the door when they got out. But they got to sit on their own."*





## What Works For You?

**Remember, to guide your child's behaviour you can:**

- ☐ Praise good behaviour
- ☐ Describe the behaviour you want
- ☐ Let natural consequences teach your child
- ☐ Use logical consequences
- ☐ Give time-out
- ☐ Give time-in
- ☐ Delay a privilege until responsibilities are met
- ☐ Offer a choice
- ☐ Negotiate an agreement



# From Words To Action

How to make good discipline happen



*"I heard this really inspiring speaker on parenting. She had so many great ideas, I wanted to use them all. But once I was home, it was too overwhelming. I didn't know where to start."*

Learning to use positive methods of discipline isn't always easy. Reading about a new skill isn't the same as making it your own; resolving to give up an old habit doesn't make it happen. **Yet many parents have succeeded in changing their responses to misbehavior – and you can, too.**

There will be mistakes and wrong turns along the way, but luckily, our children don't need perfect parents. They need parents who are learning and growing – just like them.





*Spending time with other parents is helpful in so many ways: we share ideas, support each other, and learn that our children really are 'normal'*

## One Step At a Time

For most of us, a small step is easier than a great leap. That's why many counselors advise parents to start with just one change. It could be something like, "I will no longer call my child names or tell him he's a bad person when he misbehaves. Instead, I will tell him what he did wrong and how to do better next time." It will take time to get comfortable with your new skill and learn to use it consistently. But that first change will pave the way for the next, and the next....

# Someone to Talk To

Who do you know who shares your view of parenting and can provide a sympathetic ear, new ideas, encouragement? It's much easier to change when there's somebody cheering you on:

- Luc "can't stand" his children's constant bickering – and he suspects his reaction isn't helping the problem. He and his wife, Louise, sit up late one night talking over the problem, and come up with some new ideas to try.
- Janet has just had a nasty shouting match with her 12-year-old that's left her shaken and on the verge of tears. She calls her sister, who has older kids. Mostly Janet's sister just lets her talk; she also helps her figure out what to do next.



*"I took a parenting course last summer, and after it was finished I started getting together with some of the other parents in the class. We talk things out, get a new look at the problem.... I'm a single parent and I don't have family in town, so that's been a real lifeline for me."*

## Taking Stock

You'll be able to set clearer goals for yourself if you take a careful look at what's happening in your family right now. Consider:

- **How were you parented?** Which of your parents' discipline techniques do you want to keep? Which do you want to avoid?
- **How does your own personality, and that of your child, affect your parenting?** (For example, do you get into power struggles because you are both stubborn? Or does your child get on your nerves because you are a quiet person, and she is boisterous and active?)
- **What discipline methods are you using now?** Which work well? Which do you want to change?
- **What new approaches to discipline do you want to try?**

# When Anger Flares

**It's important for parents to learn to manage their anger constructively.** Anger is a normal human response, and it's okay for children to see that we are sometimes angry with them. But our children also need to know that they are safe with us, even when we are mad – and our good example will help them learn to deal with their own anger.

If you often feel 'out of control' when you're angry, the following ideas may be helpful.

## **SOME ANGER MANAGEMENT IDEAS:**

- **IDENTIFY THE HIGH-STRESS SITUATIONS THAT OFTEN PUSH YOU TO THE EDGE, AND LOOK FOR WAYS TO EASE THE PRESSURE.** Often we 'blow up' at our kids simply because they added the 'last straw' to an already tense situation. Are you overstressed and often angry when making dinner? During the morning rush? When you go too long without adult company? Would a new routine or advance planning help?

- **LEARN TO RECOGNIZE YOUR ANGER EARLIER.** We don't always realize our anger is building – until it's too late. Review what led up to losing your cool, so you can start to notice the warning signs before you reach 'boiling point.' Then you can take steps to interrupt the cycle.

- **TALK TO YOURSELF.** Choose a phrase you will use to help yourself regain control: "Calm down, you need to cool off." Practise using the phrase when you're not all that angry, so that it will come more easily when you need it. Don't be shy to say it out loud – it will have a greater impact.



*"Saturday is my 'no patience' day, when I'm tired from a 12-hour Friday shift. Now I plan for it: I have a teenager come and play with the kids for an hour while I take a break. Then I can deal with dinner and bedtime more easily."*



- **TAKE TIME OUT.** Anger makes it hard to think clearly. Unless there's a true emergency, it's wise to allow yourself to calm down before making a decision about discipline. You can say, "I'm too angry to think straight. I'm going to my room to calm down, and then we'll talk about this." In your room (or workshop, or study) you can call a friend, read the paper, exercise – whatever helps you regain perspective. If your children can safely be left, you can even go for a walk or a drive. Then think about how you want to handle the situation.
- **GET HELP.** Not always easy, but here's where that support system pays off. If you feel that you might hurt your children – physically or emotionally – get on the phone and talk it through. And if you often reach this kind of 'crisis point,' look for professional help. (See the next section, Where to Find Help.)





# Where to Find Help

**There are many reasons why a parent might need professional support.** Perhaps your own childhood was troubled, or maybe you need help dealing with anger or stress.

**Some children who seem 'difficult to discipline' have hidden problems.** A child who has trouble focusing her attention and controlling her impulses, for example, may seem to be deliberately misbehaving. Hearing and language problems can also affect behaviour. These problems need to be diagnosed by professionals, who can also help you develop child-rearing approaches that meet your child's special needs.

## **GOOD PLACES TO START ARE:**

- your family doctor
- the local health unit
- a parent-child resource centre
- your child's school
- a crisis line

Depending on the problem and the resources in your community, you may be referred to:

- a counselor or therapist
- a child psychologist or psychiatrist
- a social worker
- a parent education program

It can be difficult to admit when we need help with our parenting skills. But asking for support doesn't mean you are a bad parent. It means you love your child and want to give him the best upbringing you can.

It's a gift that will last a lifetime.

# PARENTING FOR LIFE

The success of tomorrow's world depends largely on how we live in it to-day. Building strong, healthy families is key to our future and the right information at the right time can be a vital support for growing families. Education and skills that enable parents and children to play and grow together, are the foundation we need to give flight to our future. That's what Parenting for Life is all about.

Strong Minds Strong Kids and Today's Parent Group originally joined efforts to develop Parenting for Life, a non-profit public education program promoting positive parenting skills and the well-being of families. The resources, including booklets, a Facilitator's Guide for parent educators and posters are used as a part of many parent education programs in Canada. In 1998, Parenting for Life received the FRP Canada Media Award from the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs.

Research clearly demonstrates that a strong and healthy parent-child relationship is crucial to raising resilient, productive and mentally healthy individuals. Family by family, we need to strengthen our efforts and create a better world for our children. Please join us in this unique initiative.

Dr. Ester Cole, PhD., C.Psych

Chair, Parenting for Life Program and Past Chair  
Strong Minds Strong Kids

4773 Yonge Street, Suite 4D  
North York, ON M2N 0G2  
Tel: 416-644-4944 Fax: 416-513-0348  
[info@StrongMindsStrongKids.ca](mailto:info@StrongMindsStrongKids.ca)  
[www.StrongMindsStrongKids.ca](http://www.StrongMindsStrongKids.ca)

Printed in Canada, content © Copyright, **Strong Minds Strong Kids**, 1995, 2011. No Part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher.

No liability can be accepted for any advice rendered in this publication.

The information in this booklet is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a psychologist, physician or other qualified expert.

Également disponible en français sous le titre **C'est un Jeu D'enfant!**