

Handling Anger and Countering Abuse in the Community

AT HOME

- **Establish house rules and consequences for misbehavior before there is a problem.**

Establish house rules with your child or adolescent and discuss the consequences of breaking the rules ahead of time, so that discipline is not simply an angry response. If you are unsure about how to encourage positive behavior in your child or adolescent, consider taking a parenting class or speaking to a health professional about positive discipline techniques.

- **Take five.**

When tensions and anger rise, take five. It is normal to feel angry at times about things your child or adolescent does, but you should not lash out at your child in anger. Take a deep breath and count to 20 before you act, or give yourself 5 minutes to cool down before responding.

- **Never strike your child in anger.**

Hitting your child or adolescent when you are angry will not help, and almost always does more damage. Remember, it is never OK to shake, throw, or hit a child. Shaking a baby can lead to blindness or eye damage, brain damage, seizures, spinal cord damage, or death. Spanking is no more effective than other forms of punishment, and it can harm your child or adolescent. You may injure your child or adolescent and she may become more aggressive if spanked (American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 1998).



- **No yelling allowed. Words hurt too.**

Never yell at or insult your child or adolescent. If he breaks a rule, tell him what he did wrong and why that makes you angry. Be angry at what he did, not at who he is.

- **Get away.**

When you feel frustrated, angry or overwhelmed, vent your feelings positively—away from your child or adolescent. You may want to

- Go to your bedroom. Hug a pillow.
- Turn on some music. Maybe even sing along.
- Take a hot bath or splash cold water on your face.
- Ask a friend to come over or leave your child with someone trustworthy.
- If someone can watch your child, go outside. Exercise.

Do not stay alone with your child or adolescent when you are overwhelmed. Get help.

- **Seek mental health services.**

Many people who abuse children or adolescents were once victims of abuse themselves and have never worked through their feelings about being abused. Have you ever been sexually or physically abused? If you have, talking to a mental health professional about it can help. If you need a referral for mental health services, talk to your health professional. The more you understand about yourself, the better you'll be able to help your child or adolescent.

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■ **Say “no” to drugs. Use alcohol responsibly.**

Forbid the use of illegal substances in your home. Alcohol and drug abuse increases the risk of child abuse dramatically. If you, a relative, or a friend is dependent upon alcohol or any drug, seek help.

■ **Interview your baby-sitters.**

Check out all baby-sitters. Meet them before you hire them. Let your child meet them too. Always

ask your child about what happened while the baby-sitter was there. If you are concerned about a baby-sitter, don't hire that person. Set clear rules for bedtime and discipline. Avoid having baby-sitters bathe your children.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

■ **Help a friend, neighbor, or relative.**

Someone you know may be struggling with his or her parenting responsibilities. Offer a sympathetic ear or a helping hand. Assisting occasionally with child care or offering to locate sources of community help can be a tremendous boost to someone under stress.

■ **Advocate for services to help families.**

Parenting programs, health care, and housing needs are all important to maintaining healthy children, adolescents, and families.

■ **Report suspected abuse or neglect.**

If you have a reasonable suspicion that children or adolescents are being harmed, your concern and action may mean that they are protected from an abusive environment.

■ **Support child abuse programs and prevention efforts in your community.**

Make a contribution to a child abuse prevention organization. Support activities that raise public awareness of child abuse. Volunteer at a local child abuse program.

■ **Promote child abuse prevention programs in schools.**

Teaching children and adolescents prevention strategies can help keep them safe.

REFERENCES

- American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health. 1998. Guidance for effective discipline. *Pediatrics* 101(4 Pt 1):723–728.
- Dawson M. 1996. *Tools to Counter Abuse: Raising Whole, Healthy Children*. New York, NY: Parent Soup.

Sources: Adapted, with permission, from KidsPeace. 1999. *24 Ways You Can Prevent Child Abuse*. Orefield, PA: KidsPeace. Web site: http://www.kidspeace.org/education/parent_tips/24ways.stm.

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