



PHOTOGRAPH: REBECCA LANDY

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Scenario: a child is pulling a cat's tail

"We stroke a pussy cat like this" (demonstrate). "Let us do it together" (place the child's hand on the cat and stroke together). "He loves to be treated kindly and softly – this is the way to stroke a cat. Great, you are doing such a good job, being gentle. He loves that; well done!"

Scenario: a young child is hitting a playmate to get a toy

Say 'hands down' in a firm manner, re-directing the child to keep his hands to himself. Re-direct the child to use words to ask for a turn, or to say, 'Stop! I do not like that', if upset. Find a similar toy to play with. Re-direct the children to look at your watch to play a turn taking game when the big hand gets to the top!

Model an apology and demonstrate 'gentleness' with friends.

Play 'sharing' games with Teddy to practise this skill. Explain gentleness throughout the week with toys and chat about what makes a good friend. 'Sam does not like to be hit – it makes him sad' (explaining simple emotions). Praise positive behaviour.

CHANGE THE WORD 'NO'

At the first parenting class I attended the teacher spoke of the wisdom of not using the word 'no'. She hastened to add that this does not mean that your children get everything they want – not at all! It is merely a matter of word use. Can you step into your children's shoes? Throughout the day your children may ask for many things – if they hear a barrage of negatives, a rebellion may be in order! With food requests, try to offer a healthy alternative. With activity requests, state when it can happen or find another interesting appropriate choice.

Scenario: a child asks to have an ice-cream (it is breakfast time)

"What a wonderful idea – let us squeeze orange juice to make icy poles for a lovely treat for morning tea".

Scenario: a young child asks to watch TV

"It is a lovely day, let's make a cubby outside; we can read stories in it. Remember 'home-movie day' is Saturday".

Scenario: for more difficult questions like "Can I have a puppy?" or "Can I have a toy?"

Let us write it on your Christmas list

(children have usually forgotten by then or have asked for another ten things).

I have always found 'We'll see' is a great answer for difficult questions.

GAMES AND GIGGLES

To play games requires you both to connect together and have fun. This trick is very 'child-friendly'. Games can be a magic wand to achieving tasks with your child.

Scenario: a child who refuses to put on their socks or PJ's

"I am 'Sandy Sock' and I love to eat toes. I eat them all the way up; look at that, all the way up to the ankle!"

"Can you put your pajamas on by the time I make a cup of tea? I'll race you, ready steady go!"

Try to relax in stressful moments. Breathe in and hold for four seconds, then slowly breathe out the stress. From time to time, just try a game of chase. Most children cannot resist having a giggle. So when children stamp their feet and say 'No', say 'I am going to tickle you – run!' Lightheartedness can be a very successful tool in diffusing bad moods.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE POWER OF PRAISE!

Isolate one or two positive actions that you would like your child to achieve. Every time you see the appropriate behaviour, verbally praise it. At bedtime, as you are having a cuddle, say "I was really pleased with the way you played with Sally today". This can transform challenging behaviour over time.

If, after trying the above techniques (changing the environment, re-direction, saying 'no' a different way, playing a game, and using the power of praise), the young child is still displaying the inappropriate behaviour, quietly removing the child or toy from the challenging situation may be required. "You need to stay with me until I know John is safe. Be gentle with your friends – no hitting – everyone needs to feel safe". Take the toy away that is still being thrown, and place up high, while stating, "We throw balls; not toys". This

is a 'quiet removal'; quietly take the toy or child away from the situation, stating the positive way to behave. If the child begs to go back then allow for another chance. Otherwise re-direct to a new activity after a while of staying within your care. During the day gently explain how to be friends or treat toys.

It is paradoxical to see a parent shout 'No shouting!' or hit as a response to a child's rough behaviour. Children made to sit isolated in corners often put up a protective wall. If shut in a closed room, their screams, at times, can be primal. It is extremely difficult to always stay calm but if you talk reasonably, teach positively, and lovingly guide, these tendencies will become valuable communication skills for your children too. It is a wonderful experience, after years of role-modelling, to see your children treat each other with respect and hear your positive manner within them. Children brought up with creative discipline techniques will know how to communicate and treat others in life. This is a powerful insight.

Remember that no child or parent is perfect, and neither should they be, as it is our mistakes that help us to learn and grow. Parenting can be like a dance: two steps forward and one step back. Try to be conscious of how things worked out during and after each incident with your child – how your heart really feels in each moment. Each night, before going to sleep, run through your day with your child in your own mind. Understand where you could have parented more positively to change inappropriate behaviour and make plans to act differently tomorrow.



Lou Harvey-Zahra is a mother, playgroup leader, and primary, special needs and Rudolf Steiner trained teacher. Her book "Turning Tears into Laughter – Creative Discipline for the Toddler and Preschool Years" is published by Five Mile Press and distributed by Scribo and Brumby Books. Her website www.skiptomylouparenting.com has many more conscious parenting tips.

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