

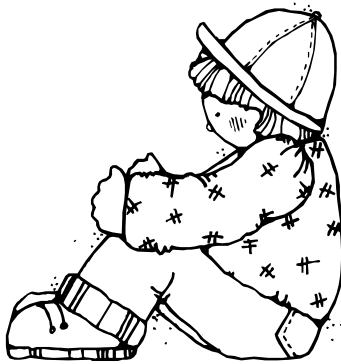
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Positive Guidance

Many parents seem to believe that there are two alternatives in child rearing. One is to become the kind of ogre that we may remember from our own childhoods, the adult who rules absolutely by producing fearful responses in children. Since this is not an appealing role for most parents (harmful as it is to parent-child relationships) they often adopt the other alternative.

This is to become a kind of "anything goes" adult, who seems powerless in the face of children's learning behaviors. You have likely seen these adults, usually coaxing or cajoling an out-of-bounds child while receiving the obvious disapproval of others around. There is actually a third alternative: The kind of adult who helps children slowly learn how to live within the parameters of acceptable and respectful behavior, without fear or the absence of self-control. These adults use



positive guidance strategies. Let's consider several of these.

1. Parents offer two choices that are acceptable to both child and adult. Choices support children's need to be independent, as well as define the limit and acceptable behavior. This gives children some control over what is happening.

"Do you want to walk to the car by yourself, or do you want me to carry you?" This is an example of positive guidance. Either way, the child is getting to the car, but the parent is allowing the child a measure of control.

2. Another positive guidance strategy is to provide alternatives to the unacceptable direction of behavior. In early childhood speak, we call this "redirection", which is simply offering an acceptable alternative to an unacceptable behavior.

It is completely unacceptable to kick little sister or

the dining room table leg. Providing a big Nerf ball allows the child to redirect the kicking impulse and energy to the backyard where it belongs.

"Those are Daddy's books," Mom says to the toddler, "Here, let's find your books to look at instead."

3. Help children understand "when"... "then." This kind of statement helps children know the next appropriate step or behavior, and places the child firmly responsible for what happens next. "When you put on your jacket, then you may go outside." "When you stop screaming, then you may come back and join us in the family room."

4. Tell children how you feel and why. "I state-ments" (like "I feel scared when you climb on the shelf, because you could fall and get hurt," or "I feel angry when you yell names at your brother, because that hurts his names at your brother, because that hurts his

Because you hurt his feelings.") describe what is going on, your feelings, and the reason for your feelings. Such communication teaches children that their actions affect others, giving them a reason to modify their behavior. After all, the relationship you have with your child means that your child is happier knowing his/her behavior has been pleasing to you, so your less positive feelings become motivations to change.

5. The last strategy for today is being quite specific in your comments when you see your children behaving appropriately. Explaining exactly what it is that children are doing appropriately, and why, means you will see that behavior repeated. "You are picking up the baby's toy for her. That makes her happy, because she couldn't reach it herself."

There is power in positive guidance, the power of helping your children learn appropriate behaviors, and the power of helping you become an authoritative, effective parent.

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ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING

A mother writes with a question that will be familiar to many of you, I'm sure. At a recent gathering of children ages 2 to 2 -1/2, another child grabbed a toy from her son. She wondered how she should handle a situation like this the next time.

Her questions: "Is it too early to teach my child to speak up for himself and try to take the toy back? Should I intervene on his behalf?"

As she said, she didn't want her son to become a bully but she wants him to be able to stand up for himself. No doubt many of you are nodding your heads with recognition.

The first distinction we should make is in our understanding of being assertive or being aggressive. Aggressive is the bully who goes on the offence; assertive is the individual who can stand up for his own rights. Aggressive is the child taking the toy back forcefully; assertive is the child who can advocate for his needs and rights appropriately, with words.

Having said that, it is certainly not too early to begin to teach her child how to be assertive. In their third year, children are struggling with understanding how to interact with others, and need guidance and coaching from their parents in learning helpful strategies. If by "intervention on his behalf" the mother means

moving in to restore the toy herself, this is not helpful for either child, as it solves the problem temporarily without teaching the children any skills for solving similar problems in the future. Such actions tend to reinforce children in passive roles, allowing them to become victims later when no one is there to rescue them.

Instead, appropriate intervention is for the parent to step in to help the children learn words to use in instances where they want to convey their needs and wants to others.

She might ask her son, "Were you finished playing with that?" This demonstrates to both children the idea that people can give something up when they are finished. If he says yes (which he may, and accept that), suggest to the other child that he say, "May I play with that now that you are finished?"

If, more likely, he says no, Mom can say, "You can tell him: "I need that back until I'm finished." With the parent standing right beside him, even the quietest child feels emboldened to say those words. And in the face of such calm assertiveness (supported by the adult's presence) even the most belligerent is liable to comply.

The parent could then complete the lesson by telling the other child, "You can ask David for a turn with that when he's finished." In all of this exchange, there is the expectation that clear communication with others will be heeded. If the first child seems reluctant to part with the toy, the parent could say, "Did you hear Jonathan's words? He's saying something important to you."

As adults give children the words to use in such situations, children develop confidence that words will give them power to assert themselves.

Even with less verbal younger children, adults can say, "You can say, No, or Mine." Giving words is giving permission to stand up for yourself.

Often parents and teachers throw out the cliché phrase, "Use your words." It takes patient teaching and demonstration before youngsters learn the words to use, and feel empowered to communicate their needs and wants appropriately.

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These activities are not a test to see whether your child knows the skills. If your child has trouble, give enough hints so that he or she can be successful. If the activity is too difficult or becomes frustrating, stop that activity and do something else that is fun. The main goal is to spend quality time with your child each day and to help your child be successful!

1 Play Dough (stove-top recipe)

Mix in a medium pot:

1 cup white flour

1/4 cup salt

2 Tbs. cream of tartar

Combine and add:

1 cup water

2 tsp. vegetable food coloring

1 Tbsp. oil

Cook over medium heat and stir (about 3-5 minutes). It will look like a "globby" mess and you'll be sure it's not turning out. . . But it will. When it forms a ball in the center of the pot, turn out and knead on a lightly floured surface. Store in an airtight container or plastic bag. Edible but not tasty.

1 continued

When using play dough, don't neglect those necessary pieces of equipment: cookie cutters, rolling pins (real or play), plastic knives, bottle caps, extra flour, uncooked spaghetti or macaroni, walnut half-shells, etc.

From Feed Me I'm Yours by Vicki Lansky. Meadowbrook Press, Wayzata, MN: 1978. pg. 94.

2 Slime

♥ In a large bowl mix:

2 cups white glue (Dap Wood Glue works best)

1 1/2 cups water

♥ Next mix in three small cups until dissolved:

1/3 cup warm water

1 teas. Borax

♥ You may add food coloring to the Borax solutions, or the watered glue solution.

♥ Finally, add the contents of one of the small cups to the glue and water mixture in the large bowl. The substance will quickly thicken in the bowl—lift out the thicken portion. There will be glue and water left.

♥ Add the contents of the next small cup, lift out the mass and do the same with the last small cup. You will have three masses of slime.

3 Non-Newtonian Goops

1 1/2 cups cornstarch

1 cup water

A mixing spoon

A large plastic bowl

Pour water into the bowl and slowly stir in the cornstarch. Experiment with the viscosity. Grab the liquid, pinch it, roll into a ball, etc. You may color the water or add coloring to the final product.