

PEACE means

- mutually helpful relationships among people
- resolving conflicts through peaceful means

The best place to begin to foster PEACE is in our homes.

Peaceful childrearing is based on these beliefs:

- Every child is special, precious and has inner goodness.
- Every person deserves to be treated with respect – children *and* parents.
- Everyone in a family, youngest to oldest, needs to cooperate to help each other.

Problems with Hitting Children (or hurting them in other ways)

Research shows that physical punishment may have the following long-term effects on children:

- Lower sense of self worth
- More anxiety
- More depression and risk of suicide
- More drug abuse
- Lower IQ in girls
- More violence to brothers and sisters
- More violence outside the family
- More teenage anti-social behaviour
- More violence to spouses in adulthood
- Less chance of a good salary

As well, parents who use physical punishment are more likely to slide into serious child abuse.

This doesn't mean that one slap will damage your child's development, or that everyone who was hit as a child becomes a troubled adult. These outcomes are averages for hundreds of people. On average, the harsher the physical punishment, the worse the outcome.

Physical punishment may bring behaviour under *your* control. But the child is likely to try to "get away with" the undesired behaviour when no one is watching. What we really want is to rear our children with strong moral values about good behaviour and firm *self*-control.

If it's harmful to hit, how should I discipline my child?

Children learn good behaviour in a number of ways. Even difficult and impulsive children will respond better to some of the following.

Laying Good Foundations

- **Foster a secure attachment.** This means spending a lot of time with young children, hugging, being available and trying to understand how the child feels.
- **Develop a cooperative relationship with the child.** Saying "yes" whenever it's reasonable. Play and have fun - laugh with your child.
- **Set an example** of kind, respectful and cooperative behaviour to everyone in the family. Try not to model behaviour such as yelling or putting others down.

Encouraging Desired Behaviour

- **Set high, but realistic expectations** of good behaviour from the child.
- **"Catch your child being good."** Praise good behaviour, even harder-to-notice things like playing quietly and not interrupting. Praise the behaviour and the child, e.g. "Thanks for setting the table so nicely. You're a great helper."
- **Talk and listen.** Explain the need for good behaviour and why bad behaviour is not wanted. Listen and respond to the child's point of view. But don't get drawn into endless arguing over points that are well understood and non-negotiable.
- **Watch and guide.** Supervision and guidance are especially important when children are young, but should taper gradually as they get older.
- **Create opportunities for caring, sharing and helping** inside the family and beyond.
- **Teach children to resolve their conflicts by** listening to each side of the conflict; brainstorming ideas for a fair resolution of the conflict and; acting on the best idea.
- **Share stories (books, videos etc.) with children** of people showing care, cooperation, kindness, courage and other good qualities. Limit exposure to violent "heroes" on TV, video games and sports.
- **Set up a 'Family Council'.** Involve everyone in discussing rules, chores, consequences and plans. Children may have great ideas you never thought of. This is also good training for shared decision-making and working in groups.

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Minimizing Undesired Behaviour

For many children, the steps laid out above may be enough. But others may need firmer guidance:

- **Reminders may help, but frame them positively.** E.g. “I’d like to see you sharing your Lego with your brother”, rather than “Don’t keep snatching your brother’s toys.”
- **Encourage empathy (care) for others as the reason for good behaviour.** E.g. “Your sister can’t sleep if your radio is loud.”
- **Anticipate problems and rehearse desired behaviour.** This may help with small children who grab and whine in a supermarket or teenagers facing pressures to drink or smoke.
- **Lay out consequences for undesired behaviour:**
 - (i) **Time out.** A child who is out of control may need time apart. Before removing the child, give a warning of what will come if the behaviour does not change. Say: “That’s one,” and wait. Then, “That’s two,” and wait. Then say, “That’s three. You must go to your room now.”
 - (ii) **Time in.** Sometimes you may need to sit out with your child and discuss the problem behaviour.
 - (iii) **Natural and logical consequences.** e.g. “If you don’t clean your teeth, I’m afraid I can’t give you any food with sugar in it, because the sugar will give you cavities.”

- (iv) **Righting the wrongs.** Help your child take responsibility: e.g. “Let’s tell Lisa you’re sorry and help her build her space ship over again.”

Final Words

Childrearing is one of life’s great challenges and can also be one of life’s greatest joys. The strategies listed here have a proven track record: We know they work better than hitting. But nothing works for all children all of the time. And all parents experience times of lower tolerance. For more ideas contact a **children’s mental health centre** or **family service centre** in your area.

**The following websites
can also provide information:**

Voices for Children

www.voices4children.org

Canadian Paediatric Society

www.caringforkids.cps.ca

www.cps.ca/english/statements/PP/pp96-01.htm

*Our hope is that children reared
nonviolently will grow into caring
and nonviolent adults.*

Peaceful Childrearing: Fostering Peace in Our Homes



Peaceful Childhoods Series