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## POSITIVE PARENTING GUIDE

### **How can we support children to behave appropriately?**

From time to time, most parents wonder if they are doing the right thing. Of course, the 'perfect' parent does not exist. Everyone runs into difficulties and worries about the impact on their children. One of their main sources of worry is discipline and how they can make their children behave acceptably. It may be a great difficulty for a lot of parents. It seems that everyone has his/her own opinion about how to successfully care for children. Does leniency mean that children end up out of control? Does strictness turn your children against you? We know that the children need boundaries in order to feel sure, but it is not easy to set these boundaries.

This material helps explain how we can encourage good behaviour by positive reinforcement.

The positive approach means we encourage and praise the behaviour that we desire, to be attentive when our children behave well – this approach does not include slaps. Some parents are very worried that they will lose control over their children, if they do not smack them from time to time. Actually, the exact opposite applies. The more we demonstrate love and respect and the better children understand why we want them to behave in a certain way, the more they will try to make us happy. We actually need to ensure that punishment is a final resort.

### **10 steps for better parenting**

1. The most important need of every child is love and showing love is a vital part of maintaining positive discipline. The more we show love to our children, the more they will want to prove that they deserve this attitude. Unconditional love helps by developing the child's confidence and self-assurance.
2. Listen carefully to your children. Show interest in what they do and how they feel. Continually assure them that strong feelings are not a problem if they are expressed in an appropriate way. The more you do this, the less you will have to enforce discipline.
3. Limits have to be set even in the most affectionate and loving relationships and to set boundaries is an important part of parenting. This is not naughtiness, but it is an important stage in the learning process. If you hold on to the limits which you set, showing that they are reasonable, meaningful and well-founded, children feel more secure, even if sometimes they complain.



4. Laughter may help you to diffuse anger (to reduce the tension). Sometimes, parents become very serious and think that fun is not connected with parenting. Look for the funny side of things and laugh often.
5. Try to see things through the eyes of your children and imagine how they feel – this is the key for understanding their behaviour. Remember the time when you were a child and how you felt confused when the adult's world seemed unfair to you.
6. Praise and encourage your child. Expect them to behave well and encourage all efforts in that direction. Praise good behaviour and do not pay attention to the bad. The more you nag, the less they will listen to you.
7. Be as respectful to your child as you are to fellow adults. Include them in decision making and listen to their opinions. If you want to say something unpleasant think about how it would sound if you had to say it to an adult. Apologize when you make mistakes.
8. Define the daily regime. Small children feel more secure and conflicts can be minimized if the day is clearly planned. They are calmer and happier when their times of feeding, sleeping and games are observed.
9. Every family has binding rules but you have to try to be more flexible with small children. Once you have defined the rules, be consistent. It is very confusing for the children if one day you demand compliance with a rule and then ignore or break it the next day. Sometimes there are different rules that apply outside the home and this have to be explained to the children.
10. Do not ignore your own needs! If you feel tired and tense or you are running out of patience, spare some time for yourself. Find an activity that will make you to feel better or relaxed. If you think that you may lose control and you may start screaming, haranguing or hitting your child, the best opportunity is to leave the room and calm down by counting to 100.

### **Positive parenting techniques:**

#### **Show your child how to behave**

Children learn behaviour patterns by copying them – demonstrate and they will follow the example.

#### **Change the environment, not the child**

Keep out of sight valuable, breakables and dangerous objects, and do not punish the child for his/her natural curiosity.

#### **Be positive**

Tell your children what you want and not the things you don't want. Avoid the 'don't' word. .

#### **Ensure your requirements to be reasonable**

Always ask yourself if your requirements are appropriate to the age and the situation of your child. You should be more patient with young children and those who are tired or sick.



## **Do not rely too much on rewards and punishments**

The older children become, the lower the effect of rewards and punishments. Explain the reasons for your decisions. Negotiate with older children and use the tactic of distraction with young children.

## **No slapping or shouting**

Sometimes it seems as if a slap is effective, but it is possible that parents may begin to hit more often and harder to achieve the same result. Constant shouting at children or repeated criticism can be harmful and lead to long-term emotional difficulties. Such punishments do not help children develop their self-control and respect for others.

## **Here are some facts that will surprise you and will definitely make you think...**

### **Children are curious and energetic by nature**

This can make them behave in ways that adults identify as mischief but it would be very strange if a child does not test different things or make mistakes. This does not mean that everything should be permissible for the children. They should learn family rules and how to communicate with others. It takes a lot of time and patience to teach children self-control.

### **Children often do not understand why they are punished**

Research shows that children are often confused by the rules of adults. They do not always understand where they make a mistake. This is especially true in cases when the child has received a slap – then he/she is too angry and upset to think clearly!

### **Children have a right to positive discipline**

The Bulgarian government has agreed to comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that guarantees the rights of children, one of which is their right to be protected "from all forms of physical or mental violence, abuse or misuse..." (Article 19 of the Convention).

### **When we give a right of choice to the children about how to act, we actually help them to behave better**

Do not get into a fight with children over trivial matters. Try to allow them to make choices about things which affect them directly - what to wear or what to eat. In this way they will not feel constantly controlled. This is helpful for you when dealing with temper tantrums and challenging behaviour.

Parents are human and sometimes parenting is not an easy task, especially if there are additional stress factors involved. When you are under stress, you can be tempted to work off your bad temper on the child, but then you feel a strong sense of guilt! It is a natural and understandable reaction, but we believe it is wrong to hit children. Studies show that most parents do not want to hit their children but still use it as a last resort. To hit a child is not an effective way to make him/her behave well.

