



PHOTOGRAPH: REBECCA LANDY

Turning tears into laughter:

creative discipline for the toddler and preschool years

By Lou Harvey-Zahra

"A hundred years from now, it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of home I lived in, or the kind of car I drove; but the world may be different because I was important to the life of a child." Anon.

All parents experience challenging moments – when your child has a tantrum in the shopping centre; when you're running out of time to go to an appointment and your young child does not want to get dressed; at a friend's house, the lovely toddler squeezes the guinea pig almost unconscious!

When toddlers display inappropriate behaviour, rather than pointing a finger, perhaps we should ask the question 'Why?' Behaviour is a means of communicating. Is my child tired or hungry? Does she need to slow down and have some special time with me? Too much excitement can lead to undesirable behaviour. Are children in fact being creative and inquisitive, and their loudness or messiness is not purposely disruptive? Asking 'Why?' allows you insight and understanding into your child's life. It stops the parent from reacting harshly, giving time to respond in a compassionate way.

At my conscious parenting classes, I have more parents enrol for the night on 'Creative Discipline' than for any of the other topics. The reality is that if you have established positive rhythms, healthy eating and creative play, providing nourishment and stability in your child's life, this will have a direct influence on how much (or little) you will need to creatively discipline your toddler and young child.

Let me explain: if your child is not getting enough sleep, time to relax, rest, and cuddle, time for softness and love, she may become very grumpy! Are you often rushed, busy and going out? Remember that a child is not aware of our adult timeframe yet. Connect and rest on your child's time frame (where you can). The consequences of a fast-paced life for a small child are floods of tears over the smallest things.

"Love to a child is spelt T.I.M.E." Anon.

Likewise, is the food that your child eats contributing to energy highs and lows and erratic, excitable behaviour? For example, additives like colours, flavours, flavour enhancers and preservatives have been linked to hyperactivity in children. Please see Sue Dengate's website www.fedup.com.au.

What about 'playing'? If children are continually over-stimulated by noise and action toys, do they get more active and high themselves? If sitting for hours in front of super hero images and television, do they fly around the room, and then get easily bored afterwards?

Why not have a wonderfully enriching, imaginative play corner perfectly placed in the heart of your home, and in the garden with plenty of mud and sand. This will have a profound effect on your child's mood. You can bring a little magic to children when they are distracted, bored or grumpy – a blanket over the table for a cubby, or a doll washing time in the sink. Can your child join in with all the household chores – chopping, cooking, washing, and shopping? Little hands love to be included and it keeps them out of mischief. Involvement is the key.

Even with all these foundation areas in place, challenges naturally occur from

Here are some useful tools for those trying moments that naturally occur with all young children. These techniques can transform challenging moments while parent and child remain connected together. The desired behaviour is achieved or a negative behaviour is stopped.

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