Everyday Learning Series
Volume 4 Number 4 2006

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

About babies toddlers and preschoolers

Everyday learning about

children's behaviour

Pam Linke

Early Childhood AUSTRALIA INC.

About the author

Pam Linke

Pam Linke is the Strategic Manager, Parenting, Child and Family section of the Children, Youth and Women's Health Service in South Australia. The Children, Youth and Women's Health Service has developed a state-wide program to support parents, including using books and their website www.cyh.com.

Pam is widely respected for her professional knowledge and has written a number of books for parents, including *Parenting at home and away*, *Let's stop bullying*, *Pants aren't rude* (Children's sexual development), *Learning about feelings* and *Travelling teens: A parents' guide to family relocation*.

Pam is currently the Chairperson of the Early Childhood Australia Publications Committee and is actively involved in the ECA South Australia Branch.

Series Editor	Sue Wales
Graphic Design	Kate Brennan
Photographers	Andrew Sikorski Pam Linke
Reviewers during 2006	Pam Linke Sue Perdriau Judy Radich

About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia Inc., formerly known as the Australian Early Childhood Association, was established in 1938. Early Childhood Australia works with Government, early childhood professionals, parents, other carers of young children, and various lobby groups to secure the best range of options and outcomes for children as they grow and develop.

Contact details

Publishing and Marketing Section
Early Childhood Australia Inc.
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
Tel: 02 6242 1800 Fax: 02 6242 1818
Email: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au

ISBN10 1-921162-07-4
ISBN13 978-1-921162-07-7
ISSN 1448-045X
Printed by Paragon Printers, Canberra

Contents

About the *Everyday Learning Series*

The most important early learning happens through day-to-day life experiences and the ***Everyday Learning*** books are about how parents and carers can make the most of these experiences. What an exciting responsibility it is to be helping build the foundations for the future of young children!

- The first years of life are the foundation for all later growth, development and learning.
- Every experience counts! Babies and young children are learning all the time, with most learning taking place in relationships.
- Research shows that what happens in these years is the key to:
  - being able to relate confidently and effectively with others
  - mental and emotional health
  - educational success.

Babies and young children are learning all the time.

What do babies and young children need, to get the best start for living and learning?

To learn best they need parents and carers (their first teachers) who:

- are warm and caring
- know each baby or child very well and appreciate what is special about them
- take time to understand the child's messages (cues) and to respond to them with encouragement, praise, comfort, independence and rest as needed
- are able to see, share and celebrate the big and small joys and achievements of the children in their care.

Adults provide:

- *responsive and sensitive care*
- *a safe and interesting place to be.*

They follow children's lead by supporting their exploration and the things they like to do.

There is no set list of things to teach babies and young children.

Living is learning and children learn through living. All children and babies have their own abilities and interests. Follow the child's lead.

Watch and listen; provide opportunities; give support; build on each child's strengths. Babies and children also come from family and cultural backgrounds that are part of the way they are and need to be included in their experiences. These books will help you to provide the best start for the children in your care.

Learning about children's behaviour

Children's behaviour is one of the most common things that parents worry about. Children aren't born knowing what behaviour is wanted and what behaviour is not wanted and, in fact, this varies depending on where you live in the world and which family you live in. So we need to teach children about behaviour, just as we need to teach them about talking and getting dressed and all the other things in their lives.

Sometimes, because behaviour problems can worry parents, the way they teach about behaviour is not as positive as the way they teach other things —it can end up as simply trying to stop children doing things, rather than teaching what they need to learn.

The way we teach behaviour is what makes the difference. Teaching with love and understanding, and with respect for their feelings and needs, is the most likely way to achieve what we want for children.

Teaching about behaviour is more than just helping children to learn what they need to do to be safe and be part of the community they live in; it is also about 'listening' to what the behaviour is saying about the child's needs and feelings.

Teaching and listening must go together.

Listening to behaviour is harder than listening to words, but it is just as important because behaviour is the way that very young children communicate.

'The way we teach behaviour is what makes the difference. Teaching with love and understanding, and with respect for their feelings and needs, is the most likely way to achieve what we want for children.'

Punishment is often used in thinking about how to teach children about behaviour. Punishment means to do something that causes the child physical or emotional pain when they do something that adults don't want them to, so they learn not to do it. Punishment can be very damaging to the child and does not teach the child about what is wanted.
(See the section on Punishment, page 25.)

Children's behaviour

With babies and very young children, what they do (behaviour) is the only way they have to let us know how they feel and what they need. Young babies don't do this consciously; they just respond to inner signals that tell them they are hungry or frightened or in pain—so they cry. Or they feel comfortable, and they smile or look relaxed. Or they are interested in their world, and they look alert and reach out to people and things.

As they grow to be toddlers and into childhood, they learn to use words to express feelings and needs, but they still show them through behaviour as well. So when we, as adults, respond to children's behaviour, we need to be thinking about what it means to the child as well as what it means to us.

Responding to behaviour

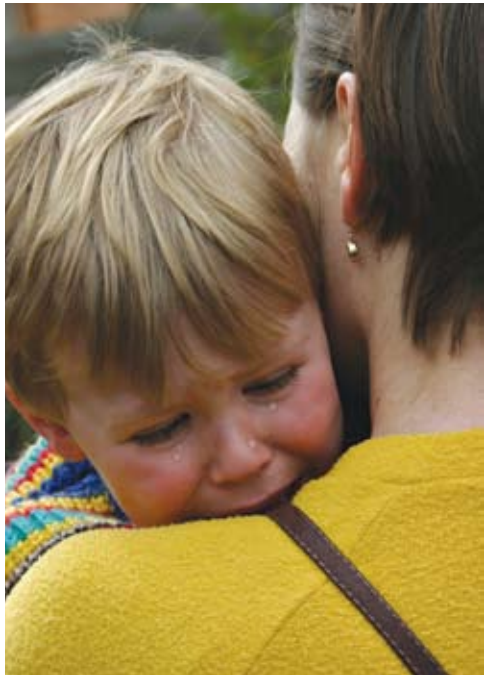
How adults respond to young children's behaviour is the way children learn to manage feelings and to relate to other people. These are some of the most important things they need to learn about getting on in the world they live in.

Some people call responding to behaviour 'behaviour management' and others call it 'discipline'.

Discipline means to teach, and teaching is the role of parents and adults in helping children to learn about managing feelings and relationships. Learning about these things takes many years, and requires patience and understanding from the adults who care for children.

This book is about discipline—about teaching and learning, not about punishing.

'How adults respond to young children's behaviour is the way children learn to manage feelings and to relate to other people.'



Cultural differences

Community cultures and family cultures can have very different expectations and different things they want their children to learn about behaviour. Here are some examples.

- Most families respond to behaviour in ways that are the ways of the community they live in and have always lived in. However, communities are always changing, so we need to re-think the ways we respond to children as well.
- Many parents treat their children in the same way as they were treated when they were children. Sometimes this is helpful, but sometimes it is not the best way for the children.
- In some families, the parents set fairly wide boundaries and let children learn most things by trying them out, rather than teaching them what to do and what not to do. In others, parents do lots of teaching.
- In some families, boys are given a lot more freedom than girls.
- Some families respond to behaviour in particular ways because it is important for the way they live—for example, if you live in a very dangerous place, you may need to keep your children near you and quiet so they are safe.

Think about the way you were disciplined as a child and what it meant to you. This gives you a start in choosing how you will want to discipline your child.

‘Learning new things takes a long time and lots of mistakes.’

Discipline choices

Parents and carers of children make choices about how they respond to behaviour.

Some things to think about:

Young children learn most from what they see you do with others and what you do to them. This means that it is very difficult to teach children not to swear or hit, for example, if you do those things yourself.

Young children usually want to please their parents. Often this gets them into trouble because, when they try to be like you and carry the dishes, some can break; and when they practise using lipstick or paint like parents do, some of it goes in the wrong places. As adults we need to think about it from the child’s point of view, as well as from how we feel when the paint spills or the dishes break.

Learning new things takes a long time and lots of mistakes. Mistakes are opportunities to try again.

Everyone (including children) learns best when they are learning from someone who loves and cares about them.

If what you are doing is not working, it is better to try something different rather than more of the same.

Some things you might want to aim for:

- The behaviour you don't want, stops.
- Children learn more appropriate ways to do things or express feelings.
- Your relationship with your children stays positive.
- Your children gradually learn to manage their own feelings and behaviour.

What to expect

It is important to be aware of what your children understand about the world and what they can do. All children are different in the ways they grow and learn, so you will know about this best by knowing your own child. However, here are some general things to think about.

- Young infants, under about six months old, don't understand that other people exist when they are out of sight. So your infant cannot be crying to manipulate you or make you walk the floor. Babies are responding to their own inner needs and, the younger the baby, the more important it is for you to try to meet those needs promptly and as well as you can. Babies can't wait.
- Crawlers and toddlers have learned that you exist when you are out of sight, so you can call out that you are coming and often your older baby's cries will quieten.
- Toddlers see the world from their own point of view, and they think that if they are feeling something you will be feeling it too. They are likely to think that, if you are angry or sad, it is about them, even if it seems clear to you that it is about something else.
- Toddlers are beginning to feel more like independent people and want to explore their independence, so they will often say 'no' (even when they mean 'yes').

'All children are different in the ways they grow and learn, so you will know about this best by knowing your own child.'

‘When you are responding to your child’s behaviour you need to have realistic expectations of what they can understand and do.’

- Toddlers don’t yet know that you can’t read their minds; they will wander off to explore the world, thinking that you know where they are, and then be very upset when they can’t find you.
- Toddlers don’t have the same sense of time as adults. They can’t hurry.
- Children aged between about six months and three years feel anxiety—to a greater or lesser degree—when they are separated from their parents or the people who care for them the most. The severity of this will depend on the child’s temperament.
- It takes about three years for children to feel more confident when separated from the carers they feel safe with, and to understand that you can’t read their minds. By this time, children have a lot more understanding, and you can explain things to them with words.
- Four-year-olds are often very exuberant and ‘over-the-top’ in the way they act, especially when they are excited or are in a group. They like to experiment with words, especially ‘bathroom’ words, or swear words if they know some.

When you are responding to your child’s behaviour you need to have realistic expectations of what they can understand and do.

‘Toddlers don’t have the same sense of time as adults. They can’t hurry.’

Responding to children's behaviour

Babies

What we know about babies shows that discipline or behaviour management does not apply to babies at all. Whatever their babies' behaviour, adults need to try to work out what they need and respond to it (especially crying). This is the only way babies will learn to trust and to feel safe in the world.

Older babies and toddlers

People often ask when you can start saying 'no' to babies. Parents usually find that, in the second half of the first year, babies are moving about on their own and trying to touch everything they see, because this is the way they learn. This is a time when you find yourself saying 'no, hot' or 'no, that hurts' as you move your baby away from the stove or an electric outlet, for example. You don't expect your baby to be able to understand and to avoid these things, but it is the start of teaching and learning about them.

Even when older babies and toddlers can understand 'no', they still take time to learn to manage their feelings when they are told not to do something. You will see a toddler walking towards something he has been told not to touch, saying 'no, no, no' to himself as he goes to touch it. He has learned that he should not touch it but he hasn't yet learned enough self-control to be able to stop himself.

The only way to keep crawling babies and toddlers safe is to keep dangerous and precious things locked away or out of reach and to always make sure you know what they are doing.

Tips for toddlers

Avoiding battles

Because of young children's need to move towards being independent, while at the same time needing you, it is easy to get into battles with them. This is never the way to get a happy result.

It is especially important to avoid battles about eating and toilet training because these can lead to ongoing problems. Young children who were good eaters as babies often become very fussy about food as toddlers, and this can last for a few years. As long as what you offer them is generally healthy food, it works best to let them choose what they eat and how much they eat. No adults like to be forced to eat foods they don't want, and children are the same. Give them different options, but they may end up mostly eating Vegemite sandwiches. If you go along with their wishes but still have plenty of other interesting foods about, they will eventually try the new foods. If you are concerned about them getting enough vitamins, keep a list of what they eat for a few days and then discuss it with a health professional.

Toilet training is difficult for young children and requires a lot of new skills. It usually works best to give the child lots of encouragement for success or even part of success, but not to show disappointment or anger at failures. If your child is showing resistance or getting upset, wait a few weeks and then try again. If toilet training turns into a battle, children can become very tense and hold on, and this can cause a problem that doesn't go away quickly.

What toddlers need every day

- Changes of activity—they have a short attention span so they need a variety of interesting things to do.
- Exercise and space—time and places to run and explore.
- Healthy food that they like and water when they need it—small stomachs don't run very long on empty.
- Not to have long waits while adults do grown-up things.
- Activities they share with parents.

Just attending to these things will make teaching your child about behaviour much easier.

'It is especially important to avoid battles about eating and toilet training because these can lead to ongoing problems.'

Teaching about behaviour

Children need your help with managing relationships, boundaries and feelings.

It takes a long time (years) for children to really learn to manage feelings, and they learn it when adults who care for them:

- listen and show they understand, even when you have to stop the behaviour—*I know you want to play with that but we don't hit.*
- name feelings for them—*You feel cross when Mummy has to feed the baby.*
- help them to find alternatives—*We draw on paper, not on walls, here is a big piece of paper to draw on.* Or *Would you like to paint on the fence with water instead?*
- help them to use words instead of actions for feelings—*You don't need to run away; you can tell me when you feel scared and I will help you.*
- hold and comfort them when they are distressed.

Say what you want, not what you don't want.

Milk is for drinking. I will get you some water to pour with and we can do it in the bathroom.

Balls are for throwing; toys aren't. Here's a ball. See if you can throw it to me.

It is Daddy's turn to talk now. Then I want to hear what you want to tell me.

I can't hear you when you shout. Can tell me what you want really softly so I can hear?

When children are learning something new (almost all the time for toddlers) it is easy to make their days full of 'no's' and negative comments. This is not good for either the child or for you. Some people suggest trying to make sure you have said more positive things than negative ones—have a bit of a count occasionally!

Another way is to practise turning possible negative comments into positive ones. Try to tell your child what you want her to do instead of what you don't want. This helps to build your child's knowledge and strengths.

For example:

'Say what you want, not what you don't want.'

Negative	Positive
Don't come to the table with filthy hands.	*Can you show me how clean you can make your hands before we eat?*
Don't pull the cat's tail, or you will go to your room.	*It hurts kitty when you pull her tail, I will show you how to stroke her gently and see if we can make her purr.*
Don't bang the door; you are naughty.	*I know you are a big boy who can shut doors quietly. Can you show me how you do it?*

‘Toddlers are usually fairly easily distracted from doing something you don’t want ... ’

Lend a hand

Many tasks seem big to young children but are much easier if they are shared. If you offer to help with tidying up toys, you are much more likely to get cooperation and things done quickly. You also can have some fun together.

Distracting

Toddlers are usually fairly easily distracted from doing something you don’t want, by an offer of a different toy or a fun game to take their minds off what they wanted to do.

For example:

Parent: *I know you want to play with that, but Kim has it now. When he finishes it is your turn. Look here is a truck to play with while you wait.*

Even older young children will respond to a different suggestion. For example, a four-year-old who is saying a swear word can sometimes be offered another word (even one you make up) that sounds funny, and they will say that instead.

Choices

Offering a choice often helps when children don't want to do something or are doing something you don't want them to. But don't give too many choices to two-year-olds, they can usually cope with only two!

For example, if your two-year-old does not want a bath, you could say: *Shall we hop to the bath like a kangaroo or fly to the bath like a bird? Shall we put red colour* (a few drops of food colouring) *in the water, or blue?*

Older preschoolers can be given a choice about managing behaviour.

For example: *That is a special book. You can look at it carefully, or I will give you a magazine instead that you can cut up.*

Would you like to clean up the blocks or the pencils?

Give choices only when there really is a choice for the child. If you have to go somewhere, don't ask the child if he wants to go. The choice could be whether he wants to run or to skip to the car.

'Give choices only when there really is a choice for the child.'

What to ignore

Sometimes you will hear it said that you should pay attention to children only when they are being 'good', and that if you ignore crying it will stop. It is true that if children's crying is ignored they will eventually learn not to cry; but at the same time they are learning that, when they are distressed or in need, there is no-one who is there to help them.

There are times when ignoring is helpful. You can ignore behaviour that does not bother you too much, when it is not because a child is upset. For example, if a child is saying something that she knows you don't like to hear, if she doesn't get any response she is likely to get tired of saying it and stop.

However children who are distressed need your help. This doesn't mean that you should give them everything they want, or give in to them if you don't believe that what they want is right—but it does mean that they need someone to understand their feelings and to help them learn to deal with disappointments and hurts. So if your child gets upset because she wanted a chocolate just before dinner, you would not give it to her but stay with her and, when she is able to listen, say that you know she is upset but that chocolates are 'sometimes foods' not for before dinner. You could then try offering an alternative e.g. something to help you get the dinner or a healthy snack.

Getting in first

Often parents can see when there is going to be trouble—children getting overactive or overexcited—or it looks as if there is going to be a fight over a toy. This is a good time to step in with another activity or suggestion before the trouble happens.

Time out

'Time out' is a punishment which involves a child spending some time by herself in a place such as a 'time out' chair or room. For under-threes, forced separation can make them feel very insecure; they don't yet really understand that you wouldn't leave them, so time out can be very stressful for the child.

For over-threes, time out would not have the same negative effect unless the child is already feeling insecure. However learning about solving problems and learning about managing behaviour does not happen in isolation.

'Time in'—which is time away from whatever the child was doing, but without separation from a parent or carer—has the effect of stopping the behaviour and at the same time does not threaten the child's security. It can be a really good learning time.

If you find that you need a break to calm your own feelings, you could try to settle the child at a calming activity (e.g. a book, puzzle or video) for a while. It is still important to stay near if you can, and to help the child understand that you can help him to manage his feelings and will not reject him. This helps him learn to manage his own feelings in time.

Planning

If you know the times when your child is most likely to be finding feelings hard to manage, it is good to have a plan. Think about what you need, what your child needs, and then how you can find a way that works for both of you.

If you have to take toddlers shopping, make sure that they are fed, toileted and rested. You can also give them some things to do, such as holding parcels in the shopping trolley or choosing some things to buy. You can make a game out of going up and down the aisles, or sing songs. All of these things can make a boring trip (for the child) into a more peaceful trip (for you).

Another example of a plan:

Problem	Your need	Child's possible need	Possible plan
Not wanting to go to bed	To get your child to go to bed	Missing out on the action	Give some warning of winding down, and provide an interesting story at bedtime. Don't be doing really interesting things with other children at bedtime.
		Afraid of night-time separation	Bedtime rituals that you follow every night help children to feel safe. Spend some time with your child—with a bedtime story, cuddle etc. Have a night-light. Allow your child to sleep in your room.
		Not ready to sleep	Try a later bedtime.
		Finds it hard to wind down	Do some relaxing things at the end of the day: spend some caring time at bedtime; share quiet, calming games or activities just before bedtime, e.g. stories.

When teaching doesn't work

If your child is upset or unhappy, even the best teaching methods won't work. This is when you need to 'listen' to the behaviour. You need to deal with the cause of the upset first.

Children might be unwell, tired, hungry, frustrated, anxious because of something going on in the family, and so on. At these times they need help with managing feelings, as well as with what is worrying them.

Some suggestions:

- A cuddle.
- Read a story with the child on your knee.
- Watch a favourite DVD together.
- A bath.
- A snack.
- Do something outside—even a walk around the block. Changing the space and having some exercise can help.
- A quiet activity with you, such as a puzzle.

'Staying near and staying calm tells the child that, even when he is out of control, you are in control ... '

For times when there is likely to be stress (e.g. waiting for appointments) a special activity box or bag is helpful. Put a few different things in it that you know your child will enjoy doing, and vary the contents from time to time. Make sure the activity box/bag is kept just for those special times.

Making sure that your child feels loved is the best way to teach.

Temper tantrums

Temper tantrums are common in toddlers as they are learning to deal with their feelings. When they start moving out into the world there are many things they want to do that they can't do yet, and many times they have to be told 'no' because what they want to do is not okay. This means that their lives can be very frustrating at times.

There are two kinds of tantrums—little tantrums which happen when children get frustrated or can't have what they want, and big tantrums when their feelings boil over into a really big upset and they can't control their feelings at all.

For little tantrums you can often deflect the situation by offering something else to think about or do.

For big tantrums where the child is really out of control—'beside himself'—you may only be able to stay near, maybe hold him if he will let you, until the storm passes. Talking usually doesn't help at this stage. When children have big tantrums their feelings are out of control and this is scary for them. They need to know that you are in control even though they aren't, and that their feelings won't make you either retaliate or leave them.

Staying near and staying calm tells the child that, even when he is out of control, you are in control; this helps him to feel safe and is the start of learning to manage feelings. This doesn't mean giving in to what he wanted, but it does mean that he knows you will help him to manage his feelings. After the tantrum is over you can think about what caused it and maybe what you could do another time to prevent it happening (see Planning, page 18).

If your young child has a tantrum in a shop (in spite of all your planning) you need to ignore any looks or comments from other shoppers and do what you need to do to settle the child. It may mean leaving the shop and carrying the child out to your car until things settle down.

You can't prevent all tantrums in young children but, if you think about when they happen and what else is happening at that time, you might be able to avoid some.

Often tantrums occur when a child misses her sleep and is tired, or hungry or stressed for some reason—so, if dinner is going to be late, a healthy snack might avoid a tantrum. A quiet game or being cuddled while watching a video might help to settle an over-tired child. Or, if you can see that your child is getting stressed, spend some time in a gentle activity together before she gets too distressed. If you wait until you finish what you were doing it might take a lot longer!

Note: Sometimes tantrums can be really upsetting for parents. If you find yourself getting tense, you may need to take some time out until you feel ready to manage your child's feelings. It is a time to think about your own experience of being a child and to get in touch with your inner feelings, because you need to be in control of your own feelings in order to help your child.

Checklist for discipline problems

If you have a behaviour problem with your child, there are some steps you can take to work things out.

1. Build the relationships first

Before you think about how to manage the behaviour, you need to be sure that you and your child are getting on well together. If the relationship is not going well, young children will be confused and unhappy. They show their feelings in difficult behaviour. So, before you tackle the behaviour problem, spend a week working on making sure your child knows that:

- she is loved (hugs, spending time together, taking time to listen to her chatter, telling her you love her)
- she is lovable [making sure that you don't talk about her or to her in a negative way (e.g. *you are … lazy, naughty* etc.) but appreciate her lovely qualities (e.g. talk about how she helped you pick up the toys, stroked the cat, gave you a hug, etc.)].

2. Teach—make eye contact and state clearly and simply what is wanted

Young children are learning a new language, so they not only have to hear, but also to understand what you say. It helps if you get down to their level and give simple steps for what you want them to do. Show them how as well as tell them how. Do it with them at first. And remember that learning new things takes time. So, instead of saying *No, don't do that*, you could say *Balls are for throwing, food goes on plates*. Remember to expect mistakes and give opportunities to try again with a bit more help, and to teach in small steps.

3. Be consistent so children know the boundaries

No parent is consistent all the time, and nor should they be. There are times when you do things differently if someone is sick or tired, or it is a birthday etc.

However, knowing what to expect helps children to make sense of the world, so it helps to show your children how you want them to do something, then keep on doing it that way. For example, *We eat at the table and not while we are watching the TV.*

'Notice when children are doing well.'

4. Encourage—look for small successes

Notice when children are doing well. Often we are so busy thinking about the big things we want from children that we forget to notice and encourage the small steps on the way. For example, a child learning to use the toilet might wet the floor and then tell you he has 'done wee'. One step on the way to toilet training is for the child to be able to tell you what he's done; so if he gets approval for telling you after he has an accident, he is on the way to telling you before he does.

Remember to watch out for your reaction to 'slip-backs' when children have learned something new. It is easy for parents to be disappointed if a child who has learned a new skill suddenly goes back to the old way. You need to see it as a temporary slip-back, because if you are angry and the child becomes stressed about it, it can turn into a big 'slide-back'.

5. Know where children are

It is important to prevent behaviour problems as much as possible. Parenting is a hands-on job. You might hope that your children will be playing happily while you do something you want to do, but the chances are that your one-year-old will have become tired of drawing on the paper and will be experimenting with drawing on the sofa.

You need to be aware of what they are doing so you can prevent accidental misbehaviour. Try spending a few minutes getting your young child involved in an activity before you start your own task, rather than hope that she will wait—it takes a lot longer to pick up the pieces afterwards.

Often giving your child something to do that is helping you will make her feel valued and give you some space to achieve what you want. For example, if you need to get the dinner on, you could let her help you wash the vegetables.

'Children learn most from what adults do, rather than what they say.'

6. Model behaviour

Children learn most from what adults do, rather than what they say. So, if you decide there is to be no swearing or hitting or dropping clothes on the floor in your home, you need to observe the rules yourself.

Punishment

Some people say that children who are brought up without physical punishment will be uncontrollable when they become teenagers. In fact, it is usually the opposite. Research shows that children who become aggressive as teenagers often have had a lot of physical punishment and have learned from it that physical aggression is the way to get what you want or to react to feelings. There is nothing in favour of hitting as a method of teaching children about socially acceptable behaviour. In fact, what punishment teaches is:

- that hitting is okay if you are 'grown-up'
- not to commit the punishable offence in the adult's presence, rather than learning not to do it at all
- not to tell the truth in order to avoid punishment
- what not to do, not what is wanted
- that physical aggression is a way to solve problems.

Children's feelings after being hit are likely to be anger or fear and, if severe, this can interfere with any learning.

Punishment is not a way to teach; it interferes with, rather than contributes to, learning. Teaching social behaviour, like other teaching, starts from good relationships between children and adults.

Research has shown that children and young people do best when they come from caring homes with positive discipline (teaching), have parents who listen and are understanding, and who take a real interest in them so they know what their children are doing and where they are.

Important.

Never shake a baby—it can cause brain damage.

Troubleshooting

If something is going wrong in your child's life and he or she is very distressed, ordinary discipline methods won't work. In this case you need to look for the cause and try to deal with it.

Try to track when the behaviour happens, what happens before and what happens after, and what has changed in your child's life. This will help you get an idea of what might be the cause.

Some possible causes:

- A new baby in the family.
- Some family change, e.g. a parent going back to work.
- Change of childcare arrangements.
- Bullying or aggression by other children.
- Separation from the special people who care for them.
- Family stress, e.g. parental arguments (children will blame themselves for these, especially before they have enough words to understand).

If any of these things are happening and your child continues to show that she is distressed by behaviour or words or both, talk to a health professional who can help you find a way through. What you do to sort things out when children are young is very important to their future.

When you are stressed yourself, you might find it hard to deal with children's difficult behaviour, and this is a time when it is easy to lose control and hurt a child. If your feelings are getting out of control, make sure your child is safe and take a break for a while. (It is best if someone else can care for the child.) You need to get back in control of your own feelings. Make a cup of tea, ring a friend or relative or a parent helpline. Sometimes just getting outside will help—put the baby or young child in a pram and go for a walk. If you are lucky the baby might go to sleep as well.

Everyone needs help sometimes. Get help when you need it.

Remember: Children won't remember how much housework you did, but they will thrive in a loving home. Take time to have fun.

Further information

Supporting Best Practice section www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/sbp

www.cyh.com (Parenting and Child Health)

Parent helplines – check the White Pages for numbers in your area

Crary, E. (1993). *Without spanking or spoiling*. New York: Parenting Press.

Kurcinka, M. S. (1991). *Raising your spirited child*. New York: HarperCollins.

Kurcinka, M. S. (2000). *Kids, parents and power struggles*. New York: HarperCollins.

Lieberman, A. (1993). *The emotional life of the toddler*. New York: Free Press.

Parker, J. A. (2003). *Helping children in times of need: Grief, loss, separation and divorce*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.

Roe, D. (2006). *Everyday learning about fears and anxieties*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.

Slee, J. (2003). *Managing difficult behaviour in young children*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.

Thomas, P. (2006). *Stress in early childhood: Helping children and their carers*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.

SUBSCRIBE and SAVE

Australian Journal of Early Childhood

A premier early childhood academic journal. It is current, topical, and features insightful innovative early childhood research from leading academics.

$70.00 (4 issues)

Every Child

Australia's premier early childhood magazine, aimed at anyone involved in the care and education of children from birth to eight years - in particular child care professionals, teachers, child care students and the parents of young children.

$50.00 (4 issues)

Research in Practice Series

Don't miss out on this highly popular series. The topics are different each edition and recent titles have been re-printed due to demand! Past issues have focused on autism spectrum disorder, boys and literacy, and ethics.

$45.00 (4 issues)

Everyday Learning Series

Focuses attention on the everday ways in which young children can be supported in their growth and development. The series offers simple and creative ideas to enhance children's interactions with the world around them.

$40.00 (4 issues)

Make life easier – subscribe! *Don't forget,* subscriptions for early childhood professionals are tax deductible

To subscribe call toll free 1800 356 900 Email: eca@earlychildhood.org.au

Children's behaviour is one of the most common things that parents worry about.

Everyday learning about children's behaviour provides a clear, easy-to-read approach to teaching about behaviour in a positive way, for parents, grandparents and other carers.

Experienced parenting expert Pam Linke covers topics such as:

- what to expect at different ages
- tips for toddlers
- planning ahead
- discipline problems
- troubleshooting.

A very useful and practical resource to equip parents and carers with the knowledge and skills they need, as they raise children with love and understanding.

ISBN 1-921162-07-4
9 781921 162077

Early Childhood Australia Inc.