

## From The School Counsellors' Desk

**Dear Parents,**

With the implementation of the newer legislations, laws are increasingly looking at the incidence of physical abuse and aggressive behaviour towards children, by adults. It is undeniable that given the spate of cases where children have been subjected to severe physical and mental trauma, such laws are essential.

However, we live in a country where "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is an age-old dictum. The question that most adults are now asking is, therefore, "How then do we discipline our children?" We hope that, in this write-up, we can provide a few pointers in that direction.

Much has already been said and written about negative disciplinary techniques, which include hitting and any other form of physical chastisement, as well as the psychological effects of insulting, humiliating or belittling a child. What then, are parents to do, when forced with inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour?

Positive discipline is based on the concept of minimizing the child's frustrations and misdemeanours rather than on giving punishments. The foundation is built when the child is encouraged to feel good about himself/ herself. To achieve this, it is essential for the parents to spend some time of the day with the child, wherein activities and conversations ensure enjoyment and a feel-good factor. This has already been addressed in our earlier newsletters. The skill one needs to pick up is that of making the child feel that he or she should behave in an acceptable manner, because he wants to do so and because, as Dr. Laura Markham stresses, the child wants to please the parent. He or she should feel that the good behaviour is an extension of the bond he/she shares with the parent, and hence, it becomes habitual.

Positive discipline techniques would include taking away privileges, like not allowing the child to watch a favourite programme because he has not done something or because he has done something wrong. Simultaneously, an explanation must be provided to ensure "no hard feelings", with a promise to reinstate the privilege once the acceptable behaviour recurs. Providing such positive discipline and guidance to your child does not mean that you are punishing your child. In such a way, he is learning lessons for life, and he will be the better for it.

Here are a few other suggestions which might help as well:

1. Involve your child in creating a set of rules for the family. If the child is able to clearly understand what behaviour is expected and why, and if they are able to contribute a few rules of family living, they will feel responsible for maintaining the same. It will help, to discuss them with your child, and let him know that there are systems being put into place and that his cooperation is a prerequisite. This reinforces family rules, what is acceptable in the family and why it is acceptable.
2. Removal of certain privileges - You can take away something which the child likes- it may be a favourite toy or snack, not letting him enjoy a designated play time, or watch a favourite cartoon show, for a particular period. This must be re-instated only when the undesirable behaviour is discontinued or the acceptable one recurs.
3. Quiet time – Dennis the Menace sulking in his corner is the best example of this. It is a kind of “time out” where the child is asked to stay quiet and away from others for a while, giving him a chance to ponder on his misbehaviour. It also allows you to cool off enough, so that you are not tempted to raise your hand.
4. Be the change you want to see – very often, we set up rules and systems in the family, but forget to follow them ourselves. It is for us to lead the way and set the example we wish our children to follow. It makes no sense to ask a child to be honest and truthful, if I phone my boss in the presence of my child, and take a day off citing ill health, when that is not the case. Children watch, observe and follow adults. So, you need to behave the way you want them to, and use the language you expect to hear from them.
5. Seek the help of other family members- This will ensure that all of you are on the same page, and that the same message is going to the child. Otherwise, the disciplining is inconsistent and he /she might learn how to manipulate the situation to “get off the hook” after having misbehaved.
6. We often forget that the best reinforcement is praise. We are so busy with laying down the “don’ts” that we often forget to appreciate the child when he does something acceptable. It is important to reward good behaviour, as that is the best way to motivate the child and also to assist in creation of good habits.

Additional features affecting discipline include :

- Reasonable expectations-do not expect overnight changes
- Age appropriate expectations-do not expect behaviour that is suitable at a higher or lower age group.
- Healthy diet
- Ample rest
- Giving clear instructions which need to be repeated- after all, practise makes perfect.
- Looking for causes of misbehaviour, with a view to remove them, if possible
- Making adjustments – some of the rules may be flexible and allow for occasional compromise

- **Building routines - Remember always that children like to know that there is some order in their lives. A routine introduces an amount of predictability in their day without necessarily being regimental. This helps to reduce frustration and misbehaviour, and hence foster discipline.**

Finally, no one ever said that parenting is a cake walk!! Despite your best efforts, you might find that things are not quite going the way you expected them to. But, help is always at hand. There are many qualified professionals who can help you sort out any disciplining issues you might be facing with your child, and it would not hurt to consult someone if the need arises.

We hope these tips are useful in your handling of your children.

Best Wishes,

**The school counsellors at La Martiniere, Kolkata**

**For appointments, interactions and discussions with the school counsellors, kindly contact the following numbers:**

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