

Choose to Hug



Information and
suggestions for parents

Choose to Hug: *Information and suggestions for parents.*

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You are invited to share the information in this book with others.
Feel free to copy it you wish.

Introduction

I know that parents in Aotearoa New Zealand want the best for their children. We want children to be happy, healthy, make good friends and do well at school. We want our children to grow up to be caring people who have safe, warm relationships with their partners and children. Confident, happy children trust, rather than fear, the adults in their lives.

The key to helping us achieve these results for our children lies in our relationship with them. We want to have positive and trusting relationships with our children. One of our most important tasks as parents is to guide our children's behaviour; to help them learn how to behave in an acceptable way in society.

But guiding our children's behaviour, and helping them learn how to behave acceptably is sometimes hard work. It takes time and patience and makes many demands on our energy. This small book provides some tools and suggestions for dealing with the kind of demanding everyday behaviours all children exhibit as they learn about becoming social human beings.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a place where it is no longer legal to hit children. There has been some confusion about the law. A section at the end of the book explains the law.

This book is intended to help parents guide children without using smacking or hitting.

This book is a revised edition of a previous book *Choose to Hug: Not to Smack: Awhitia, Kaua e Papakitia*.

It is dedicated to our children and their future.



Dr Cindy Kiro
Children's Commissioner

Setting the scene for good behaviour

Guidance not punishment

This book is about positive discipline; supporting children, showing them what you want and rewarding acceptable behaviour. It is not about negative discipline, punishment and criticism.

Punishment is not a necessary part of raising children. When adults use punishment it is often because they are frustrated with their children's behaviour. And all too often children don't understand what it is that they have done wrong. They are likely to feel angry and confused, and these feelings can get in the way of learning acceptable behaviour.

Positive discipline does not mean children can do what they like. They do best when they are well supervised and know what is expected of them.

Secure and well-loved children want to please the people they love. With time, they learn to be self-disciplined and to respect others and care about how they feel.



**Our children do best when they feel loved and valued,
are well supervised and know how they should behave.**

Provide a positive environment

Children are more likely to grow up behaving well if they feel loved, valued and are told how important they are, and when they are:

- *Given praise when they do well*
- *Kept safe from hurt and can trust the adults around them*
- *Around adults whose behaviour sets a good example*
- *Not expected to behave in ways that are too hard for their age*
- *Given clear and consistent rules*
- *Supervised well and kept occupied with interesting and fun activities*
- *Provided with predictable and sensible routines*
- *Comfortable because their physical and emotional needs are well attended to.*

Children are learning all the time about acceptable ways to behave. They do not come pre-programmed about right or wrong. They try things out and sometimes make mistakes.

Principles that encourage good behaviour in all of us

There are some principles or guidelines which, if applied consistently, encourage children (and adults) to behave well.

• Give positive attention

Praising children with appreciation and hugs for good behaviour is far more effective than criticising and punishing them for things they do wrong.

• Ignore little things

Intervene only when the child is behaving really badly or a child is in danger. Children learn to tune out or turn off if they feel constantly nagged. Their self-esteem also suffers if they feel as though they can never get anything right.

• Ensure children understand what is expected of them

Explain to children exactly what you expect of them, and help them understand what behaviour you want. Avoid focusing only on what they do wrong.

• Communicate clearly

If children don't hear or understand adults' messages, they can't do what is asked of them. Make sure you have their attention, keep messages short and check that children understand



Rewarding children for good behaviour with praise and hugs is far more effective than criticising and punishing children for things they do wrong.

what you have said and what you want. Give them time to think about what you have said.

- **Allow for difference**

Everyone has their own personality and a set of individual needs. Some children are harder to guide than others - this does not mean that they are born bad. Remember that no one is well-behaved all the time.

- **Help children learn from their mistakes**

Children and adults make mistakes. Mistakes are opportunities we can all learn from.

Encouraging the behaviours you want — some suggestions

Remember that the same thing does not always help every time.

1. **Positive attention**
2. **Distraction**
3. **Ignore behaviour you don't like**
4. **Make co-operation fun**
5. **Disapprove of the behaviour – not the child**
6. **Help children feel good**
7. **Time in and time out**
8. **Prepare ahead**
9. **Give children choices**
10. **Give children reasons**
11. **Real life lessons**
12. **Reflect the child's feelings**

1. Positive attention

Rewarding children for good behaviour works better than criticising and punishing children for unacceptable behaviour.

Positive attention and praise are the best rewards parents can give to a child of any age. Even small children really want to please their parents.

Say positive things

It's easy to say positive things to children, and it helps them learn. Children blossom when they are praised for things they have done well.

- *You did well!*
- *Thank you for putting that away.*
- *What a helpful boy - thanks for drying the dishes.*
- *I'm really proud of you for sharing your toy.*
- *Great! What a tidy room.*

Look out for success

Notice good and improved behaviour. Children may behave badly if their positive behaviour goes unnoticed or if negative behaviour gets them lots of attention.

Be affectionate

Look and smile at your children when you talk to them. Reward good behaviour with smiles, kisses and hugs.



Children blossom when they are praised for things they have done well.

Comment on improvements

- *I liked the way you sorted out who had the first turn on the bike.*
- *You were very quiet while I was on the phone. I like that a lot.*

Use humour and surprise

- *Wow! You were the first one to eat all your dinner.*

Tell someone else

- *Dad I have something very special to tell you. Susan and Tony played together all day and took turns without arguing.*

Link good behaviour and enjoyable activities

- *After you have cleaned up I will read you a story.*
- *You can play with your train after you have finished that.*

Avoid put-downs

Don't call children names like "dummy", "dick" or "idiot". And avoid telling them they are stupid or dumb. They may begin to believe what you say and stop trying.

Say sorry if you make a mistake

Everyone loses their cool occasionally. If in the heat of the moment you say something you regret, say sorry. You'll be surprised at the response you'll get. Kids feel valued when adults apologise to them.

2. Distraction

By nature, small children want their own way, can't control their feelings and don't understand about consequences. They can become very angry if they don't get what they want. Toddlers have to learn over time about pleasing others and how to manage their behaviour and feelings.

It is normal for a toddler to refuse to do what adults want – it's a normal part of their development. Getting angry with young children doesn't work – in fact it can reinforce unwanted behaviour and lead to tantrums. Both you and your child will end up feeling worse.

Rather than focusing on the unwanted behaviour, try distracting small children. Most young children are relatively easily distracted – sometimes by quite simple actions.

Focus on something else

- Look Peter – look at the big truck out the window.

Exchange activities

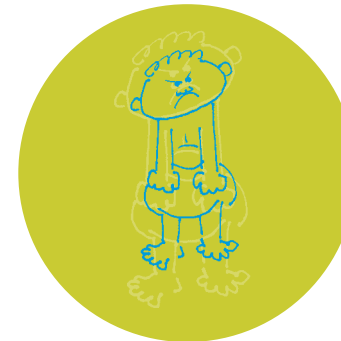
- No you can't have that (glass jar) but have this one (coloured plastic one).
- I need that (the soap powder) – you have this (the peg basket).

Move right away

- We are going to run down to the letterbox and see if there is any mail.
- Let's go and see what Mary is up to next door.

You can help distract the child by picking them up, giving them a cuddle or doing something they enjoy, such as dancing with them or singing to them. The child may be expecting an angry parent and the fact that you are not angry helps to distract the child.

Sometimes you will have to simply take control of a situation and gently but firmly move the child away from danger, or from a situation where they are hurting someone or destroying property. The reason for doing this is to keep the child or someone else safe, or to take care of the child, never to punish or hurt the child. Smacking and hitting are never needed when keeping a child safe or caring for a child.



It is normal for a toddler to refuse to do what adults want.

3. Ignore behaviour you don't like

You can make things worse by focusing on unwanted behaviour. Too much attention to unwanted behaviour teaches children that misbehaving is one way of getting the attention they want and need.

Avoid giving children negative messages all the time. It makes them feel that they can never get it right – their self-esteem suffers and they may feel angry and resentful towards you.

Ignore little things

It is best to ignore little things or, at the very least, treat them lightly. Intervene only when behaviour is really unacceptable or unsafe. This is particularly important with small children. For example, it is often best to ignore messes, grizzling, demanding behaviour and bad moods.



Avoid giving children negative messages all the time. It makes them feel that they can never get it right.

Ignore cheeky or rude behaviour in small children

If the child uses 'rude' words act in an uninterested way or say:

- *I am not interested in that.*
- *We don't use those words in our house.*

Don't 'sweat the small stuff' with older children

Everyone has faults, makes mistakes and forgets things sometimes. Let it pass unless it is serious or ongoing. Treat it lightly, the first time at least – a gentle reminder is enough.

- *Hey, you didn't put your bike away last night.*

4. Make co-operation fun

Children are more likely to co-operate and behave well if it is fun to do so.

Help children start and finish things

- *Let's see how much of this you can do before I get back.*

Use singing, rhymes and rhythm

Use tunes you know or make up your own.

- *We're putting the blocks away, today, today.*

Turn boring activities into games

- *Let's see who can get to the lamp-post first.*
- *I will put away the blue blocks - which colour will you put away?*
- *Tama certainly uses a lot of nappies. Let's count them as we fold them.*

Give the child a little challenge

For example, use the timer on the kitchen stove.

- *Can you beat the timer and pick up your toys before it goes off?*
- *Let's see if you can get dressed before that timer goes off.*



Children are more likely to co-operate and behave well if it is fun to do so.

5. Disapprove of the behaviour – not the child

It is OK to let children know when you disapprove of their behaviour. Approval and disapproval are very powerful tools in shaping children's behaviour.

Children must understand, however, that it is the behaviour – not them – that you don't like. There is a big difference.

Rather than saying: *I don't like you because you tease Tom. You make me very cross; you are a mean boy.*

It is better to say: *I don't like it when you tease Tom because he gets very upset and that means I will have to spend time with him and your dinner will be late.*

Rather than saying: *I don't like you. You are a mean boy to pull the cat's tail.*

It is better to say: *I get cross when you pull the cat's tail. It is a mean thing to do because it hurts the cat.*



Approval and disapproval are very powerful tools in shaping children's behaviour.

6. Help children feel good

Even though children can be forced to behave well through fear of punishment or pain, these feelings do not encourage children to self-disciplined in the long term.

Every child needs to develop their own internal control or self-discipline. This is more likely to happen when the adults around them model helpful, respectful and non-violent behaviour and when children feel approved of, loved and valued. These children will feel good about themselves and are likely to behave acceptably.

Saving face

Like everyone else, children sometimes need to save face when they make a mistake or don't behave well. Be sensitive to children's needs in these situations. Say things like:

- *Never mind. We all forget things sometimes.*
- *That was a bit too heavy for you. Next time ask me to help.*
- *Mary is sometimes bossy. Let's talk about ways to help you keep your temper when you are playing with her.*
- *Mummy makes mistakes sometimes and that is how we learn what works and what doesn't.*
- *Next time try doing it this way.*

- Avoid going over and over mistakes and shortcomings
- Don't make children feel silly
- Don't tease children about their faults
- Tell children how pleased you are when they get it right
- And tell them often that you love them



Children who feel good about themselves are likely to behave in acceptable ways.

7. Time In (special time)

Sometimes when children are misbehaving it's a sign to their parents that they need more attention, not less. Children need Time In – some special time alone with a parent. This can help a child get better self-control or feel more secure so he or she can behave better.

If you think your child is misbehaving a lot, set aside 15-20 minutes a day especially for him or her. Start off by having this special time five days a week – you may then want to reduce it to three or four days a week. When you are ready for Time In:

Announce that it is our “special time”

Ask your child what he or she would like to do. This should be something you do together so you can spend time with the child and comment positively on good behaviour or skills.

Provide your child with positive statements of praise or positive feedback

Tell the child what you like about their activity and behaviour.

Turn away if your child misbehaves during this special time

If the child misbehaves simply turn away for a few moments. If the misbehaviour continues, tell the child that the special time is over. Tell the child how you would like them to behave and ask them if they would like to try again now or later.

Special time can be something to look forward to

Do not threaten to withdraw it altogether if the child is behaving badly.

Sometimes when a child is upset or behaving badly he or she simply needs some time with you

For example, if you are baby-sitting the neighbour's children, and your own child is demanding, try sitting down, giving the child a hug, and telling them:

- *I understand it is hard to share me with Mary.*

If a child is hurting their new baby brother, sit down and explain:

- *I understand you are angry that mum has to spend time on the new baby. I want you to stop touching him like that – when he is asleep we'll read your new book together.*

When there is a new baby in the family it is particularly important for other children to have special time.

If a child is throwing a tantrum, sit close to them and try and help calm them down, perhaps by patting them on the back or talking or singing gently. But, if your attention seems to wind the child up more, just walk away. Some children calm down better on their own.

If they are old enough to understand, you may like to say: *You need to calm down. Mummy will come back when you have calmed down.* Walk away but stay close enough to make sure the child is safe.

It is important that children learn to manage their strong feelings themselves and how to express them in a safe way.



Special time can be something to look forward to.

Something about "Time Out"

"Time Out" is a technique sometimes recommended by parenting advisors. Others think it should not be used at all.

The purpose of time out is to give an out-of-control child somewhere safe and quiet to be so he or she can calm down and regain control.

Sometimes it is the parent who needs 'time out' - a chance to calm down and in regain control and while the child is in a safe place.

Unfortunately "Time out" is often misused as a form of punishment and for that reason we are cautious about its use.

"Time out" should never be used:

- *as a punishment or threat*
- *for more than a few minutes at a time*
- *if there is nowhere safe for the child to be*
- *if the child is not mature enough to understand why he or she is in "Time Out".*

The following are important guidelines:

- *The child should never be locked in*
- *The child should never be restrained (forcibly put in "Time Out" or held down in any way)*
- *A place that should be peaceful and safe for a child (like a bedroom) should never become associated with anger and fear*
- *"Time Out" should never be used in a way that leaves the child feeling distraught, rejected or abandoned. A small out-of-control child is very frightened and overwhelmed by their feelings*
- *The child should always understand that they can come back to you for reassurance when they have calmed down.*

8. Prepare ahead

Small children want attention, are active, get bored with activities quickly and express their feelings loudly. Adults who know them well can reduce children's frustration and boredom by planning ahead.

Avoid putting young children through frustrating experiences when you can

Keep telephone conversations, visits to the shops and car journeys as short as you can.

Anticipate a child's needs

There are many frustrating activities that can't always be avoided. Make sure the children have got interesting things to do and that they are comfortable (not hungry, or needing to go to the toilet) when you have to sit in a waiting room or go on a long journey:

- *provide a special box of toys*
- *take some food with you*
- *play some music or a story*
- *sing along with your child*
- *tell stories.*

Give the child **attention before you need to be busy** and explain that you will need their help while you shop or keep an appointment, for example. Sometimes when you have a number of things you must do it helps to make a list and ask the child to choose the order you do them in.

Take the children out to the park or for a swim before you start to prepare dinner or go to the doctor. They may then be tired enough to sit and watch

a video or look at books while you are busy. But try not to get them so tired that they require more attention because they become irritable.

Give children support if they are too tired

If children are too tired they may be unreasonable. Sometimes it is better to give up what you are trying to do (if it is not essential) and instead sit and read or play with a tired child.

Keep expectations realistic

You will be tired sometimes. It helps to plan your day so that you have time to do things alone when your children are asleep.



It helps to plan your day so that you have time to do things when your children are asleep.

9. Give children choices

Parents have to make many day-to-day decisions affecting their children. However, if you allow children to have a say and make simple choices they are more likely to co-operate than if they have no say at all. Choices help children learn about making good decisions, feel they have some power, and will distract children from arguing. Giving children choices gives them a sense of importance and involvement in their world.

Give a child real choices

Give children choices that you are prepared to accept.

You can tell a three-year-old

- Ice-cream is for pudding - but you can choose between rice bubbles or toast and honey for your breakfast.

You can tell a seven-year-old

- That is a dress to wear to a party. For school you can choose between your tracksuit, your jeans and new jersey, or this dress that Annie used to wear.

You can tell a 10-year-old

- There are three jobs. I'll do two. Which one do you want to do? Do you want to bring in the washing, put out the rubbish or feed the cat?

Involve children in decisions

As children get older you can discuss the alternatives with them and involve them in making decisions about how things are to be done.

- I know you have a music lesson tonight, and you want to watch this programme now, where will you fit in your homework?

- *Let's talk about going to the movies on Saturday. Have you thought about how you are going to get there and how you will fit in your music lesson?*

It is important that parents:

- *treat a child's solutions with respect and consideration*
- *don't give in to unacceptable choices.*

Sometimes there is no choice

Rather than *Do you want to go to bed now?*
You might say:

- *Do you want to go to bed now or in 10 minutes time?*
- *Time for my rules now. Go to bed NOW please.*



**Giving a child
some options may
increase
co-operation.**

10. Give children reasons

Very young children do not understand reasons. If you use a lot of long words little children will not understand why you are insisting on something.

Keep reasons simple

- *Hot – it hurts!*

Some toddlers will not understand such words or overcome their desire to touch the heater but others will.

Accompany words with actions

For example, remove the child from in front of a heater and put a guard around the heater.

Offer incentives

To give a pre-schooler or an older child extra reasons to co-operate.

Most pre-schoolers can understand reasons. They may not always want to accept the reason but they may be co-operative if you tell them why you want them to behave in a particular way.

- *I am busy getting dinner. It would help me if you would sit and look at the books you chose from the library. Would you like to pick a story for me to read later?*



**Young children can
understand simple
reasons.**

- That TV programme is after your bedtime and you get tired at school if you stay up that late. In the holidays you can watch it (or I will video it for you).
- We have swimming lessons after school today, so you cannot go to Sarah's but we can talk about going another time.
- It's time for me to feed the baby. I would like you to play with your toys for a while and then I will read to you.

Thank your child if they see reason and co-operate

Thanks Peter for playing with your trucks while I fed the baby. Now we can have that story.

11. Real life lessons

Sometimes learning through experience is the best way for children to find out why they should or should not do something.

Allow children to learn by experience if it is safe to do so

For example:

- Your child may be able to play outside briefly without a coat in cold weather without getting ill but will learn that he or she gets uncomfortable.
- Your child may avoid homework but will learn if the teacher becomes cross.

Encourage children to learn from their behaviour

Help your children understand the link between their behaviour and its results. This encourages them to take responsibility for behaving differently next time. Very young children will not understand consequences of their actions but a pre-schooler will.



Very young children will not understand the consequences of their actions but most pre-schoolers will.

Link the consequence to the behaviour

Consequences are not punishments but the natural follow-on from an undesired behaviour.

- *Because you did not do your homework when I asked you to, you can do it after dinner instead of watching your programme.*
- *I'm not letting you go to Mark's place for a few days because you did not come home from Mark's today at the time we agreed and I could not pick Dad up from the train.*
- *You cannot have snacks before bed because you did not eat your dinner.*

Consequences are lessons not punishments

- *I can't read the book to you because you have ripped it.*
- *You did not get out of the bath in time so there is no time left for a story tonight.*
- *I am going to shut the dog outside because you keep teasing it.*

Only threaten consequences you can enforce. If you say no treats and give in, your child will learn that you don't mean what you say. If you give in to nagging and grizzling you teach your child that such behaviour is effective.

It may help to tell your child:

- *what you don't like*
- *how you would like them to behave instead*
- *what the consequence will be if they don't stop the behaviour*
- *Jimmy, you have already asked me once. I don't like it when you nag. I am not going to change my mind. I want you to sit down quietly with that book. If you can't do that, dinner will take longer to cook and I won't have any time to read the story.*

12. Reflect feelings

When children are old enough to understand about feelings you can sometimes help them stop behaving in aggressive, destructive or defiant ways by letting them know you understand how they are feeling.

At the same time you can give them a way of expressing their feelings that will be more acceptable:

- *You must be feeling very angry about something. You just hit your sister and that's not ok. How about you tell me about it instead of hitting her?*
- *I know you don't like it when Peter hits you - you feel sad and cross. Instead of hitting back put up your hand like this and say "Stop it, I don't like it".*



Just like adults, children feel better and behave better when someone understands how they are feeling.

Sometimes the child has to face the consequence of their actions but they may be less angry and rebellious if you show that you understand.

- *You really like that bike and want to have it to yourself all the time but other kids are going to get angry with you if you don't share it. Its Billy's turn now - we will go and do a painting and I'll make sure you get another turn later.*
- *I know you get very sad when I have to go to work - let me give you a big hug and I will ask Dad to ring me so I can talk to you at dinner time.*

Naming the feeling helps children to talk about it. It may help them if they know that other people sometimes feel that way too.

Another way of letting a child know that you want to understand their feelings is by listening to them. Sometimes if you just ask a child to tell you what is happening for them and hear what the child has to say he or she may calm down and behave in a more reasonable fashion. He or she may then be willing to listen to you.

Here are some ideas for helping children behave in an acceptable way

Children learn about socially acceptable behaviour by trying things out. A lot of the behaviour parents find difficult is in fact usual for a child's age and developmental stage. It will pass as the child matures.

The following section:

- *describes behaviours that are common at certain stages of development*
- *provides suggestions about how you might respond to these behaviours positively.*

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Baby 0-1 year of age

It is important that babies form strong, trusting bonds with the people who care for them and that they feel secure in their world. Their attachment to their parents and their feelings of security are essential for the healthy development of the parts of their brains that are associated with social development.

If a baby cries a lot it may help to:

- understand that crying is the way babies communicate
- listen to your baby's cues and learn from your baby – is the crying about wind, hunger, being too hot or cold or tired?
- know that some babies cry more than others
- comfort your baby by cuddling him or her and talking softly, and very gently rocking
- walk around with baby in your arms or in a pram or front pack
- sing to your baby softly
- have someone else hold your baby for a while to give you a break.

When a baby is curious and explores things it may help to:

- put things that can be broken out of reach
- distract the baby with safe play things.

When a baby demands attention a lot of the time it may help to:

- give the baby as much attention as you can (as babies grow older they get better at amusing themselves)



- remember that if a baby is safe and comfortable leaving him or her to cry for a few minutes only won't do any harm.

When a baby won't go to sleep, or does not stay asleep long, it may help to:

- check that baby is comfortable (eg, not too hot or cold, hungry, has wind or wet nappies)
- understand that some babies sleep less than others and some cry for a short while before they go to sleep
- have a soothing time holding your baby quietly or singing to him or her quietly before bed
- help your baby settle in bed by gently patting or stroking him or her
- put the baby to bed when he or she is tired – over-tired babies may be hard to settle
- seek support and advice from a friend or a nurse or other person who helps parents.

When a baby does not want to feed, or demands food all the time, it may help to:

- observe for a day or so to see if the problem rights itself (as long as the baby is otherwise settled and well)
- talk to your nurse or doctor if the problem does not resolve itself.

If you find yourself feeling upset or angry with your baby it may help to:

- organise a break for yourself, if possible, by arranging for a friend or family member to care for baby
- put the baby safely in the cot and walk into another room for a while so you can calm down
- seek help – talk to a support person or a nurse or someone who works with children.

Toddlers 1-3 years of age

When a toddler is very determined or has temper tantrums it may help to:

- understand that this is normal for toddlers
- check that the child is not tired, hungry or unwell
- stay firm and don't give in but do comfort the child if he or she will let you
- ignore the tantrum unless the child is unsafe
- distract the child.

When a toddler will not go to bed, or stay in bed, it may help to:

- remember each child has different needs for sleep
- establish a bedtime routine and stick to it
- leave a light on and provide a toy that comforts
- play soothing music on the radio or CD
- lie with the child on their bed until they drop to sleep
- take the child quietly but firmly back to bed
- praise the child if he or she stays in bed
- if the child persists in getting up, ignore him or her.

When a toddler is a fussy eater, it may help to:

- not make a big thing of it
- remember most children will eat what they need (healthy children do not starve themselves)
- offer a range of healthy food
- remember that some small children need to eat little and often
- provide healthy, tempting snacks
- remember that toddlers' tastes and appetites are very changeable.

When a toddler does not want to share it may help to:

- remember that learning to share takes time
- remember that for a child this age not wanting to share their belongings is normal
- gradually introduce the idea of taking turns
- distract any child who has to wait for a turn
- offer praise when a toddler does take turns in sharing
- for a group of toddlers provide lots of similar toys.

When a toddler says 'NO!' it may help to:

- remember that a toddler testing the word 'no' is usual behaviour for this age
- remember that children say 'no' because they are asserting their power and still learning about co-operation
- use distraction
- avoid a battle if the issue is not important
- remove the child from the situation
- make co-operation fun
- give positive attention when the child co-operates.

When a toddler hits, bites and pulls hair it may help to:

- avoid hitting back - hitting back teaches the child that the hitting is OK
- say: NO. No hitting. No biting.
- say: I don't like that and we don't hit/bite/pull hair
- supervise the child closely until the stage stops
- give positive attention when the child plays peacefully
- try to anticipate trouble and move the child (look for what is happening just before the child wants to bite or hit).

When a toddler makes mistakes with toilet training it may help to:

- remember that children are often not physically ready to be toilet trained until about three years of age

- if toilet training isn't working, give it a break for a few months
- never punish mistakes or accidents - take a "no fuss" approach
- avoid getting into a battle with the child
- praise success and co-operation and ignore accidents.

When a toddler grizzles, it may help to:

- try and work out why the child is grizzling
- ignore the grizzling
- use distraction
- use humour
- prepare ahead to avoid frustrations
- If the behaviour is unusual check out that the child is not unwell
- praise the child when they use a 'happy' voice.



When a toddler wants to be adventurous it may help to:

- anticipate danger and avoid it
- make the environment safe, for example: don't have glass coffee tables, have safety catches on windows and keep dangerous things out of reach
- remove children from dangerous situations
- provide situations in which they can test themselves safely.

When a toddler messes up your house it may help to:

- remember children make a mess to be creative and learn
- find something messy to play with outside, such as water and sand in a small shallow container (but supervise the child well)
- supervise children closely when they are playing in areas where you do not want them to make a mess
- encourage children to help clean up by making it fun
- praise children for helping clean up, but don't expect too much.

Pre-schoolers 3-5 years of age

When a pre-schooler throws tantrums it may help to:

- make sure they have enough room so they don't hurt themselves and then walk away
- ask them to come and tell you when they have finished
- ignore the child
- distract the child
- use humour.

When a pre-schooler is not doing what is asked of him or her it may help to:

- offer choices
- use positive attention and praise when the child co-operates
- withdraw your interest or attention if the child does not co-operate
- give reasons for your request
- make co-operation fun
- use 'real-life lessons'.

When a pre-schooler is showing off or swearing it may help to:

- ignore the behaviour
- express disapproval but don't make a big thing of it
- give positive attention for acceptable behaviour
- discuss with the child the behaviour you want.

When a pre-schooler is hurting other children it may help to:

- pay positive attention to behaviour that is not aggressive
- remove the child from the situation
- make your values clear. Say clearly: No hitting! This is a no-hitting place.
- supervise the child well and intervene if you think anyone is going to get hurt

- let the child know you understand how they feel but put limits on unacceptable behaviour.

When a pre-schooler grizzles it may help to:

- check that the child is not tired, hungry, bored or unwell
- listen to the child - is something bothering him or her?
- be prepared for situations that are going to be stressful
- set limits. Say: I don't listen to that voice - tell me again when you can use your other voice.
- give positive attention for behaviour you like.

When a pre-schooler is a fussy eater it may help to:

- not make a big thing of it
- remember that children will eat what they need
- offer a range of healthy foods
- remember appetites can decrease at this age in some children
- encourage children to help themselves then they will take what they want
- provide healthy snacks and don't have unhealthy food around.



When pre-schoolers squabble and fight, it may help to:

- say: This fighting must stop. How will we work this out?
- ignore the children if nobody is going to get hurt
- separate the children if they are hurting each other
- suggest a compromise to solve the argument
- give positive attention for co-operative play.

When a pre-schooler wants to do adventurous things it may help to:

- supervise the child well to keep them away from dangerous situations
- protect the child from danger - keep your home safe
- remove the child from danger
- tell the child what is unsafe about the behaviour
- provide safe and interesting activities and some challenges for the child.

When a pre-schooler is very demanding it may help to:

- ask what it is they want
- keep the child busy with things he or she enjoys doing
- offer to do something with the child as soon as you are free
- reward the child for the behaviour you want
- if possible, involve the child in what you are doing.

School-age children

When a school-age child nags and argues it may help to:

- name the behaviour: What is going on here. Are you nagging? Why?
- ignore the behaviour
- stay firm
- give positive attention when the child accepts 'no'
- understand and support the child's feelings, but remain firm about the behaviour you want.

When a school-age child does not do as asked or breaks family rules a lot it may help to:

- check that the child knows the rules
- check that you don't have too many rules
- give positive attention when the child does what you have asked
- give reasons for what you want
- give the child choices
- use real-life experiences
- ask the child what they think should be the consequence of their behaviour.

When school-age children fight and hit each other it may help to:

- tell them hitting and fighting are unacceptable
- ask them what ways they can think of to solve the problem
- use logical consequences
- give positive attention and rewards for non-aggressive behaviour
- let the child know you understand how they feel
- offer alternative ways to deal with conflict such as talking about feelings and solving problems
- use reason.

When a school-age child tells lies it may help to:

- understand that a five- or six-year-old is still learning about 'truth' and may simply want to stay out of trouble
- ask the child what happened
- don't try to force the child to admit doing wrong
- tell the child what you think has happened
- ask: Now what shall we do?
- give positive attention and rewards for honesty
- make your home one in which the child feels safe to make a mistake
- tell your child how to get it right: It would be better if you told me you had made a mistake.



If a school-age child refuses to go to bed it may help to:

- have an established bedtime that is clear to both of you
- make it clear what you want the child to do
- give reasons why the child needs to be in bed
- maintain a bedtime routine
- use "Time In" and have some quiet together before bedtime
- reward the behaviour you like
- make sure there is nothing interesting to do if the child insists on getting up - no TV or toys.

If a school-aged child says something that you think is cheeky it may help to:

- ignore the child
- ask the child to tell you how they think that makes you feel
- tell the child how you want them to behave: I feel... when you say that. I would like you to stop saying that.

- give positive attention when the child gets it right
- use real life lessons such as, I don't want to listen to talk like that
- speak to the child in the way you want to be spoken to.

If a school-aged child takes something that belongs to someone else it may help to:

- ask the child what happened
- ask the child what should happen now
- ensure that there are appropriate consequences, for example, have the child apologise
- have the child return the other person's belongings
- stay calm while you think of what to do
- be a good role model - show respect for other people's property
- give positive attention for honesty.



For more information on guiding children's behaviour

Some places where you can get information and advice are:

- Plunket: Ask your Plunket nurse or phone PlunketLine 0800 933 922
- Parent Help – a parenting counselling service run by Barnardos 0800 472 7368.
- Parents Centre www.parentscentre.org.nz/parenting_family/default.asp
- SKIP (pamphlets) www.familyservices.govt.nz/info-for-families/skip/

Sometimes nothing seems to work because:

- Some children are less easy to guide than other children.
- Some families are stressed by their circumstances (like illness or financial pressures) and may find it hard to cope with the demands of children.
- Once a particular form of behaviour becomes a habit it can be hard to change and a negative pattern can be set up between a parent and a child that is hard to overcome.
- Sometimes when a child is constantly misbehaving or suddenly starts misbehaving there is something wrong – the child is not well or something is upsetting him or her.

If you find yourself stressed with a particular child, or feel that nothing is working, it is a good idea to get professional help. A nurse, doctor or early-childhood teacher will know of an agency in the community that can offer help and support. Sometimes talking to other parents or belonging to a parent support group can be helpful too.

New Zealand's child discipline law

What is the law and what does it mean?

In 2007 Parliament passed a new law called the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act.

The new law means:

Parents who assault children no longer have the defence of "reasonable force"

Before the law was changed in 2007 parents or carers who were prosecuted for assaulting a child could claim an "excuse" - that they were correcting a child. The correction had to be reasonable in the circumstances. This was called a statutory defence (a defence in law). No such defence existed when adults assaulted adults.

This defence no longer exists. If they are victims of assault children can now expect to be treated the same as adults in the eyes of the law.

The police are able to choose not to prosecute in cases of minor assault

Under the previous law the kinds of cases that went to court involved serious assaults. That is unlikely to change.

When the new law was being debated many people feared that parents who occasionally lightly smacked a child would be prosecuted in court and be convicted of a criminal offence. There is no need to be concerned about this. The new law recognises that prosecuting parents for minor assaults would not benefit either the child or the parent. Therefore, the law contains a provision that reminds the police that they are allowed to choose not to prosecute when children are assaulted if they think the assault is of a minor nature. Police have similar discretion to decide whether or not to prosecute adults who assault adults.

The use of physical punishment is banned in law

Police discretion does not mean that the law says that physical discipline (hitting and smacking) is ok - in fact the law goes as far as to say that "use of force" for correction is not allowed.

Adults who have to restrain a child are protected

Another worry that people had during the debate about the physical discipline law was that parents might get prosecuted if they held or restrained a child to keep them or someone else safe. The new law allows parents to hold or restrain or pick up children to:

- *keep them safe, for example, from running on the road or touching a hot stove*
- *prevent them hurting other people or damaging property*
- *remove them from a place where they are being disruptive*
- *provide children with care like changing their nappies (even against their will) or to take them to their room or put them to bed.*

Such restraint has to be reasonable in the circumstances.

Parliament will look at how the law is working two years after it was passed

The law also says that Parliament is to review the new law in June 2009 to see how it is working. Some of the things that might be looked at are:

- *Have parents been prosecuted in cases where the assault is minor?*
- *Have more parents been reported to Child, Youth and Family Services?*
- *Have more parents come to understand that there are better ways to teach children to behave well than hitting and smacking them?*
- *Are fewer children being hit and smacked or hurt and injured?*

The law and positive parenting

The law sets a standard in law that is consistent with what we know about helping children behave well and with the goals of child discipline

We know from research into children's behaviour and development that it takes time for children to learn how to behave in socially acceptable ways. Making behaving well something a child chooses to do because it is part of who they are rather than something done only out of fear of punishment is one of the goals of raising a child. It is about learning self-discipline. Indeed learning self-discipline extends through adolescence and even into adulthood. As we saw earlier in this book there are many things a parent can do to help this process - positive actions that help the child feel safe, loved and guided. Smacking and hitting are not part of these actions.

Children are influenced to behave well when their parents behave well around them. Children copy their parents' behaviour. Children also like to please their parents.

Smacking children sometimes works to stop a particular behaviour in the short term but it does not contribute to a child developing self-discipline.

When we discipline children we are often trying to get the child to behave well in the short term (for example, to stop kicking the cat) and of course that matters. But we should not forget that our ultimate goal is a long-term one. We want children to develop self-discipline and to grow up to be caring, confident and respectful people (who avoid hurting animals because they know it is wrong and they care about animals).

Some of the suggestions in this book are about dealing with the short-term in ways that help children learn self-discipline. The positive environment we talked about at the beginning of the book is also important - it sets the scene for long-term good behaviour.

The law sends a message that violence to children is unacceptable

Most children are raised in loving, non-violent homes. However, some children in New Zealand are treated violently. Much of this violence happens in the name of discipline. All children in New Zealand will be better protected when everyone knows that New Zealand is a place where you don't hit children.

The law brings New Zealand in line with many other countries that ban physical punishment

There is a strong movement throughout the world towards ending physical punishment of children. In some countries children are still caned in institutions and schools, as well as beaten in their homes. The number of countries that make all physical punishment of children illegal is growing rapidly - in Europe, in South America. New Zealand is the first country in Australasia to do so. New Zealand can now play a part in influencing other countries.

What children had to say:

Quite a few years ago some children were asked for their suggestions to adults on how to help them behave. The highlighted words below remind you of some of the messages in this book.

Don't hit or abuse me

Talk things over with me

Listen to me and respond

Show me what you want

Don't scream at me - just **tell me**

Notice when I behave well

Praise me and give me rewards



Understand me

Say you are **sorry** when things went wrong

Don't **over-react** to my mistakes

Have a sense of **humour**

Don't **put me down**, tease me or insult me

Be **fair**

Encourage me

Talk over problems

Set a **good example**

Be **firm** when you need to be but don't be nasty

When I am angry let me **cool down**

Meet me halfway

Show me you like me.

