



Child Builders

Houston's Advocates for Mental Health in Children

Tools for Healthy Discipline

By Janet Pozmantier, Parents Under Construction Director

Ever so quickly, your eight-month-old has crawled over to the corner and is ready to inspect the attractive electric outlet. Just as he reaches out to poke a chubby finger into the openings, you turn around and see what is about to happen.

Your three-year-old asks for a cookie. When you tell her "No, not now," she begins to whine and throw a tantrum.

Your school-age child is 30 minutes late coming home from a friend's house. When you tell him he is grounded, he yells, "I hate you! You're the worst parent in the world."

Every parent finds themselves in situations like these sooner or later. Out of fear, irritation, or anger, we may resort to spanking our child. Yet we now know that spanking is not the most effective or emotionally healthy way to discipline a child. In fact, there are many techniques that parents can use instead.

As in carpentry, parenting is a profession where you need more than one tool to get the job done right. The following techniques can help you add more "tools" to your parenting toolbox!

Modeling. If you want your child to do something, you have to do it, too. Words alone do not help your child learn the right thing; you must teach by example. For example, if you do not want your children to use bad language, you must not use bad language, either. If you want your children to be polite and respectful, you must use words like, "Please" and "Thank you" when you speak to them. Remember, children learn from what we do much more than from what we say.

Redirection. The baby is heading toward the outlet, and you need to act fast. Slapping her hand might stop her, but will she learn about what is OK to play with? And more importantly, how will the slap affect her trust in the safety of her relationship with you?

Instead, you can choose to say, "Stop" in a loud voice, pick her up, and show her some safe toys. Then, join her in playing with the safe toys. This "tool" is called "redirection" because you are changing your baby's direction away from something dangerous to something safe. You can do this with your words ("Here, play with this!") as well as picking her up and moving her. With redirection, your baby learns a lot - what is dangerous, what (and who!) is safe, and what pleases her parent.

Consistency. When you are consistent, you do what you say you are going to do — each and every time. For example, if you have a rule with your teenager that car privileges will be taken away one day for each minute they are late for curfew, consistency means you will stick to the rule each and every time your child is late. Your teen will learn that no matter what, they will lose car privileges if they break the rule. And most teens would rather come in on time than lose car privileges!

Consistency benefits all children, regardless of age. If consequences to behavior are the same each and every time, children will feel they are being treated fairly and are far less likely to rebel. Most important, when your children can depend on you to be consistent, they feel secure. And secure children grow into confident, mentally healthy adults.

The “tools” of modeling, redirection, and consistency all help children build the most important skill of all - self-discipline. After all, we parents can’t be there all the time!

The parenting techniques described in this brochure are also taught to children in a program called Parents Under Construction. Since 1992, this award-winning curriculum has given thousands of children and adolescents the tools they need to build healthy relationships today and strong families tomorrow. For more information about Parents Under Construction, please contact ChildBuilders at 713-783-8470, ext. 24 or 25.

ChildBuilders (formerly known as HAMIC), founded in 1974, is a non-profit organization that provides innovative programs to educate parents, children, teachers and the community about the emotional well-being of children and their families. www.childbuilders.org ChildBuilders Community Education.

For further information & referral
call your child’s school counselor

DePelchin Children’s Center	713-730-2335
ESCAPE Family Resource Center	713-942-9500
Harris County Psychiatric Center	713-741-5000
Jewish Family Service	713-667-9336
Mental Health Association	713-522-5161
MHMRA of Harris County	713-970-7070
NAMI Metro Houston	281-579-3750
United Way of Texas Gulf Coast	211 or 713-957-4357

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