

Study Guide

YELLING , THREATENING , AND PUTTING DOWN: WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

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Overview

This program presents common-sense techniques for dealing with four challenging interactions between parents and children aged 2-10:

1: When children are very active

2: When children get angry

3: When children whine

4: When siblings fight

After each scene, viewers are invited to stop the program and discuss alternatives to yelling, threatening and putting children down. When they resume watching, they'll see a variety of positive, practical parenting techniques.

The program emphasizes prevention: understanding children, thinking ahead, and establishing clear family rules in advance. It also emphasizes taking time to help children, redirecting children, and following through firmly and calmly.

This program offers parents practical suggestions, and stimulates free-flowing discussion.

A discussion leader can facilitate a free and open exchange of ideas by being relaxed and not lecturing. Remind group members that there is no such thing as a perfect parent or child, and that no "one-size-fits-all" technique works in every situation.

Encourage viewers to be specific in their discussion. Steer away from questions that elicit "yes or "no" answers, and ask clarifying questions that require further thought. Answers will vary, depending on the situation and the family circumstances. Most importantly, keep a sense of humor!

1. WHEN CHILDREN ARE VERY ACTIVE

Two-year-old Christopher runs noisily back and forth in front of the TV, blocking his father's view of the basketball game. At first, Dad tells Christopher not to run in front of the TV. Then he lifts Christopher onto the couch beside him, but Christopher jumps down and resumes his noisy play. Exasperated, Dad tells him to quiet down. When that doesn't work, Dad blows up and yells at Christopher.

Discussion Questions

If you were Christopher's parent, what would you do?

How might Dad's own behavior contribute to Christopher's noise and activity level?

What other factors could contribute to the problem?

What other situations can you think of, where a child's high activity level may challenge a parent?

Helpful Information

It is important to have realistic expectations of a child's capabilities, given his/her age and level of development. For example, in this scene, it may be unrealistic for Dad to expect Christopher not to block his view, because many children under five or six do not have a clear concept of spatial relationships, and they may not know when they are standing in someone's view.

Christopher may want Dad to pay attention to him rather than to the TV. By ignoring Christopher, Dad may be encouraging the attention-seeking part of Christopher's behavior.

If you were Christopher's parent, what would you do?

Dad may be unrealistic in expecting Christopher to watch a ball game, an adult activity that he does not understand. It is also unrealistic to expect children under five or six to sit still for extended periods of time. In fact, they usually have a high activity level and need plenty of exercise.

Finally, it is not always realistic to expect young children to play quietly, since noise is usually part of children's play.

Parenting Techniques

Think before you act.

Talk to your spouse or to another parent in order to understand your child.

Think about the causes of your child's behavior.

Enjoy your child's energy level, and let him know it.

Redirect your child to a calmer activity.

Combine your need and your child's need.

Postpone your own activity.

Sometimes, choose to satisfy your child's need rather than your own.

Does this mean you should never yell at a child?

Not necessarily. If a child is in danger (e.g. running into the street), you may find yourself yelling to get his attention and prevent him from being hurt. Even here, however, you can think *after* you act and prevent the problem from occurring again.

2. WHEN CHILDREN GET ANGRY

Four-year-old Kajun attempts to build a tower with her toy blocks. When the blocks fall on her face, she gets angry and throws them.

Kajun's mother tells her to stop throwing the blocks. When Kajun continues throwing, Mom yells and threatens, *"If you keep doing that, I'm going to take your toys away from you and you won't get any more ever!"*

Discussion Questions

If you were Kajun's parent, what would you do?

What are some other common situations where children may get angry?

Why is a child's anger challenging for parents?

After watching this entire section: What other logical choices can parents give children in situations like this?

Helpful Information for Parents

Like the rest of us, young children experience a wide range of emotions, including anger. Their anger often comes from frustration when they attempt something that is difficult. Young children also get angry because of hunger, fatigue, or an insistence on doing things their own way.

Angry children can be a challenge to deal with, especially when parents respond by getting angry themselves. The problem is that yelling and threatening create an atmosphere of fear, rather than one of understanding, love, and trust. When parents yell and threaten, they don't teach children how to deal with their own anger.

Parenting Techniques

- Recognize when your child's frustration is rising and intervene before things start flying.
- Think of family rules as a 2-sided coin with a "DO" side and a "DON'T" side. Emphasize the "DO" side rather than the "DON'T" side.
- Acknowledge and manage your own anger.
- Model the desired behavior: stay calm, help your child, and talk her through the activity.
- Empathize with your child, and let her know you understand her feelings.
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Praise your child when she plays calmly.
- Encourage your child to express her feelings in words, and listen to her response.
- Redirect your child to a less frustrating activity.
- If your child continues throwing:
Remind her firmly and calmly of the rules. Tell her to stop.
Give a choice that is logically related to the behavior.
Follow through.
Do not get into power struggles over little things.
Have fun together and show your child you love her.

3. When Children Whine

In the supermarket, seven-year-old Teresa asks Mom to buy her a candy bar. Mom's response is wishy-washy and Teresa begins to whine. Mom becomes irritated and threatens Teresa, *"If you don't stop this right now, I'm going to walk out and leave you."*

Teresa answers, *"Daddy buys me candy."*

Furious, Mom caves in, throws the candy bar in the shopping cart, and puts Teresa down, saying, *"I can't stand you. You're such a little pain!"*

Discussion Questions

If you were Teresa's parent, what would you do?

In what ways does Mom make Teresa's whining worse?

Why are stores a particularly challenging place for parents and children?

What other factors might contribute to the problem?

Helpful Information for Parents

Supermarkets, toy stores, etc., are very tempting to children. Unless clear expectations are established in advance, it is very possible that children will ask for, whine, and demand things.

Aggravating as a child's whining may be, threats and put-downs are unlikely to solve the problem.

Threats intimidate children, without teaching them an alternative to whining, and sometimes parents make threats that are dangerous such as leaving a child alone in a store.

Put-downs are destructive for several reasons: They teach the child that put-downs are acceptable; they are global statements about the child's character; and they create an atmosphere of disrespect rather than love.

Parenting Techniques

Have a family meeting, discuss the issue, and agree to one set of rules.

Calmly and clearly communicate expectations to your child in advance.

Help your child practice the desired behavior ahead of time.

Give your child a snack before entering a supermarket.

Give your child a job to do in the store and praise her when she is helpful.

Be firm: do not encourage whining by wishy-washy statements or by whining yourself.

Consider rewarding your child at the end of the shopping trip if she has acted appropriately.

Follow through firmly and calmly with the rules and expectations you have established.

4. WHEN SIBLINGS FIGHT

Jana, 8, and her brother Matt, 10, fight over a CD. Their fighting escalates, with kicking and name-calling. Dad steps in and attempts to figure out who started the fight, but gets exasperated and yells at the children. The children “settle down,” but for only a moment. Soon the fighting starts again and Dad blows up. He yells at them, threatens, *“If you two don’t knock it off, you’re both grounded!”* and puts them down: *“I don’t believe what babies you guys are!”*

Discussion Questions

If Jana and Matt were your children, what would you do? Apart from the disagreement over the CD, what other factors might cause the fight? Why is sibling fighting a problem for parents? Why is it important to teach children non-violent ways to resolve conflict?

Helpful Information

Sibling conflict is common and often distressing to parents. It can disrupt the home environment, and sometimes be a symptom of problems at home, at school, or in the neighborhood. Even so, when handled constructively, sibling conflict can provide opportunities for children to learn healthy, non-violent ways to settle conflict.

It will help parents if they understand why siblings fight: They may have a legitimate difference and not know how to resolve it peacefully. They may want attention from their parents or be competing for their parents’ love.

They may be taking out on each other something else that is bothering them. They may fight because they are at different developmental levels and their abilities or needs clash. They may imitate the behavior of adults or older children. They may be bored and getting on each other's nerves.

Parenting Techniques

Hold a family meeting. Take turns listening and talking. As a parent, acknowledge any part you may have in a pattern of family fighting.

Agree on rules for peacefully solving disagreements. Be specific about what behaviors are desirable. Write the rules and post them so they are easy to see. Set a positive example of peaceful conflict-resolution.

Learn to distinguish between different levels of conflict: If it is a minor disagreement, ignore it and let the children work it out.

If it is squabbling that could get out of control, with name-calling, hitting, kicking, etc., stop the fighting and remove the object of disagreement.

If it is fighting that is already out of control, with abusive language or violence, separate the children. Remind them that insults and physical attacks are not allowed. Have them go to separate areas to cool off.

Help the children learn to problem-solve without violence. Explain that they need to use appropriate language, listen without interrupting, and reach a solution acceptable to everyone concerned.

If the children have difficulty solving the problem, help them. Your goal should be to help them learn to settle it themselves. Do not impose your own solution unless they absolutely cannot reach a settlement.

Have patience and remain impartial and fair.

Listen to the children's ideas. Suggest a few of your own. Write the ideas down.

Viewing Notes

What can parents do when children are very active?

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What can parents do when children get agry?

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