



# A GUIDE TO BUILDING HEALTHY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS: A Positive, Rights-Based Approach

With the contribution of  
the European Commission



**Save the Children**  
Italia ONLUS

**We are** the world's leading independent organization for children.

**Our vision** is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

**Our mission** is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.**

**We save children's lives.**

**We fight for their rights.**

**We help them fulfill their potential.**

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**Save the Children**

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# PREFACE



**C**orporal punishment is one of the most common forms of violence against children. Over 40 States still authorise the whipping or flogging of children in their penal systems. Only 32 states around the world have achieved full prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings; of these, 23 are European<sup>1</sup>. **This means that 95.5% of the children in the world are living in countries with no law prohibiting corporal punishment in the home<sup>2</sup>.**

In this guide, Save the Children will focus on two categories of punishment<sup>3</sup> that can occur separately or together<sup>4</sup>:

**Corporal or physical punishment** which is any application of punishment to a child's body, whether mild or severe. It includes hitting the child with the hand or with an object (such as a cane, belt, whip, shoe, etc), kicking, shaking, or throwing the child, pinching or pulling their hair; forcing a child to stay in uncomfortable or undignified positions, or to engage in excessive physical exercise; burning or scarring the child.

**Humiliating or Degrading Punishment** which takes various forms such as psychological punishment, verbal abuse, ridicule, isolation, withdrawal of love or ignoring the child.

Save the Children works towards eliminating all forms of corporal or physical punishment and other humiliating or degrading punishment of children in all settings. For this reason, Save the Children Italy, Save the Children Lithuania, Save the Children Romania, and Save the Children Sweden are promoting activities to prevent physical and humiliating punishment in all settings through the Project “**Educate, do not punish**” financed by the European Commission - Daphne III Programme. The project is focused in these four European countries, which have different legislative, administrative, social and educational measures in place related to corporal punishment. In Italy and Lithuania, corporal punishment is still not banned in the family context. In Romania, corporal punishment has been banned in law, but it is still socially accepted and it is still a considerable problem. In Sweden, corporal punishment was banned in 1979 and is no longer a socially acceptable act<sup>5</sup>.

Save the Children advocates for **legal reform**. The imperative for prohibiting all corporal/physical punishment is to assert children's rights to respect for their physical integrity and human dignity, and to equal protection under the law. The aim of legal reform is not to punish parents, but rather to send a clear message that violence against children is not tolerated<sup>6</sup>. We support the inclusion of the explicit ban of physical and humiliating punishment in all settings in the political agenda and debate.

Save the Children advocates for **social change and increased knowledge** that can contribute to a change of attitudes and practices. It is essential to change social acceptance of corporal and humiliating punishment and to increase the visibility of these punishments as violations of children's rights. We promote the transfer of knowledge through the development of awareness raising materials.

Save the Children, as a rights-based organization, emphasizes the importance of **child participation**. We involve children, hear their voices, and consider their suggestions. Children have the right to be heard both in public and within the family.

Save the Children promotes “**positive parenting**”. With this Guide to Building Healthy Parent-Child Relationships, Save the Children aims to make parents aware of the importance of positive approaches to interacting with their children that take into account children's rights. Save the Children aims to provide clear guidance on positive parenting and affirm the unacceptability of corporal and humiliating punishments. The Guide will help parents to build strong, secure relationships with their children and avoid reacting to them with anger and violence.

Save the Children aspires to eliminate all forms of corporal punishment against children, in all settings to guarantee that all children have all their rights respected.

**Children are not mini-human beings with mini-human rights. Council of Europe**

<sup>1</sup> For more information visit, <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children - Position Paper On the prohibition and elimination of corporal/physical punishment and all other cruel or degrading punishment of children, May 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Save the Children - Position Paper On the prohibition and elimination of corporal/physical punishment and all other cruel or degrading punishment of children, May 2011.

<sup>4</sup> The Committee on the Rights of the Child - General Comment No. (2006) - defines “corporal” or “physical” punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (“smacking”, “slapping”, “spanking”) children, with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In the view of the Committee, corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child.

<sup>5</sup> 92% of Swedish parents disagree with corporal punishment. Kroppslig bestraffning och annan kränkning av barn i Sverige - en nationell kartläggning 2011, by Staffan Janson, Carolina Jernbro, Bodil Långberg, (2011), Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset.

<sup>6</sup> Save the Children - Position Paper on the prohibition and elimination of corporal/physical punishment and all other cruel or degrading punishment of children, May 2011. Ibidem.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION





## What this document is about

Parenting a child is one of life's most powerful experiences. It can bring tremendous joy, love, pride, excitement and happiness to our lives. It can bring out the very best in us. But, at the same time, it can challenge our patience and our ability to handle frustration. Sometimes it can bring out the anger and violence in us.

All parents, no matter where they live or what their circumstances may be, need support and information. This document provides fundamental information to help parents build strong relationships with their children, and avoid reacting to them with anger and violence. It sets out the basic building blocks of positive parent-child relationships and demonstrates how these building blocks can be used to resolve conflict constructively.

This document does not provide a prescription or recipe for how parents should handle specific situations. Rather, it helps parents reflect on their own actions, and to better understand their children's actions. It also shows parents how they can actively use this knowledge to guide their children as they grow, while building strong relationships to last a lifetime.

## Who this document is for

This document is intended for parents of children of all ages, in all cultures. The information it contains will be useful in all parent-child relationships. But families with particular challenges, such as trauma, conflict or violence between parents, or children with neurological concerns or chronic illness, will need additional information and support.

This document will be helpful to professionals such as teachers, early childhood educators, youth support workers, and educational assistants. It may provide insight that can help professionals teach and support children more effectively.

The information in this document will also help policy makers, legislators, and parliamentarians to better understand "positive discipline". It sets out a vision of non-violent, effective parenting that can be integrated into policy to support child protection laws.



## How this guide is organized

This guide takes readers through a series of steps toward understanding how parents can effectively guide their children and build strong, healthy relationships with them. Each step builds on the ones before it, so it will be most helpful to read the entire guide in sequence. This approach is based on principles of children's rights, research on physical and humiliating punishment, and four principles of effecting parenting - focusing on long-term goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel, and problem-solving. The following chapters explain each of these components of the approach.

Chapter 2 provides an explanation of children's rights and their relevance to parenting. In this chapter, you will learn about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles it sets out for promoting healthy child development and parenting.

Chapter 3 describes the findings of research on physical and humiliating punishment. It summarizes what has been learned over the past 20 years and explains why these punishments do not take parents where they want to go.

Chapter 4 introduces the building blocks of healthy parent-child relationships. In this chapter, you will think about your own goals for your child's development, and you will learn about the two most powerful tools for reaching your goals - warmth and structure.

Chapter 5 takes you through the stages of child development. It provides information on how children think and feel at different ages and why they behave as they do. You will practice problem-solving to figure out why children might behave in various ways and you will evaluate the effectiveness of different responses to those behaviours.

References provides a list of resources on building healthy parent-child relationships that are available in various languages. These resources may provide further insights and may help you to practice your skills.

# CHAPTER 2

## CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



### What are children's rights?

All people have basic rights. These rights apply equally to everyone regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability. Rights are inherent to all humans. Our rights have been agreed upon by all of the countries of the world and set out in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. That treaty sets out the standards for how human beings should treat each other. One of its main principles is that we all have the right to be treated with respect and dignity by each other.

Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. *Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

Not only adults have rights - children also have rights. But because children are small and dependent, adults often do not consider them to be full human beings with rights. Even the rights set out in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* have not been applied equally to children and adults through the years. This situation led to the development of a human rights treaty specifically focused on children - the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

### What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Over a period of 10 years, all of the member countries of the United Nations came to agreement on the fundamental rights of children around the world. They set out these rights in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1989.

Governments around the world then studied this treaty and decided whether to ratify it. By ratifying, they would commit to putting its principles into practice through law and policy.

Today, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has been ratified by more countries than any other human rights treaty in history. In fact, it has been ratified by every country of the world but two (the United States and Somalia). This means that virtually all governments, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America or Oceania, have committed themselves to upholding the rights of children.

### How do children's rights relate to parenting?

The Convention recognizes the vital importance of families and the critical role parents play in guiding children throughout their development.

The family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children. *Preamble, Convention on the Rights of the Child*

But the Convention also recognizes that children have basic rights within their families: to develop as individuals; to protection from violence; to have their perspectives heard; and to have their dignity respected. These rights are relevant to parenting in several ways.

1. By recognizing that children are full human beings, we can no longer think of them as parents' property. Human rights principles guarantee that no person may be the property of another. This means that parents may not treat children in any way they wish.

# CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

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The child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. *Preamble, Convention on the Rights of the Child*

2. By recognizing children's rights to protection from violence, we can no longer justify using violence for any reason. This means that parents may not use physical or humiliating punishment to correct or control their children's behaviour.

All appropriate measures shall be taken to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence. *Article 19, Convention on the Rights of the Child*

3. By recognizing children's rights to express their perspectives, we can no longer impose our will on them without considering their point of view. This means that parents must try to understand situations of conflict through the eyes of the child, explain things in a way the child can understand, and encourage the child to express his or her thoughts and feelings.

Children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. Their views should be given weight according to their age and level of maturity. *Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child*

4. By recognizing children's rights to dignity, we can no longer shame or humiliate them. This means that parents must consider the impact of their words and actions on the child's developing sense of self-worth. They should nurture their children's positive emotional development and teach them skills for interacting with others in a way that respects their rights.

The child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. *Preamble, Convention on the Rights of the Child*

For many parents around the world, including many living in Europe, raising children with recognition of their rights is a new idea. Most parents of today were raised before the Convention was written. Many of us were brought up with physical and humiliating punishment in an era when children were "seen and not heard." So it can be difficult to envision what parenting that respects children's rights could look like. It can be especially difficult to picture what discipline could look like without hitting and shouting.

The Convention recognizes that one of parents' roles is to help children understand their rights, as well as the rights of others, in a way that is appropriate to the child's level of understanding. This is a huge challenge for parents who are themselves learning about rights and who may not feel confident in their understanding of children's development. Therefore, parents need information and support to make the Convention's vision of parenting a reality.

Parents and legal guardians shall receive assistance in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities. *Article 18, Convention on the Rights of the Child*

This document describes an approach to parenting that teaches children important values while respecting children's rights. It is:

- non-violent,
- solution-focused,
- respectful of children's rights, and
- based on child development principles.

# CHAPTER 3

## PHYSICAL AND HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT



One of the greatest challenges to adopting an parenting approach that respects children's rights is the long-held belief that children learn from being hurt or shamed. This belief has been popular in virtually every country around the world, but that is changing rapidly due to recent research findings and growing recognition of children's rights.

## What does research tell us about the impact of physical and humiliating punishment on children?<sup>7</sup>

Most parents hope that their children will learn important lessons from punishment. However, what children actually learn is very different from what parents intend to teach.

*I feel like my mom hates me. I feel like I have no one to lean on for the future. It's like my world, it's ended*

1. Physical and humiliating punishments **weaken the parent-child bond**. Children depend on their parents to keep

*Children never forget*

them safe from harm. When parents hurt them physically or emotionally, children learn that their parents cannot be trusted to keep them safe. Building a strong trusting relationship is the foundation of effective parenting and healthy child development. A weakened parent-child bond can lead to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

2. Physical and humiliating punishments **impair children's emotional development**. Children need to know that they are valued. Physical and humiliating punishments can be felt by children as rejection by the people they need most in the world. This experience can have lifelong effects on their sense of self-worth. Children who are physically punished are more

*They feel alone, helpless and sad. They become isolated and no one can reach them anymore*

*A smack is pain, humiliation and fear*

likely to become depressed and anxious, to use drugs and alcohol, and to develop psychiatric and mental health problems. Children who are emotionally punished are more likely to have low self-esteem; to be emotionally unstable; to have difficulty becoming independent; to become shy, introverted or extremely compliant; and to become depressed and suicidal.

3. Physical and humiliating punishments can create feelings of **resentment and hostility** toward parents that children cannot express directly. They also create fear of parents, which can lead children to become dishonest. And these punishments provide a model of aggressive solutions to conflict that children may then apply in their own power relationships. Together, these effects lead to higher levels of aggression in children who have been physically or emotionally punished. Physical punishment predicts higher levels of violence against siblings, bullying,

*They feel abandoned and alone, as if nothing else matters anymore*

*Children feel humiliated, helpless. They feel as if a great injustice has been done to them*

and assaulting and injuring dating partners. Humiliating punishment is associated with lying, stealing, and violence. Both physical and humiliating punishments are associated with lower levels of empathy and higher levels of antisocial behaviour.

4. Physical punishment increases the likelihood of **physical injury** to the child, as violence can easily escalate. Children who are slapped and smacked by their parents are many times more likely to also be

### PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT INCLUDES:

- slapping
- smacking
- punching
- hitting with objects
- pulling ears or hair
- forcing a child to hold an uncomfortable position
- forcing a child to stand in the heat or cold
- putting a child into a closet or cupboard

### HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT INCLUDES:

- shouting
- yelling
- name-calling and put-downs
- ignoring
- embarrassing
- shaming
- rejecting
- withdrawing love
- public humiliation
- threatening violence against the child or people, animals or objects the child loves

<sup>7</sup> This section is based largely on two studies. The first is a meta-analysis by E. Gershoff who analyzed the findings of 88 studies of "everyday" physical punishment ("Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review". *Psychological Bulletin*, 2002, volume 128, pages 539-579). The second is a comprehensive review of research on emotional punishment by S.N. Hart, M.R. Brassard, N.J. Bingelli, & H.A. Davidson ("Psychological maltreatment", *American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children's Handbook on the Abuse of Children*, 2002, Edited by J.E.B. Myers and others; Sage Publications, pages 79-103).



# PHYSICAL AND HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT

punched and kicked by their parents. Sometimes, punishment escalates when children resist it, fuelling the parent's anger which raises the level of force. Other times, children are unable to control the behaviour that is being punished; a parent who believes that physical punishment works is likely to increase its intensity when the child doesn't comply. In some cases, children get used to being hit, so the parent must hit harder to get the same effect. And in other situations, children fall as they are hit, banging their heads or falling down stairs, sustaining injuries indirectly. Many studies have found that most of what we call "physical abuse" actually is physical punishment; that is, a parent's attempt to correct or control a child's behaviour by inflicting punishment on the child's body. Many children around the world die every year as their parents attempt to control their behaviour through physical force.

*I get smacked when I don't listen to my parents. It passes like the wind but it hurts so much*

*They feel as if their parents don't want them anymore. They think less of themselves, as if they deserve what's happening. They get used to the beating*

## What do children's rights principles tell us about the place of physical and humiliating punishments in children's lives?

The overarching principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that in all actions concerning children, the **best interests of the child** shall be a primary consideration (Article 3). Research findings are consistent: physical and humiliating punishments predict only negative outcomes for children. Therefore, these punishments are not in the best interests of children.

The Convention also states that **children's survival and development must be ensured to the maximum extent possible** (Article 6). There is no evidence that physical or humiliating punishment has any positive effect at all on children's development. In fact, using physical force against a child greatly increases the likelihood of injury and even death. Therefore, these punishments interfere with, rather than ensure, children's survival and development.

According to the Convention, we must do all that we can to **protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence** (Article 19). In the past, some people have not viewed physical or humiliating punishments as violence. But the United Nations' position is clear:

*There is no ambiguity: 'all forms of physical or mental violence' does not leave room for any level of legalized violence against children. Corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment are forms of violence.  
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8, 2006*

*Children's rights must be respected and ensured irrespective of the parent's or guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.  
Article 2, Convention on the Rights of the Child*


Sometimes, it is argued that physical and humiliating punishments are traditional parts of a community's culture, so they should not or cannot be eliminated. But traditions are meant to preserve unique cultural knowledge and values. Physical and humiliating punishments are not unique to any culture, nor do they pass on unique cultural knowledge. They harm children physically and emotionally. Traditions need to be questioned if they harm members of the culture. Children's rights principles are, in essence, about setting standards that **ensure children**

## CHAPTER 3

are treated as full human beings with worth and dignity. Hurting and humiliating children violates those standards. These forms of punishment convey the message to children that they are not worthy of respect for their bodies or their self-worth.

*Corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8, 2006*

The consistency of research findings on the negative outcomes associated with physical and humiliating punishments, together with the clarity of children's rights principles on this issue, has led a growing number of nations to abolish these forms of punishment. There are now more than 30 countries with such prohibitions in all settings<sup>8</sup>.



*Children have the right to a non-violent upbringing. Corporal punishment, psychological injuries and other humiliating measures are prohibited*

Germany's Civil Code

*Parents/guardians must exercise their authority with respect to the child's physical and psychological integrity.*

Spain's Civil Code,  
Articles 154 and 268

<sup>8</sup> End all Corporal Punishment of Children, <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/>.

# PHYSICAL AND HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT

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*Children are entitled to care, security, and a good upbringing. Children are to be treated with respect for their person and individuality and may not be subjected to corporal punishment or any other humiliating treatment.*

Sweden's Parenthood and Guardianship Code, Chapter 6

*Caring for and raising one's child includes the care and the responsibility for the emotional and physical wellbeing of the child and for his or her safety as well as for the promotion of the development of his or her personality. In the care and upbringing of the child the parents will not use emotional or physical violence or any other humiliating treatment*

Netherlands' Civil Code, Article 1:247

*The child has the right to be shown respect for his or her personality and individuality and may not be made subject to physical punishments or to other humiliating or degrading treatments.*

Romania's Law on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, Section 1, Article 28

*Persons exercising parental care, care or alternative care over a minor are forbidden to use corporal punishment, inflict psychological suffering and use any other forms of child humiliation.*

Poland's Law on the Prevention of Family Violence, Article 2

# CHAPTER 4

## BUILDING HEALTHY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS



## CHAPTER 4

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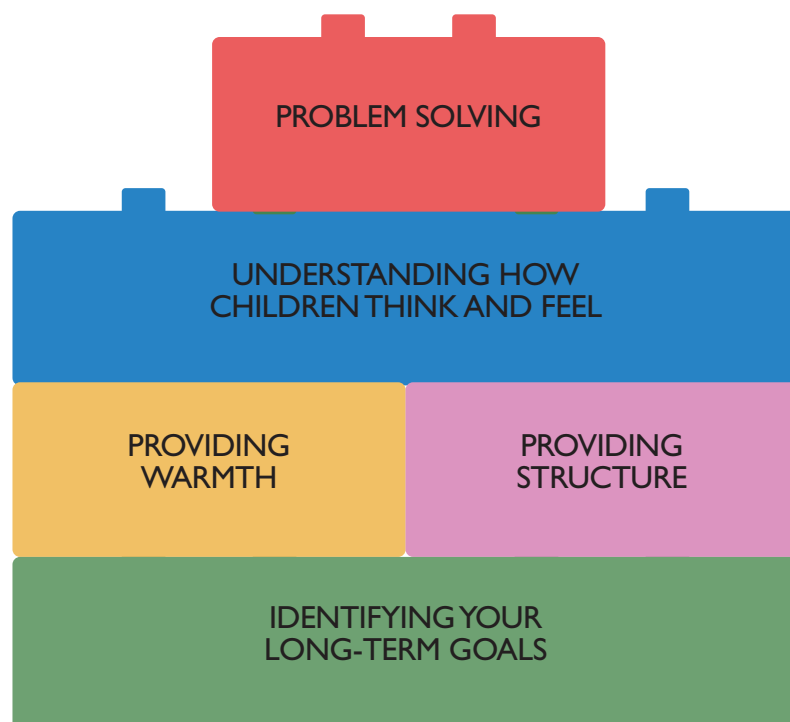
Some parents believe that without hitting and shouting, they will lose their authority, or that they will have to become permissive. Other parents want to stop hitting and shouting but they just don't know what to do when they are frustrated or stressed. Sometimes the challenges of parenting seem overwhelming and nothing we do seems to be right.

Most of us become parents with little knowledge of how children develop, so we rely on our instincts or our own childhood experiences. But often our instincts are just emotional reactions that aren't well thought-out. And sometimes our own childhood experiences were negative or even violent ones.

So how can parents build strong, healthy relationships with their children and teach their children all that they need to learn without physical or humiliating punishments? They can do this by using four principles that can be applied in all interactions with their children - not just the challenging ones. These four principles are:

1. Identifying your long-term parenting goals.
2. Providing warmth and structure in all of your interactions with your child.
3. Understanding how children think and feel in different situations.
4. Taking a problem-solving, rather than punitive, approach to conflict.

These four principles are the “building blocks” of healthy parent-child relationships and of positive discipline.

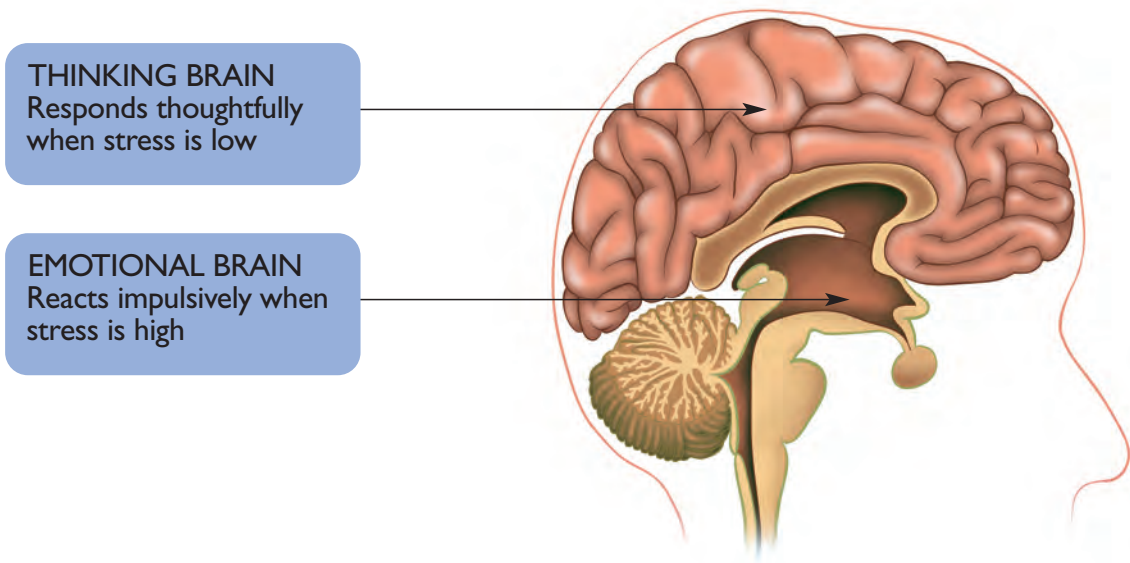


## The challenges of parenting

Parents' days are filled with trying to find ways to get their children to do something *now*: to put their shoes on *now*, get off the road *now*, come into the house *now*, stop hitting *now*. When children don't do what we want them to do, our stress levels quickly rise. When we're also feeling time pressure, public embarrassment or fear, our stress increases further. And the concerns we are facing at work or in other parts of our lives can compound that stress.

When we are calm, our "thinking brain" responds rationally. We can think things through and act constructively. But when we are stressed, our bodies and brains react. Our muscles become tense, our heart rates speed up, and our brains shift into a panic mode. Our "emotional brain" takes over. We lose our ability to think clearly. Instead, we react emotionally. If we are feeling panic, powerlessness or desperation, we can quickly react with anger, hitting or shouting. We can say things that we don't mean to say, and do things that we feel ashamed of later. Taking a problem-solving, rather than punitive, approach to conflict.

This is all very normal and it happens to every parent at some time. But every time it happens, we weaken the parent-child relationship. The more often it happens, the weaker the relationship becomes.



## What can help us to respond more constructively in these situations?

It can be very helpful to recognize that these situations often develop very quickly over short-term issues. Our goals in short-term situations are often very different from our long-term goals. The challenge is to shift our focus from our short-term goals to our long-term goals. If we can do this, short-term stresses become *opportunities* to teach children what we really want them to learn.

Imagine that you are looking through a lens that can "zoom in" and "zoom out". When you are zooming in, you will only see the short-term situation, feel your stress, and react to what is going on in that moment. But when you zoom out, you will see the bigger context. You will see the factors that have contributed to the situation, and you will see where this situation will lead you next. You might even see how it will influence situations well into the future.

By zooming out, you can see the reasons for your child's behaviour, and you can see what your child is learning from your reaction. Using this lens, you can start to see the difference it makes to focus on your long-term goals in short-term situations.

The first step in building a healthy relationship with your child is to identify your long-term parenting goals.



## IDENTIFYING YOUR LONG-TERM GOALS

## The goals of parenting

To see the difference it makes to focus on your long-term goals, even in stressful short-term situations, imagine this scenario:

*It is a typical morning in your home. Your child is getting ready for school and it's getting late.*

First, think about what you want your child to accomplish right now. Probably, you are focusing on goals such as getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, and gathering the things that will be needed for school that day. These are your **short-term goals**.

*Your child is dawdling and you see the time is getting very short. You remind your child to hurry, but he or she doesn't speed up.*

Now think about how you are feeling. What is happening to your body, your facial expression and your voice? Probably, you are feeling your muscles getting tense, your heart is beating faster, your face is looking serious, and your voice is getting loud. What is happening to your emotions? Probably, your frustration level is rising quickly, you might be feeling a sense of panic, and you are rapidly entering a state of anger.

*You keep telling your child to hurry, but he seems to just move more slowly. Your voice is sounding angry and you are stomping through the house, telling him that if he makes you late you'll be in trouble at work.*

What are you thinking in this situation? Maybe you're thinking, "I know he can get ready. He's doing this on purpose to make me late." Or maybe you're thinking, "Why doesn't she ever listen to me? I need to MAKE her listen." Or maybe you're thinking, "He can't do this to me. I'll show HIM who's the boss in the family."

What do you do next? Many parents in this situation will start shouting. They might say things like, "If you aren't ready in two minutes, I'll leave without you." Or "Why do you always do this to me?" Or "Why can't you ever learn?" They might threaten the child with punishment, such as spanking or taking something away that the child loves. They might threaten to take the child to school before she's dressed. Some parents will grab and shake the child, hit the child, or call the child names, like "stupid".

What is happening to the child as this scenario unfolds? Usually, when our emotional

**SHORT-TERM GOALS  
ARE THE THINGS  
YOU WANT YOUR  
CHILD TO DO  
RIGHT NOW**



# BUILDING HEALTHY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

brains take over, we lose sight of the effects of our actions on our children. If we could zoom out, we would see that the child is becoming stressed as well, frightened by our anger or our threats. Children can feel very hurt and sad by being called names. Our punishments can make them feel unloved and unwanted. All of these reactions shut down their thinking brains. So the child's emotional brain now responds; the child cries, hits back, or yells. Your child is feeling just as panicked as you are. Two panicked people are not able to find a constructive solution to the problem.

## WHEN OUR EMOTIONAL BRAINS TAKE OVER, WE LOSE SIGHT OF THE EFFECTS OF OUR ACTIONS ON OUR CHILDREN

The likely ending of this scenario is that you angrily take the child to school, without a smile or a goodbye hug. By the time you get to work, your thinking brain has switched back on and you begin feel very badly about the things you said and did. Your child is having trouble concentrating at school, feeling unloved, rejected and abandoned. The teacher might get frustrated with the child for not listening. The child might be thinking about being called "stupid" just before writing a test, or feeling resentful and taking it out on younger children. You are having trouble concentrating at work because you feel ashamed of your behaviour and you are worried about your child. Your short-term goal might have been met - you got to work on time - but your relationship and your child's sense of self-worth have been harmed in the process.

Now imagine this scenario:

*Your child is all grown up. You are about to celebrate your child's 20 th birthday. Imagine what your child will look like at that age. What kind of person do you hope your child will be at that age?*

Think about the characteristics you hope your child will have as a young adult. Many parents hope that their children will be confident, honest, respectful, empathic, motivated, responsible, wise, and non-violent. Are these the kinds of characteristics that you hope to see in your child?

*What kind of relationship do you hope to have with your child when he or she is 20 years old?*

What do you hope your child's feelings will be towards you? Many parents hope that their children will love them, want to spend time with them, come to them for advice, care for them, and trust them. Is this the kind of relationship you hope to have with your child?

When you think about your hopes for the future, you are identifying your **long-term goals**.

Now think about whether your reactions to short-term stressful situations are leading you toward your long-term goals.



# CHAPTER 4

When you shout, are you showing your child how to be respectful? When you hit, are you showing your child how to solve problems without violence? When you threaten, are you building a trusting relationship with your child?

Children learn to deal with stress by watching how we do it. If we react with shouting, hitting and name-calling, we are teaching them *the opposite* of what we want them to learn. Every time we react with our emotional brains, we are losing an opportunity to show our children a better way.

**LONG-TERM GOALS ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS WE HOPE OUR CHILDREN WILL HAVE AS ADULTS - AND THE RELATIONSHIPS WE HOPE TO HAVE WITH THEM AT THAT AGE**

A key to healthy relationships and effective teaching is to see short-term challenges as *opportunities* to work toward our long-term goals.

When you feel your muscles begin to tense, your heart rate begin to speed up, and your voice begin to rise, this is a signal that you have an opportunity to teach your child something important. You have an opportunity to teach your child how to:

- manage stress
- communicate respectfully even when frustrated
- handle conflict without hitting
- consider other people's feelings
- achieve your goal without harming others physically or emotionally

Stress and frustration give you opportunities to be a role model for your children. When you cope well, you show them how to cope with their own frustration.

This is one of the great challenges of parenting - meeting our long-term goals while also meeting our short-term goals. How can it be done? It can be done by focusing our thinking brains on the two most powerful parenting tools - *warmth and structure*.



## Providing warmth

To understand why warmth is important to parent-child relationships and to children's learning, complete the following exercise.

Imagine that you are starting to learn a new language.  
For each question, check the answer that applies more to you.

**Will you learn better if your teacher:**

- tells you what you are doing right, or
- tells you only what you are doing wrong?

**Will you learn better if you feel:**

- safe with your teacher, or
- afraid that she will hit you if you make a mistake?

**Will you learn better if you think:**

- your teacher will stay with you and support you when you make mistakes, or
- storm out of the room in anger when you make errors?

**Will you want to spend time with a teacher who:**

- is kind and understanding, or
- embarrasses and criticizes you?

**Will you want to learn more if your teacher:**

- tells you how capable you are, or
- tells you that you're stupid?

**Will you want to tell your teacher when you're having problems if you expect:**

- he will listen and help, or
- he will get angry and punish you?

No matter where they live or what they do, most adults will choose the first answer to each of these questions. This is because we are motivated to try, to learn from our mistakes, and do better next time when we feel supported by those around us. If we feel afraid, we become less motivated and less confident. Some of us will become resentful and fight back. Others will become anxious, which makes it difficult to learn. Others might come to believe they are stupid, give up trying, and become depressed.

*Be kind to your children. Be happy and understand the child's feelings*

Just like us, when children feel afraid, they lose their motivation to try. They can become resentful, anxious, or depressed. And just like us, children learn best when they feel respected, understood, trusted, safe, secure and loved. This is **warmth**. Warmth is physical and emotional security. In an atmosphere of warmth, children feel safe, even if they make mistakes. They trust their parents, which builds their confidence and their motivation to try. They also learn the importance of empathy and respect for others' feelings. A warm home climate provides the foundation for meeting your long-term goals.

*A parent should support his or her child, consider how it feels. Get the child to feel safe and happy*

# CHAPTER 4

WARMTH IS PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SECURITY. A WARM HOME CLIMATE PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION FOR MEETING YOUR LONG-TERM PARENTING GOALS

How do parents provide warmth to their children? They do this by:

- showing them they are loved, even when they do something wrong
- comforting them when they are hurt or afraid
- listening to them
- looking at the situation from their point of view
- playing with them
- laughing with them
- supporting them when they are facing challenges
- encouraging them when they have to do something difficult
- telling them they believe in them
- recognizing their efforts and successes
- showing them that they trust them
- having fun with them
- hugging them
- reading to them
- saying, “I love you.”

Warmth is absolutely necessary to building a strong, healthy parent-child relationship. It must be present at all times. But it is not sufficient. Warmth must always be accompanied by structure.

## Providing structure

To understand why structure is important to parent-child relationships and to children’s learning, complete the following exercise.

Imagine again that you are starting to learn a new language.  
For each question, check the answer that applies more to you.

**Will you learn better if your teacher:**

shows you how to spell new words and teaches you the rules of spelling, or

expects you to figure out how to spell new words and punishes you when you make mistakes?

**Will you learn better if your teacher:**

gives you the information you need to succeed on a test, or

doesn’t give you the information you need and then gets angry when you fail the test?

**Will you want to spend time with a teacher who:**

talks your mistakes over with you and shows you how to improve next time, or

afraid that she will hit you if you make a mistake?

**Will you learn better if you think:**

your teacher will stay with you and support you when you make mistakes, or

hits you when you make mistakes?

**Will you want to learn more if your teacher:**

gives you tips, advice and encouragement to try, or

tells you that you’ll never be able to learn?

# BUILDING HEALTHY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Will you want to tell your teacher when you're having problems if you expect:

- he will try to understand why you are having problems and help you find a new approach, or
- he will get angry and punish you?

Most adults will choose the first answer to these questions. This is because we are more likely to succeed at learning when we are given the information that we need, and when someone talks calmly with us about our mistakes and shows us how to improve next time. If our teachers don't give us the information we need, don't explain things to us, and punish us when we make mistakes, we can't learn how to improve our skills. If we are hurt or embarrassed when we make mistakes, we are likely to start hiding them. If our teachers are aggressive rather than empathic, we are likely to become resentful and to learn that aggression is appropriate.

*If a child does something wrong, talk to them and show them what is right and wrong*

If we set rules for children that we do not follow ourselves, or expect them to figure things out and punish them when they make mistakes, they will feel confused and anxious. If we try to force them to behave in certain ways, they will resist. If we hurt them when they make mistakes, they will become afraid to try. Just like us, children learn best when they have information, when they are helped to find constructive ways of meeting their goals, and when they understand the reasons for rules and

guidelines. This is **structure**. Structure is information and clear, respectful communication. Structure is not coercion, control or punishment. Structure gives children the tools they need to succeed when you're not there.

*See things from their point of view and show understanding*

How do parents provide structure? They do this by:

**STRUCTURE IS INFORMATION AND CLEAR, RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION. IT GIVES CHILDREN THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED WHEN YOU'RE NOT THERE**

- acting as positive role models and guides
- explaining the reasons for rules
- involving their children in setting the rules
- explaining their point of view and listening to their children's point of view
- helping their children find ways to fix their mistakes in a way that helps them to learn
- teaching them about the effects of their actions on other people
- talking with them often
- being fair and flexible
- controlling anger and avoiding threats
- preparing them for difficult situations by telling them what to expect and how they can cope
- giving them the information they need to make good decisions
- avoiding threats of hitting, monsters or other things that children fear, or taking away love

Building a healthy parent-child relationship requires a combination of warmth and structure throughout the child's development - from infancy to young adulthood. To accomplish this requires a *way of thinking* that is focused on *long-term goals* and provides the *warm learning climate* and *information* required to achieve those goals over the course of the child's development.

*Be serious and kind at the same time. Say things without hurting*

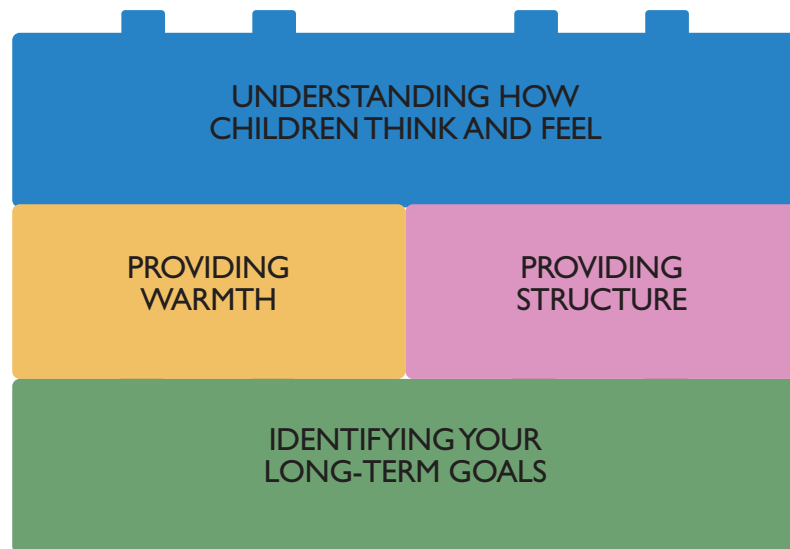
All children (and adults) learn best when they have support and information. But children of different ages need different kinds of support and information. The next chapter will describe how children develop. This information will help you think about the kinds of warmth and structure they need at different ages.

*A parent should always be there for their children and help them*

# CHAPTER 5

## UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL





A child's development is an ongoing, never-ending process. It is because children change that we are able to teach them new information and new skills. All learning builds on prior learning - and forms a foundation for future learning. When we see the world through the eyes of a 1-year-old, a 5-year-old or a 13-year-old, we can begin to understand their behaviour. It always reflects the way they see the world at a particular stage of development.

To guide our children effectively, we need to:

- have realistic expectations of our children's abilities at different ages
- understand that they might not have the experiences or information they need in order to succeed
- reflect on what we could do differently to help them learn
- recognize that their perspectives could be different from ours

In this chapter, you will learn how to reach your parenting goals by providing warmth and structure that are appropriate to your child's stage of development.

## Pregnancy

Our relationships with our children begin even before they are born. In the first three months of pregnancy, the basic brain structures of the fetus are formed. By 30 weeks, the fetus can hear the sounds of the outside world, can move to the rhythm of the mother's speech, and can even recognize the mother's voice<sup>9</sup>. The process of attachment between the parents and the child has already begun.

If the baby is wanted and loved prior to birth, the parents are likely to anticipate the birth eagerly and greet the baby with warmth and happiness. If the pregnancy is unwanted, the mother may not attach to the baby before birth and may greet the child with ambivalence or even rejection. The conditions of pregnancy set the stage for healthy parent-child relationships and shape the emotional climate of the world that the baby enters at birth. These conditions include the mother's physical and emotional health, the level of stress she experiences, the degree of social support she has, her housing conditions, her access to prenatal care, and other aspects of her social and physical environments.

<sup>9</sup> Kisilevsky, B.S. et al. (2009). Fetal sensitivity to properties of maternal speech and language. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 32, 59-71.



## Infancy - birth to 2 years

Babies are brand-new to the world. But over the first two years of their lives, they will develop in amazing ways. They will learn a great deal about you and about their relationship with you. Three very important developments in this stage are: 1) attachment; 2) language; and 3) independence.

### Attachment

Being so new to the world, babies can't make much sense of things, so they don't know how to get their needs met. They also don't know any words. Luckily, they have a built-in reflex that helps them to communicate - crying. Crying is a survival instinct for the baby. It is a signal for parents to respond and help. It also lays the foundation for a unique and powerful emotional bond between babies and their parents.

Babies cry for many reasons, including:

- hunger
- thirst
- feeling too hot or too cold
- pain
- being wrapped too tightly or too loosely (babies have different preferences)
- allergies to foods that the mother eats that enter the baby through breast milk
- allergies to formulas or early foods
- teething
- fever, headache, stomach ache, sore throat, nausea

Another reason babies cry is that their brains are becoming "organized". It is quite common for babies to cry at the same time each night. This is a sign that their bodies and brains are developing a rhythm. Crying is part of this process.

Babies don't understand why they are crying. Their own crying can even scare them. But over time, they learn whether they can trust us to listen and respond. Babies' crying gives parents their most valuable opportunities to build a strong foundation for their future relationship.

Crying is babies' language. They aren't trying to make their parents mad when they cry. They need to cry to tell us when they are uncomfortable. When we respond to their cries, they learn that they can rely on us to comfort them and ensure that they are safe. If they learn this, they will develop **trust** in us and a strong **attachment** to us.

This is parents' primary task during infancy: to provide a responsive, safe and secure environment for their babies.

What young babies need most is **warmth**. They can't understand rules. They can't understand your feelings or what you're saying to them. What they do understand is the feeling of security they find with you. One of the things that they need most is to be held, cuddled, rocked and carried. This physical comfort is very important to building a strong relationship with the baby. A baby who feels safe and comforted with you will develop a strong attachment to you.

Parents can get very tired caring for babies. Sometimes they might feel like hitting or shaking a baby who doesn't stop crying. Shaking or hitting a baby will not stop the crying, but it might:

- make the baby afraid of you
- injure the baby
- damage the baby's brain
- kill the baby

Babies' bodies and brains are fragile. Never shake or hit a baby.

A baby who can't stop crying needs to know that you are there, and to be held and comforted. You can't spoil a baby.

But you won't always be able to calm your baby. If you find that you are very tired or stressed, be sure to ask for help from your family, friends, doctor, or other resources in your community.

Why does a strong parent-infant attachment matter?

1. Babies who trust their caregivers feel emotionally secure. They become easier to comfort when they are upset and they will find it easier to separate from their parents when they are older. They are less likely to be anxious or fearful.
2. Babies who trust their caregivers also tend to trust other people, expecting them to be dependable and responsive. So they are more likely to develop positive social relationships with siblings, peers, and teachers.
3. Babies who feel secure tend to grow into toddlers who explore their environments because they expect to be safe. Exploration is crucial for children's brain development. This is how they learn concepts, such as number, colour, shape, sound, size and weight. The more that babies can explore safely, the more they will understand about their world, and the more ready they will be for school when the time comes.

### Language

As babies get older, they gradually learn to communicate through language more than through crying. About halfway through the first year, they begin to "babble". They make sounds like "ba" or "da" or "ma".

When their parents respond by repeating those sounds back, babies begin to learn their native language. They learn which sounds are important and they practice saying them. Over time, those sounds will grow into words.

When parents respond to babies' early communications with smiles and encouragement, their babies learn that when they speak, people will listen. This is one of the most important building blocks of your relationship - **communication**.

Why is this early communication important?

1. Through this process, children will gradually learn how to express themselves and they will learn that you will listen. At this early stage, parents can help their children learn how to express their feelings and can show them that they will respect their children's attempts to communicate.
2. Babies whose caregivers respond to their laughter, babbling and early words with encouragement tend to develop large vocabularies. If they have more words to express themselves, they find it easier to learn how to reach their goals through language.

### Independence

About halfway through the first year, babies learn to crawl. This changes everything! Parents now have to watch them all the time because they don't understand that they can hurt themselves or other people, or that they can damage things. But their movement is critical to the development of their brains and bodies.

During this stage, babies learn how to use their muscles. They learn how to grasp and chew. They love to grab things and put them into their mouths. When they do this, they aren't being "bad"; they are exercising their muscles. They learn how to use their hands and fingers. They practice chewing so that they will be able to eat solid food and to speak. And by touching and tasting, they learn about all of the objects around them.

Around the end of the first year, babies learn to walk. Now they are "toddlers". They are thrilled by this new independence. They can go wherever they want to go, and reach things that they couldn't reach before. They love to explore every corner - and to touch and taste *everything!*

This exploration is a toddler's journey of discovery. It is how children learn about their fascinating world. It is absolutely necessary to their brain development.

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

For example, they will drop toys over and over and over again. They don't do this to annoy us. They do it to understand what "falling" is, what "bouncing" is, and what "crashing" is.

They will put their hands in their food to discover its texture. They will put toys in their mouths to discover their taste. They will spit out their food to see how it feels.

None of this behaviour is "bad". It is your child's task at this stage to discover the world. Toddlers are explorers. When we try to stop them from exploring, they become very upset. They cry and stomp their feet because we have blocked their desire to learn. They want nothing more than to learn about their world.

It is a primary task of parents to ensure that the world of toddlers is safe for exploration. By exploring, they will learn a lot very quickly. They will want to know the name of everything that they see. If we respond encouragingly, they will learn an amazing number of words very quickly, developing a rich vocabulary and a love of words. This is a wonderful opportunity to enrich children's language by talking about everything you see, reading together, listening to what they say, and answering their questions.

One of the words that toddlers learn early is "No!" When toddlers say "No!" they are not being defiant or disobedient. They are trying to tell us how they feel. While they know the names of many objects, they don't yet know how to name their feelings. So a toddler who says, "No!" might be trying to say:

- "I don't like that."
- "I don't want to leave."
- "I want that."
- "I want to choose my own clothes."
- "I'm frustrated."

"No!" is toddlers' way of expressing and practicing their independence. They are not trying to make you late or make you mad. They are not defying you or being selfish. They are saying that they want to make their own decisions. They don't know how you're feeling or what you need. They are not yet capable of understanding another person's feelings.

Toddlers experience a great deal of frustration every day. They want to be independent, but we can't always allow them to do what they want to do. When we say, "no" to them we are usually trying to keep them safe and teach them important rules. But they don't understand our intentions. They only feel the frustration of hearing "No!"

Sometimes, the result is a tantrum. The frustration builds up and children don't know how to release it. Their language is not developed enough for them to express their feelings. So they collapse in sadness, discouragement and frustration. They express their feelings through tears, screams, and throwing themselves onto the floor. These responses are most likely when children are tired, hungry, thirsty or beyond the limits of their endurance.

Sometimes, parents do the same thing! When we don't understand our children's intentions when they say "No!" we sometimes become frustrated and have tantrums too

Young children need to explore. This is how they learn. It is absolutely necessary for their brain development. But parents need to keep their children safe. The best solution is to "child-proof" your home.

- Put away all objects that a baby could choke on
- Put all sharp objects, poisons, breakables up high or in locked cupboards.
- Cover electrical outlets.
- Lock up knives, tools and medicines.
- Turn pot handles toward the centre of the stove.
- Make sure that heavy objects can't be pulled down.

# CHAPTER 5

## WHEN A TODDLER SAYS “NO!” HE IS NOT BEING DEFIANT OR DISOBEDIENT. HE IS TRYING TO TELL YOU HOW HE FEELS AND ASSERTING HIS INDEPENDENCE

- especially when we're tired or hungry. If we understand what is going on inside the child, we can show them how to handle frustration and express their feelings in a constructive way.

The way that parents deal with toddlers' desire for independence lays the foundation for teaching them how to resolve conflict constructively. Parents' responses can either increase the child's frustration and escalate the conflict, or teach the child skills that will last a lifetime while strengthening the parent-child relationship.

## HOW CAN PARENTS BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?

Remember that warmth and structure are the two most powerful tools to help you reach your long-term goals. To understand how parents can provide them to children during this stage, imagine this scenario:

*Your toddler is very active, running through the house touching things. The toddler has just reached for a pair of scissors that were left on a table. What should you do?*

Think about each of the following responses and decide which one is best, and why.

1. Slap the child's hands to teach him/her not to touch dangerous things.
2. Scold the child loudly, to scare him/her away from the scissors.
3. Take the scissors from the child gently, say calmly what they are called, and show how they cut paper. Explain that they can hurt us, so you will put them away in a safe place. Then distract the child's attention with a toy.

Before you respond, think about why the child has grabbed the scissors. Write as many possible reasons as you can here:

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Now think about your long-term goals. What kind of relationship do you want to have with your child over the long term? What characteristics do you want your child to develop? Write your long-term goals here:

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Would slapping the child help you reach your long-term goals?

Yes

No

Would scolding the child help you reach your long-term goals?

Yes

No

Would naming the object, showing what scissors are for, explaining that they can hurt us, putting them in a safe place and distracting the child help you reach your long-term goals?

Yes

No

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide warmth to your child. Remember that “warmth” is physical and emotional security.

Would smacking the child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would scolding the child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would naming the scissors, showing what they are for, explaining that they can hurt us, putting them in a safe place and distracting the child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide structure to your child. Remember that “structure” is the information that children need in order to learn.

Would smacking the child provide structure?  Yes  No

Would scolding the child provide structure?  Yes  No

Would naming the scissors, showing what they are for, explaining that they can hurt us, putting them in a safe place and distracting the child provide structure?  Yes  No

When you consider your long-term goals, the reasons why toddlers touch things, and the importance of providing warmth and structure, which of the 3 responses would you choose?

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## The preschool years (3 to 5)

If we have encouraged and taught them respectfully through infancy, children will want to learn more and more as they grow. They will ask questions and more questions! They will acquire large vocabularies. But while they are storing a great deal of information in their brains, they are still figuring out how things work. Three very important characteristics of this stage of development are: 1) curiosity; 2) imagination; and 3) fears.

### Curiosity

This is a tremendously exciting stage. Your child wants to know everything! When children of this age see something new, they want to know what it's called, what it's for, how it works, why it moves as it does ... They ask many, many questions!

Sometimes, parents get tired of trying to answer all of their children's questions. Sometimes they don't know the answers themselves! But what preschoolers are showing us with all of their questions is that they want to learn and understand. Their brains are primed for information - for structure.

At this stage, parents can build a strong foundation for their children's learning by responding respectfully to their children's questions. If we respect their curiosity, they will experience the joy of learning. This feeling will stay with them as they enter school. If we don't know the answer to a question, we can show them how we find information and encourage them to seek it.

**WHEN WE RESPECT  
PRESCHOOLERS'  
CURIOSITY, WE  
FOSTER THEIR LOVE  
OF LEARNING**

Parents who try to answer their children's questions, or help them find the answers, are teaching them that:

- it's ok to not know everything
- their ideas matter
- there are many ways to find information
- searching for answers and solving problems is fun

When children learn these things, they become more confident in the face of challenges, more patient in seeking information, and more motivated to keep learning.

**CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO SEEK INFORMATION.**

*Article 13, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

But sometimes children want to learn about dangerous things, such as how to light a candle, or what will happen if they jump head-first from a tall tree - or what will happen if they drop your favourite dish. Because children cannot be allowed to do dangerous things, they begin to learn about rules at this stage. The more they understand the reasons for rules, the more likely they are to follow them. Preschoolers want to

know "Why?" Why do birds fly? Why do fish swim? And why can't I light the candle? By asking "why?" your child is not challenging you. He really wants to know the answer.

When we answer children's questions, we teach them self-respect. When we encourage their exploration, we motivate them to learn. When we give them opportunities to solve problems, we show them that they are competent. When children believe that they are capable, they are much better prepared to master the challenges they will face in the years ahead.

## Imagination

At this stage, children begin to imagine. It is a magical time for children. They pretend to be all kinds of things - animals, babies, grown-ups. When they are pretending, it feels very real to them. They can become lost in their play.

When children play, they are not wasting time. Playing is their job. They learn very valuable things through play. They put themselves into other roles situations and see things through their eyes, developing a capacity for empathy. They solve problems, invent new things, do experiments, and figure out how things work, developing their brains and capacity for logic.

Children absolutely need to play. It is crucial to their healthy development. As their imaginations develop, they become more creative problem-solvers. As they take things apart and put them back together, they realize that they can figure things out. As they draw and sing, they become confident in expressing themselves through art. As they have opportunities to work out arguments, they become better at resolving conflict.

## Fears

As children's understanding grows and their imagination takes off, they can suddenly become afraid of things that didn't worry them when they were younger. Sometimes this development worries parents. But fears are signs of children's growing understanding. As they understand more about danger, they become more afraid of being hurt. As their imaginations grow, they become afraid of monsters and ghosts.

Children of this age don't yet have enough experience to know the difference between make-believe and reality. They believe that what they see - or even what they imagine - truly exists. So they might suddenly become afraid of masks, drawings in books, cartoon characters, or scary-looking toys. This happens because they have learned about danger, but they don't yet know that some things aren't real.

**PLAYING IS A PRESCHOOLER'S JOB**

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

## CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO PLAY.

*Article 31, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

In the minds of preschoolers, everything is alive. If you put on a mask, they will think you have become that creature. If they imagine that there is a monster under the bed, they believe it is true. If they see a clown, they believe the person under the make-up really looks like that. If they see a dinosaur in a movie, they believe that

it is alive in the theatre. Children of this age also believe that their dreams are real, so they can be very frightened alone in their rooms at night.

Preschoolers also can be frightened when their parents leave them. This is because they understand about danger, but they still don't understand that you will always come back. They also haven't even yet learned how to manage their fear. So, they can be very frightened when they are left alone or with people they don't know very well. They can become shy around strangers because they now understand the difference between strangers and people they know.

Children of this age also might refuse to be held by your friends or relatives. Those who used to love being held by their grandmothers might suddenly refuse to be held by them. When this happens, these children are not being rude. They are beginning to want control over their own bodies. They want to decide for themselves who can touch them. This is a very important development. By respecting children's body privacy, we teach them that they have rights to control their own bodies.

At this stage, children need a great deal of reassurance and support. They need to know that we understand and respect their feelings - and that we will keep them safe. They do not yet have much understanding of our feelings; they are only beginning to understand their own. Parents' primary task at this stage is to **respect their children's feelings**. We teach children to respect others' feelings by respecting theirs. When they trust that their parents will respect their feelings, they feel safe and become more confident. A young child's security and confidence are the foundation of all future learning.

Respecting children's feelings means:

- helping them put their feelings into words
- telling them that sometimes you feel like that too
- not shaming or embarrassing them
- not punishing them for being afraid

A YOUNG CHILD'S  
LEARNING.  
SECURITY AND  
CONFIDENCE ARE  
THE FOUNDATION  
OF ALL FUTURE  
LEARNING

## HOW CAN PARENTS BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR PRESCHOOLERS?

Always remember that warmth and structure are the two most powerful tools to help you reach your long-term goals. To understand how parents can provide them to children during this stage, imagine this scenario:

*You are getting ready to leave for work. Your 4-year-old child is playing quietly with his or her favourite toys. When you are ready to leave, you tell your child that it is time to go, but the child doesn't stop playing. You say it again and he or she still doesn't stop. What should you do?*

Think about each of the following responses and decide which one is best, and why.

1. Say that if the child doesn't come right away, you will leave without him/her.
2. Grab the child and pull him/her out the door.
3. Tell the child where you are going and why you need to go. Set a timer to go off in 5 minutes. Tell the child that you must leave when the timer sounds, so he/she should finish up. Reassure the child that his/her play can continue when you get home. Let the child know when there are 2 minutes left and make a race out of getting your coats and shoes on.

# CHAPTER 5

Before you respond, think about the reasons why the child isn't coming when called. Write as many possible reasons as you can here:

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Now think about your long-term goals. What kind of relationship do you want to have with your child over the long term? What characteristics do you want your child to develop? Write your long-term goals here:

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Would threatening to leave without your child help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Would pulling your child out the door help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Would telling your child where and why you are going, setting a timer, allowing time to prepare for the transition, showing respect for what the child is doing, and making the departure fun help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide warmth to your child. Remember that "warmth" is physical and emotional security.

Would threatening to leave without your child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would pulling your child out the door provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would telling your child where and why you are going, setting a timer, allowing time to prepare for the transition, showing respect for what the child is doing, and making the departure fun provide structure?  Yes  No

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide structure to your child. Remember that "structure" is the information that children need in order to learn.

Would threatening to leave your child provide structure?  Yes  No

Would pulling your child out the door provide structure?  Yes  No

Would telling your child where and why you are going, setting a timer, allowing time to prepare for the transition, showing respect for what the child is doing, and making the departure fun provide structure?  Yes  No

When you consider your long-term goals, the reasons why preschoolers sometimes don't come when they're called, and the importance of providing warmth and structure, which of the 3 responses would you choose?

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## The school years (5 to 13)

This stage marks a major turning point in the lives of children - and of parents. During this stage, most children will start school. When children enter school, their world changes. They must quickly learn how to manage on their own, without their parents. They must get along with many new children and meet the expectations of many new adults. And they must learn, and follow, new schedules and routines. Three important aspects of children's development that are important to consider in this stage are: 1) temperament; 2) peer relationships; and 3) puberty.

### Temperament

The new challenges presented by school entry tend to highlight the differences among children's **temperaments**. Every child is born with a temperament. Each of us has a particular way of approaching the world that is innate and cannot be changed. Our temperaments make us unique individuals. Every temperament has its own strengths and challenges. A child's temperament can greatly affect how he responds to school.

Some important dimensions of temperament are: 1) activity level; 2) regularity; 3) response to novelty; 4) adaptability; 5) distractibility; 6) persistence; and 7) intensity.

**Activity level.** Some children are *highly active*, wanting to run, jump, or climb most of the time. They hardly ever sit still, even at mealtimes. They seem to be always in motion. Other children are *inactive*, preferring quiet activities, such as looking at books or playing with puzzles. Other children's activity levels fall somewhere in-between.

**Regularity.** Some children have *predictable rhythms*. They get hungry at regular intervals and wake up, fall asleep and go to the bathroom around the same time each day. Other children have *changing rhythms*. They might be very hungry at noon one day and not at all hungry at noon the next day. They might wake up very early on Monday, but sleep late on Tuesday. Other children have rhythms that fall somewhere in-between.

**Response to novelty.** Some children *approach new situations*. They smile at strangers, walk up to new groups of children and join in their play, easily make new friends, like to try new foods, and enjoy going to new places. Other children *withdraw from new situations*. They move away from strangers, take a long time to join new groups, spit out new foods, and hesitate or avoid going to new places. Other children's responses to novelty fall somewhere in-between.

**Adaptability to change.** Some children adjust quickly to changes in routines, places and people. It might take only a day or two for them to adjust to changes in schedules or teachers. Other children adjust slowly to change. It might take months for them to adjust to changes in schedules or teachers. Other children's adaptability to change falls somewhere in-between.

**Distractibility.** Some children are *easily distracted*. They move from one thing to the next, depending on what they happen to see or hear that moment. It takes a long time for them to finish tasks because their attention is constantly being drawn off in different directions. But when they are sad or disappointed, it is easy to shift their attention to something else and change their mood. Other children are *not easily distracted*. They will sit and read for long periods. And when they are hungry or sad, it can be difficult to shift their attention. Other children's distractibility falls somewhere in-between.

**Persistence.** Some children are very persistent, sticking with a challenging task until it is done. They have a goal in mind and they will keep going until they achieve it. They don't give up in the face of failure. But it's not easy to convince them to stop doing things that they want to do. Other children are less persistent. If they fail, they will stop

## CHAPTER 5

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climbing. If they don't succeed in solving a puzzle quickly, they lose interest. And it's easy to convince them to stop doing things that we don't want them to do. Other children's persistence falls somewhere in-between.

**Intensity.** Some children have *very intense responses* to events and situations. If they have difficulty with a puzzle, they yell and throw the pieces. They show intense anger and sadness, but they also show intense happiness. They cry loudly when they're sad and laugh joyfully when they're happy. You always know how these children are feeling. Other children have *subdued responses*. When they are sad inside, they cry quietly. When they are happy, they smile quietly. It's difficult to know how these children are feeling. Other children's intensity falls somewhere in-between.

### **Why does temperament matter?**

Children's temperaments have a powerful influence on their *readiness for school*. Some children will find the new environment interesting and exciting, will adapt quickly to the new routines, and will enjoy making new friends. Others will find the new environment stressful, will take time to adjust to the new routines, and will find it difficult to make new friends.

While it is not possible to change a child's temperament - to make an active child into an inactive one, for example - we can *identify each child's strengths* and build on them. We also can *identify each child's unique challenges* and create a supportive environment that allows each child to thrive.

Similarities and differences between your child's temperament and yours - or between your child's temperament and a teacher's - can greatly affect those *relationships*. Think about a parent who is not very active. This parent likes to stay indoors, read quietly and listen to gentle music. What might happen if this parent has a child with a high activity level? What will happen if this child is kept indoors and is expected to sit quietly? Parents who recognize a difference in activity levels will be able to adjust their expectations and find ways to meet the child's needs for activity. Parents who don't realize that a child's behaviour might be due to temperamental differences might think that the child is being "bad".

It's very important for parents to think about their own temperaments and consider how well they match their children's temperaments. Doing so can help us to understand the reasons for many family conflicts.

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

To understand your child's temperament, your temperament and the "match" between them, complete the following exercises.

Think about a child with whom you have frequent conflict.  
Rate that child on each of the 7 dimensions of temperament.

## 1. Activity level

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Sits still for long periods Always on-the-go

## 2. Regularity

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Gets hungry and sleepy at different times on different days Gets hungry and sleepy at the same time every day

## 3. Response to novelty

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Shies away from new people, unhappy in new places, rejects new things Likes to meet new people, go to new places, try new things

## 4. Adaptability to change

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Takes a long time to adjust to changes in routines or environments Quickly adjusts to changes in routines or environments

## 5. Distractibility

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Focuses on one activity for a long period Notices everything, shifts attention often

## 6. Persistence

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Loses interest in activities quickly Sticks with activities until they are finished

## 7. Intensity

Low  1  2  3  4 High  
Doesn't show much change in emotions Shows intense sadness, anger and happiness

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Now rate **yourself** on each of the 7 dimensions of temperament.

## 1. Activity level

Low

1

2

3

High

4

I like quiet activities best

I like to be physically active and on-the-go

## 2. Regularity

Low

1

2

3

High

4

I get hungry and tired at different times on different days

I get hungry and tired at the same time every day

## 3. Response to novelty

Low

1

2

3

High

4

I'm uncomfortable in new situations, meeting new people and trying new things

I enjoy going to new places, meeting new people, and trying new things

## 4. Adaptability to change

Low

1

2

3

High

4

It takes me a long time to adjust to changes in routines or environments

I adjust quickly to changes in routines or environments

## 5. Distractibility

Low

1

2

3

High

4

I can focus my attention on one thing for a long time

My thoughts are easily distracted; my attention shifts often

## 6. Persistence

Low

1

2

3

High

4

I lose interest in activities quickly and move on to other things

I stick with an activity until it is finished

## 7. Intensity

Low

1

2

3

High

4

I don't really show my emotions; other people often can't tell how I'm feeling

When I'm happy, sad or angry, other people know it

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

Look carefully at the two pages you just completed.  
Where do you see similarities between your temperament and the child's?  
Where do you see differences?

Similarities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Differences: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How might your similarities contribute to conflict between the two of you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How might your differences contribute to conflict between the two of you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How might your similarities contribute to your getting along together?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How might your differences contribute to your getting along together?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The match between your child's temperament and your own can have a powerful effect on your relationship. To build a healthy parent-child relationship, it is important to recognize the role of temperament in your child's behaviour - and in your behaviour. Understanding temperament can help us understand the reasons behind many parent-child conflicts. It also helps us understand why shouting and hitting don't help. Our temperaments cannot be changed. But we can find ways of resolving conflicts without fights or arguments. We can find ways of respecting our differences and working them out.

## Peer Relationships

During the school years, children's social relationships become increasingly important. Their growing interest in friendships is a sign of their growing independence. Their worlds are expanding. They are learning a great deal about how others think, what others believe, and how others behave.

Sometimes parents worry about all of the new influences on their children. They might feel a loss of control over what their children are exposed to and who they spend time with. But this is a necessary and important part of children's development. During this stage, they learn a lot about other people - and they learn even more about themselves.

During this stage, children must figure out very complicated issues for the first time.

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CHILDREN WHO HAVE A SENSE OF SELF-WORTH, SELF-RESPECT, COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE HAVE A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

BY STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S SELF-WORTH AND THEIR TRUST IN US, WE ARE SETTING THE STAGE FOR INDEPENDENT DECISION-MAKING IN THE TEEN YEARS

They must learn how to manage conflict with other children, handle disagreements, stand up for themselves, deal with bullies, understand loyalty, and show kindness even when others do not.

The foundation for children's success in this stage was laid down in the infant and preschool years. If they acquired a sense of self-worth, self-respect, competence and confidence, they will have a strong foundation for facing these new challenges.

- Children who have come to see themselves as good, caring and capable people are more likely to make good decisions.
- Those who have watched their parents handle conflict, anger and stress without aggression or violence are more likely to solve their own conflicts well.
- Those who learned from their parents how to listen, communicate and treat others with respect are more likely to do the same with their peers and teachers.
- Those who feel supported and accepted by their parents are more likely to turn to them for advice and help.

Everything parents did to build strong, trusting relationships with their children in the earlier years will now give the children strength to handle difficult situations - and to turn to you when they need support. Figuring out social relationships is a huge and complicated challenge. Children will make mistakes. They don't yet understand everything that we understand. But as they try, fail and succeed, they will learn a great deal about other people and about themselves.

Parents' major task in this stage is to **support and guide** their children. Our role is to show them how to communicate effectively, show kindness, help others, make amends for their mistakes, be loyal, and act with integrity. By showing them how to treat others with respect, we are working toward our long-term goals. By strengthening their self-worth and their trust in us, we are setting the stage for independent decision-making in the teen years.

## Puberty

Toward the end of this stage, children enter puberty. This is a time of tremendous physical and emotional changes. Their hormones transform their bodies. They begin to look like adults physically, but they still are children. Their hormones can make them moody. They increasingly want independence from their parents, but they might not have all of the skills they need to make their own decisions. They are realizing that their beliefs might be different from their parents' beliefs. They are beginning to figure out who they are as individuals, separate from their parents.

All of these changes can lead to increasing conflict between parents and children. Just as they did when they were toddlers, children of this age want to make their own decisions. But the decisions are bigger now, and have greater consequences. So parents worry about their children's safety; they worry that their children will get into trouble or do poorly in school; they worry that their children's friends will influence them negatively.

But if parents supported their children's independent decision-making when they were 2, 4, and 6 years old, providing information in a safe and secure environment, their children are more likely to navigate this stage successfully. Parents' task in this stage is to **keep their children safe while respecting their growing need for independence**.

Parents can do this by:

- finding ways to stay connected with their children without coercion
- being available to listen, discuss and advise
- trying to understand the feelings behind their children's behaviours

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

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- demonstrating that they will always be there to help
- helping them discover their strengths and special characteristics
- taking an interest in their schoolwork and supporting their efforts to succeed at school
- getting to know their teachers
- inviting their friends into the home
- knowing where they are and who they are with, while respecting their growing needs for privacy
- showing them that they trust and believe in them
- helping them develop their own sense of right and wrong
- helping them find ways of resisting peer pressure that will work for them
- helping them develop a sense of responsibility and competence
- involving them in family decision-making and respecting their viewpoints
- encouraging them to help others
- talking with them about the future and all of its possibilities
- encouraging them to have dreams of what they want their lives to be
- helping them find ways to reach their goals

Remember that you've been building a foundation for several years. All of the building blocks that you put into place in earlier years become very important now.

In early infancy, you established a strong emotional attachment and a trusting relationship. Children who learn early in life that their parents can be trusted are more likely to listen to their advice as they get older.

In later infancy, you showed respect for your child's communications with you. Children who are listened to and taken seriously are more comfortable talking with their parents as they get older.

In toddlerhood, you encouraged your child's independence, providing the information she needed to stay safe. Children who practiced their independence when they were younger are more likely to have developed the skills to make independent decisions and protect themselves.

You also showed your child how to resolve conflicts without violence. Children who observe constructive conflict resolution are more likely to resolve their own conflicts non-violently.

In the preschool period, you showed respect for your child's feelings. Children who have learned that their feelings matter are more likely to express their fears and worries to their parents as they face complex challenges.

You answered your child's questions. Children who have learned that their parents will help them to find answers are more likely to go to their parents for information *before* trouble strikes.

You have respected your child's individuality. Children who have acquired a sense of self-worth are more likely to "be themselves" and resist peer pressure.

You have built your child's confidence. Children who feel confident are more likely to believe in themselves, to stand up for themselves and others, and to do what is right.

The respectful, trusting, warm relationship you have built from birth will now serve as your child's anchor during the journey through adolescence.

## HOW CAN PARENTS BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHILDREN DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS?

Always remember that **warmth** and **structure** are the two most powerful tools to help you reach your **long-term goals**. To understand how parents can provide them to children during this stage, imagine this scenario:

*Your child has been going to school for 4 months. You receive a report from the teacher telling you that your child can't sit still, talks to other children a lot, and takes a long time to finish assignments. What should you do?*

Think about each of the following responses and decide which one is best, and why.

1. Tell the teacher to slap your child when for misbehaviour.
2. Tell your child that at the next sign of trouble at school, he/she won't be able to watch television for a week.
3. Explain to your child why he/she is getting in trouble with the teacher. Explain that you want to help your child pay attention better. Let your child know that you understand that it is hard to pay attention sometimes. Ask your child about his/her point of view. Find out if something is happening at school that is bothering or distracting your child. Ask him/her for ideas and solutions. Meet with the teacher to develop a plan.

Before you respond, think about the reasons why the child isn't paying attention at school. Write as many possible reasons as you can here:

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Now think about your long-term goals. What kind of relationship do you want to have with your child over the long term? What characteristics do you want your child to develop? Write your long-term goals here:

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Would telling the teacher to slap your child help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Would taking away television time help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Would explaining, understanding, hearing your child's ideas, and meeting with the teacher to discuss solutions help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide warmth to your child. Remember that "warmth" is physical and emotional security.

Would telling the teacher to slap your child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would taking away television time provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would explaining, understanding, hearing your child's ideas, and meeting with the teacher to discuss solutions provide warmth?  Yes  No



# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide structure to your child. Remember that “structure” is the information that children need in order to learn.

Would telling his teacher to slap him provide structure?  Yes  No

Would taking away television time provide structure?  Yes  No

Would explaining, understanding, hearing your child’s ideas, and meeting with the teacher to discuss solutions provide structure?  Yes  No

When you consider your long-term goals, the reasons why children sometimes don’t pay attention at school, and the importance of providing warmth and structure, which of the 3 responses would you choose?

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## Adolescence (14 to 18 years)

Children practice for this stage all their lives. Throughout childhood, they strive for independence, in preparation for this stage. Their childhood experiences have given them the skills, confidence and self-respect they will need to successfully navigate adolescence and enter adulthood. If they have had many opportunities to practice, make mistakes, learn from their mistakes, and improve their skills, they will be well-prepared to face the challenges that will come.

Through the years, they have learned how to respect others, resolve conflicts non-violently, communicate their feelings constructively, and stand up for themselves and others. Now they must use these skills on their own, as they increasingly separate from their parents.

This is a very exciting time. Your child is almost an adult, able to communicate with you about almost anything. Children of this age can think about new ideas, develop their own values, and set their own course. This means big changes in your relationship and there will be many challenges along the way. But, as always, those challenges provide opportunities to teach your child how to make good decisions, resolve conflict and cope with failure.

Children’s primary task at this stage is to find their own unique **identity**. The parent’s task is to **strengthen the parent-child connection while nurturing the child’s independence**.

### Identity

In this stage, youth have a powerful drive to express who they are, not who their parents expect them to be. They may express themselves through a sudden change in their choice of music, clothing, hairstyle, friends, beliefs, food preferences, out-of-school activities, academic interests, or plans for the future. Sometimes, parents feel that what they have taught their children is being lost, as their children develop new religious or political beliefs, stop going to religious services, dye their hair in unusual colours, or dress in unusual ways.

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ADOLESCENTS ARE LIKE CATERPILLARS SHEDDING THEIR COCOONS. THEY MUST CAST OFF SOME OF THEIR OLD WAYS IN ORDER TO EMERGE WITH THEIR OWN IDENTITIES

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But what is happening in this stage is just what was happening in toddlerhood - the child is experimenting. While toddlers experimented with taste and touch, youth will experiment with their identities. They will try on different ones to find out which ones fit them best. To do this, they must cast off some of their old ways. They are like caterpillars shedding their cocoons. They must do this in order to emerge with their own identities.

It is common for adolescents to try on identities that are very different from those of their parents. They listen to music that their parents dislike, and hold viewpoints that their parents disagree with. By becoming different from their parents, they are better able to figure out who *they* are.

Sometimes, in this journey, youth might experiment with things that can harm them, such as drugs and alcohol, or sex and relationships. They can have difficulty understanding that bad things can happen to them. Their brain development is not yet complete; those parts of the brain that help us predict consequences, plan ahead and weigh our options are not yet fully formed. As a result, adolescents sometimes do very risky things because they believe that nothing will go wrong for them.

At this time, the trust parents have built with their children over their lifetime becomes extremely important. They need to know that they can turn to us *without fear* for information and advice. They do not want to be controlled. But they do need to know that we are there, providing clear and honest information, clear expectations and structure, and a safe environment.

All of the skills that they have been developing since infancy in making independent choices, communication, and conflict resolution will help them meet the challenges of this stage. But remember that these skills are not yet fully developed. They will continue to develop for many years to come. At this stage, youth will still make mistakes and will still get hurt - just as they did when they were younger.

Just as you kept the environment safe, provided information, and supported the child's growth in earlier years, you can do this now as well. Youth are testing their wings. Will fall sometimes, but with our help they will learn to fly.

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YOUTH ARE TESTING THEIR WINGS. WILL FALL SOMETIMES, BUT WITH OUR HELP THEY WILL LEARN TO FLY

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## Strengthening the parent-child connection

Parents' connections with their children begin before they are born. Through building early trust and strengthening the attachment through the years, you have shaped the relationship that will launch your child into adulthood. Children are more likely to go through adolescence successfully if their connections to their parents are warm, kind and loving - and stable, consistent and predictable.

Teenagers with strong connections to their parents are more likely to:

- have positive relationships with other adolescents and adults
- feel trusted by their parents and want to maintain that trust
- respond to others with respect and empathy
- have self-confidence and higher self-esteem
- be more cooperative with others
- have better mental health
- listen to and act on their parents' advice

Parents can build on and strengthen this connection during adolescence by interacting with their teenagers in ways that are positive and fun. When youth enjoy spending time with their parents, they are more likely to feel relaxed when talking with them, listen to their advice, want to maintain a positive relationship, view their parents as caring instead of controlling, and spend more time with their parents.

# UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL

## THIS STAGE PROVIDES PARENTS WITH A FINAL OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN PRACTICE THEIR DECISION-MAKING SKILLS IN A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Attempts to control or punish adolescents are likely to contribute to resentment, anger, dishonesty and resistance. Youth who view their parents as controlling or interfering are likely to avoid them, and are more likely to become depressed and anxious. They will be afraid to talk with their parents when they have concerns, to spend less time with them, and to reject their advice.

This stage provides parents with a final opportunity to help their children practice their decision-making skills in a safe and supportive environment. Parents can nurture their adolescents' independence by:

- genuinely respecting their children's ideas, even when they are different from their own
- encouraging their children to decide what their values are
- showing unconditional love
- engaging in discussions with their children as equals
- showing confidence in their children's abilities to make decisions, and to cope with the outcomes of their decisions
- respecting their children's feelings
- supporting their children when they make mistakes
- encouraging their children to try again after they fail
- considering their children's point of view when they feel unfairly treated
- negotiating solutions to disagreements

Adolescents' independence is encouraged when parents show their children that they respect and believe in them.

## HOW CAN PARENTS BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHILDREN DURING THE TEEN YEARS?

Always remember that **warmth** and **structure** are the two most powerful tools to help you reach your **long-term goals**. To understand how parents can provide them to children during this stage, imagine this scenario:

*You have told your 17-year-old child to be home by 10:00 pm on weekends. It is now 10:30 on Saturday night and he/she has not yet come home. You are extremely worried because you know that he/she was going to a party in a car with an inexperienced driver. You also know that there are other youth at the party who you do not know. And you suspect that alcohol is available at the party. What should you do when your child walks through the door?*

Think about each of the following responses and decide which one is best, and why.

1. Ground your child for a month and say that the next time it happens you will lock him/her out of the house.
2. Slap your child's face to show that you will not tolerate such disrespectful behaviour.
3. Tell your child how worried you were. Explain how it feels to think that someone you love is in danger. Explain the risks that he/she was taking. Ask your child what he/she will do to stay safe and get home on time. Develop a set of rules together that you agree on. Tell your child that you will extend the curfew if he/she follows those rules for a month.

# CHAPTER 5

Before you respond, think about the reasons why your child came home late. Write as many possible reasons as you can.

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Now think about your long-term goals. What kind of relationship do you want to have with your child over the long term? What characteristics do you want your child to develop? Write your long-term goals here:

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Would grounding your child and threatening your child help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Would slapping your child help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Would explaining the effect of your child's behaviour on you and its risks, involving him/her in setting the rules, and offering more freedom if the rules are followed responsibly help you reach your long-term goals?  Yes  No

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide warmth to your child. Remember that "warmth" is physical and emotional security.

Would grounding and threatening your child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would slapping your child provide warmth?  Yes  No

Would explaining the effect of your child's behaviour on you and its risks, involving him/her in setting the rules, and offering more freedom if the rules are followed responsibly provide warmth?  Yes  No

Now think about which of the 3 responses would provide structure to your child. Remember that "structure" is the information that children need in order to learn.

Would grounding and threatening your child provide structure?  Yes  No

Would slapping your child provide structure?  Yes  No

Would explaining the effect of your child's behaviour on you and its risks, involving him/her in setting the rules, and offering more freedom if the rules are followed responsibly provide structure?  Yes  No

When you consider your long-term goals, the reasons why teenagers sometimes break their curfews, and the importance of providing warmth and structure, which of the 3 responses would you choose?

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# CONCLUSION



**W**ithin the project “Educate, do not punish”, Save the Children aim to strengthen children’s rights and ban all forms of corporal punishment in all settings, including the family context. To make this real, we think that is absolutely important to support parents in their everyday works and give them all tools they can use for building a healthy and positive relationship with their children and be able to meet the child’s needs and rights. For this reason, Save the Children decided to produce a Guide on positive parenting.

This guide has described the principles of building strong and healthy parent-child relationships – focusing on long-term goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how your child thinks and feels, and problem-solving. Of course, it can be hard to think clearly when your emotional brain takes over in a frustrating or stressful situation. It takes planning ahead and lots of practice to become skilled at keeping your thinking brain in charge.

## You can begin by working on one situation

When you are calm, talk with your child about it and hear your child’s point of view. Then think it through and plan a response for next time that will lead you toward your long-term goals by providing the information that your child needs in order to understand.

Then, when the situation happens again, take a deep breath, focus on your long-term goals and try out your response. Ensure that you respond with warmth, keeping your child emotionally and physically safe. Stay calm and keep your thinking brain in charge. Keep practicing, focusing on one situation at a time, and getting a bit better each day.

Remember that your efforts will teach your child how to deal with frustration, conflict and anger.

You will give your child the skills needed to live without violence.

You will build your child’s self-respect.

And you will earn your child’s respect.

No parent is perfect. We all make mistakes. Nevertheless has the child some basic rights within their family, such as to develop as an individual, to be listened to and to be protected from violence, no matter what. And we can all learn from our mistakes – just as our children do.

Throughout this Guide, Save the Children hopes to give to parents fruitful and useful advices and tools which should help them to implement a positive parenting approach with their children, without using any kind of violence.

# RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS\*



This list provides examples of resources providing additional information about positive and effective parenting. They include books, brochures, videos and websites for parents, as well as toolkits, manuals and academic articles for professionals.

## Save the Children Publications

### In Italian

*Rapporto genitori-figli: un approccio positivo*, marzo 2012. <http://www.savethechildren.it/IT/HomePage>

### In Lithuanian

Breidokienė, R., Ignatovičienė, S. (2010). *Pozityvios tėvystės igūdžių ugdymo pratybos*. Vilnius: VšĮ Vaikų laikinosios globos namai „Atsigrėžk į vaikus“ ir Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija. <http://www.socmin.lt/index.php?1745646277>

*1-3 metų vaikai: mieli, tačiau kartais sunkiai suvaldomi...* Vilnius: Bendruomenių kaitos centras ir Paramos vaikams centras. <http://www.pvc.lt/uploads/old/Pozityvi%20tevyte%20-%201-3%20metu%20vaikai.pdf>

*Taisyklės ir ribos ankstyvojo mokyklinio amžiaus vaikams* Vilnius: Bendruomenių kaitos centras ir Paramos vaikams centras. <http://www.pvc.lt/uploads/old/Pozityvi%20tevyte%20-%20Taisykles%20ir%20ribos.pdf>

*Teigiamas dėmesys, gyrimas ir atlygis* Vilnius: Bendruomenių kaitos centras ir Paramos vaikams centras. <http://www.pvc.lt/uploads/old/Pozityvi%20tevyte%20-%20Teigiamas%20demesys,%20gyrimas%20ir%20atlygis.pdf>

*Vaikai brendimo metu: kalbėjimasis, derybos ir kontrolė* Vilnius: Bendruomenių kaitos centras ir Paramos vaikams centras. <http://www.pvc.lt/uploads/old/Pozityvi%20tevyte%20-%20Vaikai%20brendimo%20metu.pdf>

*Išlaikyti savitvardą: kaip elgtis, kai vaikas veda iš proto* Vilnius: Bendruomenių kaitos centras ir Paramos vaikams centras. <http://www.pvc.lt/uploads/old/Pozityvi%20tevyte%20-%20Islaikyti%20savitvarda.pdf>

*Dešimt žingsnių, kurie padės tapti geresniais tėvais* Vilnius: Paramos vaikams centras. [http://www.vaikystebesmurto.lt/\\_sites/paramosvaikamscentras/media/images/Leidiniai/10\\_zingsniu1.pdf](http://www.vaikystebesmurto.lt/_sites/paramosvaikamscentras/media/images/Leidiniai/10_zingsniu1.pdf) or <http://www.pvc.lt/uploads/old/10%20ZINGSNIU.pdf>

**In Romanian** (all published and distributed for free by Save the Children Romania and available in English too) <http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/>

Organizația Salvați Copiii, *Comportamentul copilului meu. Un ghid pentru părinți*;

Organizația Salvați Copiii, *Fii acolo pentru copilul tău! Sfaturi pentru părinții copiilor cu vârstă cuprinse între 2 și 7 ani*;

Organizația Salvați Copiii, *Cu părinții la școală. Ghid pentru părinți*.

### In Spanish

Bavolek, S.J. *Golpes y Gritos: Cómo Evitarlos*. (VHS) <http://www.intermedia-inc.com/title.asp?sku=GY01>

Creciendo como padres y madres (Guide; Save the Children Spain). <http://www.savethechildren.es/docs/Ficheros/191/guia-padres-2009.pdf>

### In Swedish

Ekborn, I. (2008). *Barn I Föräldrars Fokus: En utbildning för mammor och pappor som befinner sig i familjerättsliga konflikter* (Educational programme for parents experiencing marital conflict and family problems). Stockholm: Save the Children Sweden. <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/node/2897>

### In French

Durrant, J.E. (2011). *La discipline positive: de quoi s'agit-il et comment s'y prendre*. Bangkok : Save the Children Sweden. (Manual for parents of infants to adolescents). <http://www.frp.ca/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=1066&documentFormatId=1817>

### In English

Durrant, J.E. (2011). *Positive Discipline. What It Is and How To Do It* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Bangkok: Save the Children Sweden. (Manual for parents of infants to adolescents).

[http://sca.savethechildren.se/South\\_East\\_Asia/Misc/Puffs/Positive-Discipline-What-it-is-and-how-to-do-it/Hardcopies%20available%20from%20http://www.frp.ca/index.cfm](http://sca.savethechildren.se/South_East_Asia/Misc/Puffs/Positive-Discipline-What-it-is-and-how-to-do-it/Hardcopies%20available%20from%20http://www.frp.ca/index.cfm)

Durrant, J.E. (2010). *Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching: Guidelines for Educators*. Bangkok: Save the Children Sweden. (Manual for educators of students from Kindergarten to high school).

<http://seap.savethechildren.se/Global/scs/SEAP/publication/publication%20pdf/Education/Positive%20Discipline%20Everyday%20Teaching%20FINAL.pdf>

Horno Goicoechea, P. (2008). *Non-Violent Discipline: A Guide for Training Professionals*. Bangkok: Save the Children Sweden. (Training programme) <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/non-violent-discipline-guide-training-professionals>

*Childrearing without Violence. A Practical Guide for Families and Communities* (2008). Bangkok: Save the Children Sweden. (Guide for professionals) <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/childrearing-without-violence-practical-guide-families-and-communities>

*A Toolkit on Positive Discipline* (with particular emphasis on South and Central Asia). Kathmandu: Save the Children Sweden.

<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/toolkit-positive-discipline-particular-emphasis-south-and-central-asia>

## Council of Europe Publications

*Positive Parenting: What Is It?* (Brochure). [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/familypolicy/enfance/parenting\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/familypolicy/enfance/parenting_en.asp)

*Parenting in Contemporary Europe: A Positive Approach*. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/publications/ParentingContemporary\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/publications/ParentingContemporary_en.asp)

*Views on Positive Parenting and Non-Violent Upbringing* (Summary of discussions with children and parents). [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/publications/viewspositiveparenting\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/publications/viewspositiveparenting_EN.asp)

\* This list provides only a sample of available resources. It is not intended to be exhaustive. Readers are advised to assess the credibility and suitability of any resource or service they are considering, and to specifically ask about its position with regard to physical and emotional punishment.



## Books and Videos

- Bavolek, S.J. *Shaking, Hitting, Spanking: What To Do Instead.* (DVD/VHS). <http://www.intermedia-inc.com/title.asp?sku=SH02>
- Block, N.A., & Gomez, M.Y. (2011). *This Hurts Me More Than It Hurts You: In Words and Pictures, Children Share How Spanking Hurts and What to Do Instead.*
- Christophersen, E.R., & Mortweet, S.L. (2003). *Parenting that Works: Building Skills that Last a Lifetime.* Washington, DC: APA Life Tools.
- Coloroso, B. (2002). *Kids are Worth It! Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). New York: HarperCollins.
- Crary, E. (1993). *Without Spanking or Spoiling: A Practical Approach to Toddler and Preschool Guidance* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Seattle, WA: Parenting Press, Inc.
- Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (1999). *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk.* New York: Avon Books.
- Greenspan, S.I., & Salmon, J. (1995). *The Challenging Child: Understanding, Raising, and Enjoying the Five "Difficult" Types of Children.* Don Mills: Addison-Wesley.
- Kurcinka, M.S. (1998). *Raising Your Spirited Child: a Guide for Parents Whose Child is More Intense, Sensitive, Perceptive, Persistent, Energetic.* New York: Harper Collins.
- Leach, P. (2010). *Your Baby & Child: From Birth to Age Five* (6<sup>th</sup> edition). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Nelson, J., Lott, L., & Glenn, H.S. (2007). *Positive Discipline A to Z: 1001 Solutions to Everyday Parenting Problems* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Riera, M., & Di Prisco, J. (2002). *Right from Wrong: Instilling a Sense of Integrity in Your Child.* Cambridge: Perseus.
- Shore, P., Leach, P., Sears, W., & Weininger, O. (2002). *Teaching Your Child Positive Discipline.* Toronto: The Parent Kit Corporation.
- Wolfe, J. (1998). *I'm Three Years Old! Everything Your Three-Year-Old Wants You to Know about Parenting.* New York: Becker & Mayer Books.

## Web Sites

- Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development. A free on-line encyclopedia containing information for parents and professionals. [www.child-encyclopedia.com/](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/)
- Gelb kit vaikus (Save the Children Lithuania). <http://www.gelbvaik.lt/gelbvaik/>
- Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children. A global alliance of agencies, individuals and NGOs. Monitors the prevalence and legality of corporal punishment worldwide. [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org)
- Italia Onlus (Save the Children Italy) <http://www.savethechildren.it/IT/>
- Manifesto against Violence against Children. Save the Children Romania. [http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/?id2=00060001000300000002#Protection against Violence.html](http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/?id2=00060001000300000002#Protection%20against%20Violence.html)
- Parents 2 Parents - a free on-line parenting community. <http://www.parents2parents.ca/>
- Rädda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden) [www.rb.se](http://www.rb.se)
- Salvați Copiii (Save the Children Romania) <http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/>
- Welcome to Parenting. An on-line program about becoming a parent. <http://www.welcometoparenting.com>

## Academic Publications

- Bussman, K.-D., Erthal, C., & Schroth, A. (2011). *Effects of Banning Corporal Punishment in Europe: A Five-Nation Comparison.* In J.E. Durrant & A.B. Smith (2011). *Global Pathways to Abolishing Corporal Punishment: Realizing Children's Rights* (pp. 299-322). New York: Routledge.
- Durrant, J.E. (2008). *Physical Punishment, Culture, and Rights: Current Issues for Professionals.* *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 29 (1), 55-66.
- Durrant, J.E., & Smith, A.B. (2011). *Global Pathways to Abolishing Corporal Punishment: Realizing Children's Rights.* New York: Routledge.
- Durrant, J.E., & Ensom, R. (2012). *Physical Punishment of Children: Lessons from 20 Years of Research.* *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, on-line.
- Gershoff, E. (2002). *Corporal Punishment by Parents and Associated Child Behaviors and Experiences: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review.* *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 128 (4), 539-579.
- Gershoff, E.T., & Bitensky, S.H. (2008). *The Case against Corporal Punishment of Children: Converging Evidence from Social Science Research and International Human Rights Law and Implications for U.S. Public Policy.* *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, Vol. 13 (4), 231-272.
- Janson, S., Jernbro, C., & Långberg, B. (2011). *Kroppslig Bestraffning och Annan Kränkning av Barn i Sverige - En Nationell Kartläggning 2011.* (Corporal punishment and other humiliating behavior towards children in Sweden: Results from two nationally representative studies in 2011. English summary.) Stockholm: Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset och författarna. [http://www.allmannabarnhuset.se/data/files/B\\_cker\\_PDF/Kroppslig\\_bestraffning.pdf](http://www.allmannabarnhuset.se/data/files/B_cker_PDF/Kroppslig_bestraffning.pdf)
- Lansford, J.E., & Deater-Deckard, K. (2012). *Childrearing Discipline and Violence in Developing Countries.* *Child Development*, 83 (1), 62-75.
- A Review of the Research on Corporal Punishment* (Primary Prevention Committee of the Health Care Coalition on Violence, Minnesota) <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/review-research-corporal-punishment>
- Report on Physical Punishment in the United States: What Research Tells Us About Its Effects on Children* (Centre for Effective Discipline, Ohio) [http://www.phoenixchildrens.com/PDFs/principles\\_and\\_practices-of\\_effective\\_discipline.pdf](http://www.phoenixchildrens.com/PDFs/principles_and_practices-of_effective_discipline.pdf)
- Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* (Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Ottawa) English: <http://www.cheo.on.ca/en/physicalpunishment> French: <http://www.cheo.on.ca/fr/punitioncorporelle>





**Save the Children** is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in more than 120 countries, focusing on the poorest and most marginalised children. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

Corporal punishment is one of the most common forms of violence against children. Save the Children works towards eliminating all forms of corporal or physical punishment and other humiliating or degrading punishment of children in all settings, to guarantee that all children have all their rights respected.

With this **Guide to Building Healthy Parent-Child Relationships**, Save the Children aims to make parents aware of the importance of positive approaches to interacting with their children that take into account children's rights. Save the Children aims to provide clear guidance on positive parenting and affirm the unacceptability of corporal and humiliating punishments.

The Guide will help parents to build strong, secure relationships with their children and avoid reacting to them with anger and violence.