

101 POSITIVE DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES

BY ELIZABETH O. COOPER

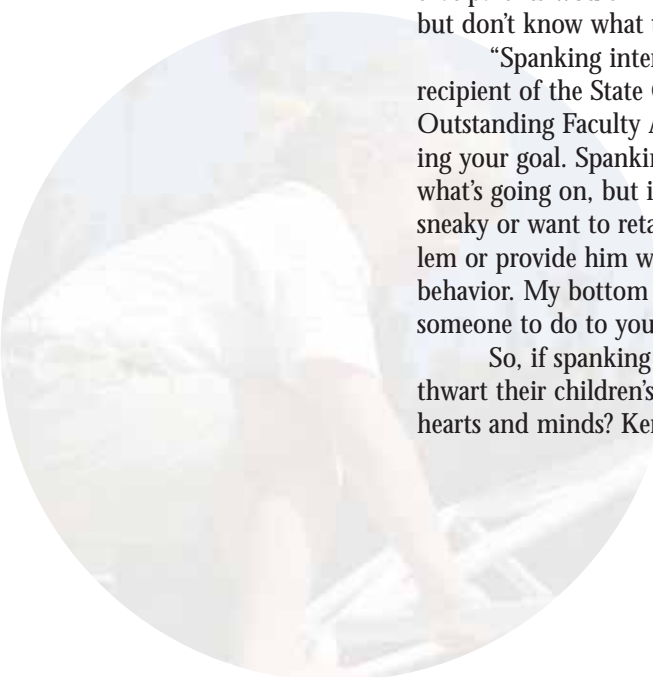


The scene plays out daily in grocery stores, restaurants, doctors' offices and other public venues. A child acts up and refuses to obey his parent's admonition to behave. Finally, the frustrated and embarrassed parent literally takes the situation into his own hands by delivering a swift smack to the child's bottom.

That reaction causes more problems than it solves, according to Katharine C. Kersey, University Professor of early childhood education and chair of the Department of Early Childhood, Speech-Language Pathology and Special Education. The author of several books, including *The Art of Sensitive Parenting*, *Helping Your Child Handle Stress* and *Don't Take It Out On Your Kids*, and co-author of *The First Year Teacher*, Kersey is a long-time opponent of spanking and other forms of corporal punishment. She believes that parents would like to find better ways to teach children cooperation but don't know what to do, so they resort to spanking.

"Spanking interrupts the learning process," asserts Kersey, a 2005 recipient of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia Outstanding Faculty Award. "You lose ground. You really aren't accomplishing your goal. Spanking is a short-term fix. It works in that it usually stops what's going on, but it teaches the child to hit and causes him to become sneaky or want to retaliate. It does not show the child how to solve a problem or provide him with the skills and training to accomplish the desired behavior. My bottom line is never do to the child what you wouldn't want someone to do to you."

So, if spanking is out, then what can tired, frustrated parents do to thwart their children's misbehavior and instill self-control in their young hearts and minds? Kersey has the answer in the "101 Positive Principles of





Discipline,”

a list of 101 positive discipline techniques to help parents nurture and love their children, teach respect, shape behavior, foster independence and build resiliency. Available on DVD, VHS and CD-ROM (www.dl.edu.edu/101s), the 101s focus on positive discipline techniques demonstrated by childcare providers in Old Dominion’s Child Study Center who use each of the principles as Kersey provides comments. The material also includes resources and activities to help parents, educators and childcare workers apply and reinforce each principle and design their own effective disciplinary plan.

Kersey began formulating the 101s several years ago after several encounters with audiences who objected when she spoke against the use of corporal punishment. “Many would insist that they were spanked and ‘turned out all right,’” she recalls. “I used to leave speeches feeling that I made people uncomfortable instead of convincing them that spanking was unnecessary and counterproductive.” To counter that, one of her students suggested that Kersey include alternatives to spanking in her speeches. Kersey introduced 30 original principles to provide specific positive discipline choices which teachers and parents could use to guide a child’s behavior. As the 101s took shape, Kersey challenged her students to contribute additional techniques that have been successfully implemented in both the classroom and home environment. The 101s have since become a staple in the early childhood and PreK-6 curriculum.

She emphasizes that the 101s do not encourage permissiveness. Rather, they include many basic principles that give guidelines, encourage parents to be consistent, listen to the child, form a connection with the child and help the child realize that behavior has consequences. They work best when parents, teachers and caregivers have laid a foundation of trust, kindness and respect. Kersey says that while all 101s may not “feel right” for any one person, she believes that most people can effectively and comfortably use at least 50 of the techniques to enhance discipline.



SOME OF THE 101S INCLUDE:

When/Then – Abuse It/Lose It Principle – “When you have finished your homework, then you may watch TV.” Kersey notes that this technique teaches children to be responsible, obedient and accountable.

Incompatible Alternative Principle – Give the child something to do that he can’t do while misbehaving. “Help me pick out six oranges” instead of running around the grocery store. It is a good idea to offer two positive alternatives that are incompatible with the inappropriate behavior: “Would you like to choose the cereal or select the apples?”

Choice Principle – Give the child two choices, both of which are positive and acceptable to you. “When a child does something you don’t want him to do or doesn’t want to do what you have requested, give him a choice,” Kersey explains. “If your child balks outside the barbershop, you say, ‘You may either hold my hand or walk in now on your own.’ Then – ‘You choose, or I’ll choose’ is the next choice if he is still reluctant. Usually, he’ll choose, but if not, quickly take his hand and hurry into the barbershop talking about the interesting barber chairs that roll up and down or the park you are going to visit later.”

Make a Big Deal Principle – Make a big deal over responsible, considerate, appropriate behavior with attention, thanks, praise, thumbs-up, recognition, hugs and special privileges. “That’s something we forget to do,” Kersey notes. “Children want our eyeballs more than anything else, so we have to train ourselves to look for the good behavior and look away when it is inappropriate (as long as it is not dangerous or destructive). If it is dangerous or destructive, we

have to stop it in the least reinforcing way possible – quickly before it escalates.”

Talk About Them Positively to Others – “Tell your husband ‘You should have seen Johnny at the barbershop. He sat up so tall and answered the barber’s questions.’ Johnny’s gotten an earful of good things.”

Modeling Principle – Model the behaviors you want. Show the child, by example, how to behave.

Take a Break Principle – Tell the child to “take a break” and think about what he could do differently that would work better or be more constructive. Tell him that he can come back as soon as he is ready to try again. Put the ball in his court – and make him responsible for changing his behavior.

Privacy Principle – Never embarrass a child in front of others. Always move to a private place to talk when there is a problem.

Positive Closure Principle – At the end of the day, remind your child that he is special and loved. Help him look for something good about the day that is finished and the day that lies ahead.

“. . . never do to the child what you wouldn’t want someone to do to you.”

Talk With Them, Not to Them Principle – Focus on two-way communication rather than preaching to children. Listen as well as talk.

Pay Attention Principle – Keep your eyes and mind on what is happening. Don’t wait until the child is out of control to step in. Remove the child from the situation if necessary. Stay calm and emotionally detached. Let him know what his options are. Be firm but not mean.

Use Actions Instead of Words – Don’t say anything. When the child continues to get out of bed and comes to the living room, take him back to bed – as many times as it takes. Don’t get upset, talk, scold, threaten or give reasons. Stay calm. Your child will learn that nighttime is for sleeping and that you are serious about enforcing bedtime.

Whisper Principle – Instead of yelling, screaming or talking in a loud voice, surprise the child by lowering your voice to a whisper. This often evokes immediate attention and helps you stay in control and think more clearly. “It’s our reactions to children’s actions that teach them whether or not to repeat them,” Kersey adds. “They’ll get your attention whichever way they can get it. Children repeat the behavior that works.”

Get on Child’s Eye Level Principle – When talking with the child, get down on his/her eye level and look him in the eye while talking softly to him.

Many of the principles are derived from common sense, Kersey notes. “A lot of them are ones people use intuitively. Good parents use many of them without even realizing it. They really empower children, making them responsible for their own behavior.”

Although the list may seem daunting at first glance, Kersey advises implementing the techniques slowly. She recommends parents and caregivers try one principle for a week until it becomes a common practice. “You have to build up until you can become confident you can get the child to obey you in other ways,” she says, adding that the child may not immediately respond to the principle. The 101s offer a variety of choices. Parents will find favorite techniques that will work most effectively with each particular child.

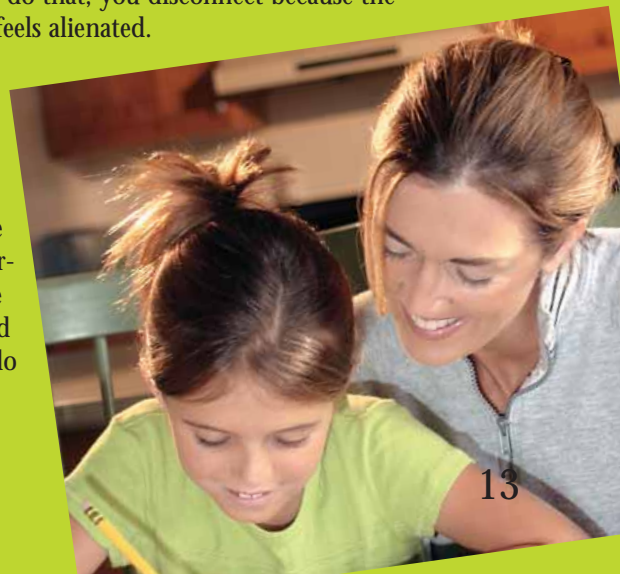
Kersey shows how to help a child break bad habits or develop good ones that are in his own best interest. “We need to think of a kind way to help the child become responsible for his own behavior,” she explains. “For example, a child could keep track of every time he makes his bed or brushes his teeth. For every five tallies, he can help his mom make cookies or go to the park with his dad. By the time he has 20 tallies,

he will be much more likely to brush his teeth or make his bed automatically. Habits are hard to break or cultivate. It helps if we can find a way to make the new behavior important enough for him to want to do it until it becomes habitual.”

Parents and caregivers can draw on the 101s to provide a healthy, nurturing environment focusing on positive discipline that teaches and trains, Kersey adds. “The goal of discipline is self-discipline. We want the child to learn to make good decisions for himself.”

On the other hand, punishment, including spanking, yelling and embarrassing the child, is counterproductive and unnecessary, according to Kersey. “My definition of punishment is hurting on purpose – either hitting or humiliating. Any time you do that, you disconnect because the other person feels alienated.

Whenever we disconnect, the focus is on anger instead of helping the child to understand what he did wrong and what he can do



Take a Break Principle • Privacy Principle • Positive Closure Principle • Talk With Them, Not to Them Principle

Pay Attention Principle • Use Actions Instead of Words • Whisper Principle • Get on Child's Eye Level Principle

better next time. This makes him want to retaliate, and our energy has to be spent trying to rebuild the connection.”

Still, many parents believe spanking is the quickest and most effective form of discipline. Kersey notes that many proponents of spanking were spanked when they misbehaved as children and instinctively react in the same manner when their children exhibit bad behavior.

“Most people who say they were spanked turn out fine because the amount of love and respect they felt in their homes far outweighed the times when they felt alienated,” she says. “It should come as no surprise that we see more aggressive tendencies in children who are spanked. A child isn't born violent. He learns to be violent from modeling the behaviors of those around him.”

Kersey adds that many parents spank out of anger toward the child's inappropriate actions. She advises parents in those situations to count to 10 or simply walk away. “It is hard once you've gotten in the habit of spanking to stop, but

once you stop, you never go back to it because you see how effective other discipline techniques are.”

The 101s can be used with all ages, including adolescents and even adults. Kersey acknowledges that she uses many of the principles with her staff and students. She notes that sports coaches, as well as business leaders, have used techniques found in the 101s with their teams and employees. During the past year, teachers at Newport News' Newsome Park Elementary School, who had been trained to use the 101s, were filmed in their classrooms using the principles with their PreK-6th grade minority children. Kersey would especially like to see the 101s used in high schools, noting that while the wording of the principles would have to be changed, the basic idea is the same.

“Respect is the bottom line,” she adds. “When you treat a child with respect, then he comes to treat you with respect and comes to respect himself.”

“The goal of discipline is self-discipline. The 101s help a child to assume responsibility for his own behavior and learn to make good decisions for himself.”

—Katharine C. Kersey

