



COMPASSIONATE CHILD-REARING

HANDOUT

PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Class 6 Handout **Guidelines for Discipline and Socialization**

(Adapted from Chapter 10, *Compassionate Child-Rearing* by Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.)

The following recommendations and suggestions refer to attitudes that predispose action rather than specific how-to-do-it practical techniques.

Ideally, parents would:

- Avoid unnecessary restrictions, rules, and standards.
- Act as positive role-models for their children. (by not indulging the critical inner voice)
- Reward and teach rather than punish or harshly judge their children.
- Avoid cynical, judgmental attitudes that reinforce a child's sense of badness.
- Avoid physical punishment. It actually changes the child's developing brain
- Attempt to firmly deal with their children's undesirable behaviors; especially maladaptive behaviors children often use to express their frustration, disappointment, or anger.

Within these broad guidelines, parents would try to:

- Avoid making evaluative, judgmental pronouncements about their children's behaviors. Allow children to verbally express their anger and help them develop ways of using self-control when tempted to express their anger inappropriately through their behavior.
- Refrain from analyzing or categorizing children or foisting a strict or fixed image on them.
- Never beat or physically abuse a child.

- Avoid the use of idle threats of future punishment to enforce rules and standards.
- Avoid teaching children that they are bad or selfish or wanting. Label the behavior as “bad” or unacceptable, but never label the child in these terms.
- Reassure the child that he/she is not bad after disciplining him.
- Avoid comparisons with other children for the purpose of motivating good behavior.
- Use humor to help their child get out of a bad mood or stop misbehaving.
- Express genuine anger or fear or concern when disciplining their child, while not acting out these feelings on the child physically. Make sure you take time to calm yourself, to defuse your own feelings before using the situation as a teaching moment with your child.
- Deal firmly with negative power plays of children (that is, weakness, helplessness, excessive crying and whining, sulking, playing the victim).
- Teach children that it is never appropriate to castigate or hate themselves for wrong-doing, that it is much more functional and appropriate to change their behavior in the future.
- Avoid battles of will.

Specific Situations

When dealing with a crying infant:

- It is valuable for parents to recognize painful feelings in themselves that are aroused by their infant’s cries of distress.
- It is impossible to “spoil” the infant by picking him up when he is crying; in fact, a baby should be held and soothed before he reaches an uncontrollably agitated stage.
- Ideally, parents would help their children learn that it is appropriate to cry when they are sad, not when they are angry.

When handling temper tantrums:

- Tantrums are emotional storms. Sometimes, before crying has escalated to the level of a full-blown tantrum, parents can divert the child with a favorite toy, a new game, or simply by offering him a drink of water. As soon as the child is distracted in this way, the tantrum is over.

- In many cases, parents may need to contain the child, that is, to hold him/her gently but firmly and allow him/her to vent his/her rage. Do not put the child into “time-out“ or isolate him or her during the tantrum. Being left alone also contributes to the child's fear of his anger. It increases his anxiety about the disastrous effect he imagines his rage has on his parents. Isolating an angry child does not teach him anything about how to handle his anger; the only positive effect may be that the crying is eventually extinguished because his crying is not being reinforced by getting the parents' attention. However, the negative effects of time-out far outweigh the benefits.
- Children need parents who are in touch with their own feelings and know how to accept and handle feelings of anger in themselves, in order to learn methods to control and appropriately express their own anger through words, not actions.

Attitudes toward work:

- Providing the child with a series of jobs serves as a useful discipline that is accepted matter-of-factly by a child. Mothers and fathers who take pride in their vocational efforts and approach their work with energy and dedication will reinforce positive attitudes towards work in their children.
- It is also important to share projects with the child, simple tasks at first, for example household chores, but then it is important to extend the child's interest in working to include a creative project that the parent enjoys or that the parent and child enjoy doing together.

Adapted from *Parenting from the Inside Out*. (Siegel and Hartzell, 2003) Chapter 6. “How We Make Sense of Our Lives: Adult Attachment.” pp 132-133, 139-140. Requesting permission to reprint 3/27/2018