

Don't spank or scream: Tips for taming unruly kids

June 10 2011, By Cheryl Tierney

Do you ever swat your child on the behind? Let's hope not. Over the past few decades, numerous studies have concluded that spanking isn't the best or most effective way to discipline a child successfully.

But when your kids misbehave, don't replace spanking with yelling. New research shows that screaming loudly at children may also harm them. So what can parents do when their kids become unruly, especially with the summer vacation months upon us and children spending more time at home?

Tactics that don't work

According to one large study, 63 percent of American parents admitted they had used verbal aggression -- including swearing and insults -- against their children at least once.

But yelling and spanking are both ineffective because children learn to ignore them after a while. Instead of making children responsible for their actions, physical or verbal abuse simply increases their feelings of aggression.

Parents often complain that they "have to yell" for their [child](#) listen to them. If you feel that way, it might be that your child isn't sensing the difference between the happy, proud parent and the upset version until you bring it up a notch. Catch your children being good and constantly comment on it during the day (called "time in") is a great way to help

children learn what you expect of them and lets them know you notice their good behavior.

When a child acts out for attention that is generally a sign of not enough "time in." Children say to themselves, "Why behave anyway? My parents don't usually notice. They just notice when I step out of line."

Negative attention is attention and its better than nothing. So don't let that happen, provide plenty of praise for background good behavior and you will notice it will take a lot less yelling to have your children listen to you the first time.

Spanking isn't just unproductive. It may also lead youngsters to assume that it's OK to hit other children. And spanking has been shown to have lasting effects. Adults who were physically disciplined as children are more likely to hit their spouse and their children, and to take part in crime and violence.

Likewise, emerging research shows that the children who are screamed at the most when they step out of line are at higher risk for depression, irritability, anger and hostility.

Here are alternatives

So if yelling and spanking are unacceptable, how can stressed-out parents teach their children to behave the right way?

-- Set rules in your home for all members of the family, such as no hitting, shouting, name calling, cursing, or ridiculing. Be firm about the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

-- Reward good behavior and create clear consequences for bad behavior. If children fail to comply, don't automatically spank or yell.

Instead, respond gently and follow through with the punishment.

-- If you lose your cool, stop, leave the room or count to 10. Then speak with your child after you have calmed down.

-- Remember that children mimic you. If you want youngsters to behave respectfully, you must behave respectfully -- even if you feel a meltdown coming on.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Don't spank or scream: Tips for taming unruly kids (2011, June 10) retrieved 5 May 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-06-dont-spank-unruly-kids.html>

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