

Barbara Burrows Parenting *Presents*



Raising Kids Without  
*Raising the Roof!*

An Education/Support Program for Mothers and/or Fathers of Children 2-10 years.

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## RAISING KIDS WITHOUT RAISING THE ROOF – WORKSHOP

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## INTRODUCTION

That child needs to be *disciplined!* This is a common phrase, and usually when heard, is true! If someone makes such a comment, likely a child is not controlling him or herself very well. However, we use the word “disciplined” synonymously with the word “punishment”. And it is absolutely *not* helpful to punish a misbehaving child -- not if you want to improve the child’s capacity for self-discipline, anyway.

In the long run, it is easier for everyone – parents and children – when children develop their own wish to behave themselves in a reasonable way and develop the capacity to do so. How does that happen? There are a number of psychological “building blocks” of development that must be successfully mastered before a child can control impulses in a “disciplined” way. For some families, helping children develop these skills seems to come easily. For others, it takes more thought. Often, it is easier for parents to help one child develop the capacity for self discipline than another.

Some people have problems with getting along with others throughout their lives – they never achieve a good level of self-discipline. Most of us do achieve a reasonable level of control. Actually, once we understand how many factors must be develop within the personality for it to become well-integrated, it is amazing that anyone reaches the level where they are able to exercise a reasonable level of discipline in their lives. This is hard work for both parents and children. How we reach this level of control is what this manual is about.

With the right information, every parent can increase his or her child’s ability to develop self-discipline.

The capacity for self-discipline develops with strong, healthy psychological growth.

## **PART 1 – IMMEDIATE ANSWERS**

The discipline problems parents face are often so tiring, ongoing and emotionally draining that they want to know “what to do”. There are no “magical” answers to child rearing discipline problems, although the numerous books on the market might suggest otherwise. A deeper understanding of the issues children face in their psychological development can help parents understand the best way to approach their particular child around particular issues. Parenting requires ongoing thinking, trying to understand and responding to each situation with new thought. The most satisfying results come when parents get a deeper understanding, over time, of the cause of the child’s difficulties. This allows them to *resolve* the underlying issues, and helps the child move forward in his or her development.

Several principals can help. Discipline, rather than punishment is one important concept.

### **a) DISCIPLINE VS. PUNISHMENT**

#### **What is discipline?**

The dictionary definition is:

1. corrective training,
2. orderly behaviour or
3. self-control

Discipline means “to teach; to maintain order”.

#### **What is punishment?**

1. A penalty causing one to suffer for some committed offence or
2. A severe, rough or disastrous treatment.

To learn well, think clearly and develop meaningful relationships, our children need to learn much about controlling their inner impulses to develop inner control. It is discipline, not punishment that will enable them to do so.

<p>With the right information, every parent can increase his or her children capacity for self-discipline.</p>
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**b) What to do First..**

Even though understanding the underlying factors influencing a child's behaviour takes time, there are certain principals that can be helpful immediately. Here are five general concepts that will help in almost all cases. These ideas come from the seminar "**Raising Kids Without Raising the Roof**" by Barbara Burrows.

**1. Stop the behaviour without punishing.**

Punishments alienate children and parents. Punishments often make the child feel over-powered which increases his rage and often temper. Without ever realizing, parents often set up a cycle whereby the child is punished, feels resentful, acts up to retaliate and is punished again.

Parents can stop children from doing things they shouldn't by intervening, not with punishments, but by being well connected and using grown-up authority. Often verbal interventions early enough will help children regain control. "I think you will feel badly if you do that. You'll feel better if you stop." can be an effective warning for children with language. "Uh uh" can get a baby or toddler to stop and look at the parent.

"The Successful Child" (Sears and Sears) points out that when parents and children are well connected, it is easier to correct or redirect them. "*All I have to do is give him the look and he stops misbehaving,*" says a mother who is well "in tune" with her toddler. (P17) This toddler wants to get back into his mother's good graces – and is willing to put aside his wishes to please her.

Until children have their own inner controls, they need a great deal of help from their parents. When children are well supervised, adults can often sense when a child is beginning to lose control of either behaviour, or emotions. With early intervention, parents can often help a child behave in a reasonable way.

Interventions might be a verbal reminder, or perhaps actually going to the child/ren and encouraging them to find the kinder, or fairer way to behave. Parents might have to remove an out of control child from the situation to reduce stimulation, but it is usually better to stay with the child until calm returns rather than sending the child away.

**2. Share Feelings**

Talk with children about inside feelings – help them notice when they feel good emotionally and when they do not. From an early age, the conscience causes us to feel miserable inside when we have done something we consider wrong. Helping children recognize these inner miserable feelings helps them become more aware of what they must do to feel good again. Many children need help, around age 5 or 6, with an overly strict conscience. They may feel badly over the smallest mistakes, and berate themselves as "stupid".

Children do not feel good when they are hurting others. A child does not get into behaviour struggles when he or she is feeling secure and calm inside. When troubled behaviour starts, it is a sign of inside troubles for the child. The more aware parents become of misbehaviour indicating inside troubles, the more they can help the child know when troubles are there and help the child start to think of what he can do to feel better again.

*When Larry, age 4 would start to get out of control, his father would gather him in his arms (with Larry pushing, and fighting) and his father would say, "What do you need to do to get your good feelings back again."*

*When his father first used this technique, Larry would fuss and squirm and push and pull, yelling "put me down!!" but his Dad just kept patiently asking him the same question. As his Dad would use this approach often, Larry got much better at noticing when he was getting upset and knowing what he could do to calm himself. Eventually he would say, "OK, OK, I'll get my book" as his father came towards him to pick him up, even before his father reached him.*

By setting limits in this way, Larry's father helped him think more deeply about his feelings, which in turn, helped Larry find ways to get his upset feelings under control. His father effectively stopped Larry's poor behaviour without punishing or rejecting him in any way.

### **3. Hang In**

The more you feel like rejecting your child in anger, the more your child needs you. From toddlerhood to adolescent, try not to reject your child when misbehaving.

Staying with the child in a non-punitive way strengthens the child's sense of self. It is saying "I'm not giving up on you, or rejecting you, even in the midst of your troubled behaviour". This helps the child feel better and may increase his "ego strength" (good feelings about the self). Increased ego strength increases self-discipline. If a parent is able to do support the child this way, it is usually better for the child. If the child or the parent is too angry, they may need time apart. Clearly designating this time apart as a cool down, rather than a punitive "you stay there until you can behave better" approach is more effective in motivating a child to think about his own actions introspectively.

### **4. Making Things Right Again**

Going back, looking at what happened, and thinking together about what can be done to make things right again will restore good feelings in the child and parent. In order to be successful, this introspective approach has to be something the child wants to and feels ready to do. Parents have to be on the children's side to help them feel secure enough to be able to admit their error and wish to make things right again.

### **5. Offer Hope!**

Realize and help your child realize that difficult inside feelings lead to difficult behaviours, and the younger children are, the more difficult it is to control wishes and impulses. Help your child search for her own “good reasons” for the trouble and offer hope that she will be able to find a better way in future – one that leaves her with good inside feelings.

Remind him that even grown-ups don't always behave the way they would like to, but everyone has an “inside helper”, a little voice that helps us figure out the best way to behave.

## **PART 2 - THE BIGGER PICTURE**

Along with addressing the immediate, day-to-day discipline issues, we need to look at the bigger picture. What psychological “building blocks” do children need to develop the capacity to manage well? The more parents can understand about children’s psychological development, the more they can do to support the tasks children need to master to develop discipline.

### **a) Attachment – Separation**

#### **Attachment**

One factor that motivates children to control their unacceptable impulses is feeling loved by their parents. When the child feels the parents’ emotional investment, he wants to try and do what the parents ask, because the child feels happy when he knows his parents are happy with his efforts. John Bowlby’s work on attachment and loss is well known.

*No variables have more far-reaching effects on personality development than a child's experiences within the family. Starting during his first months in his relation to both parents, he builds up working models of how attachment figures are likely to behave towards him in any of a variety of situations, and on all those models are based all his expectations, and therefore all his plans, for the rest of his life. Attachment and Loss (1973, p.369)*

Based upon attachment theory, “The Successful Child” (Sears and Sears) outlines a number of good suggestions for connecting with infants, toddlers and older children, which they call “Attachment Parenting”. Birth bonding, breastfeeding, baby wearing are ways of mothers and babies becoming “attached” psychologically.

#### **Separation**

Almost as soon as the infant is well attached to the mother and father, and they to him, families face another difficult hurdle. The child is ending infancy, moving into toddlerhood, and now needs his parents to recognize his budding needs for separation. Slowly, but surely (over many years), parents must relinquish some of the gratifying feelings of “oneness” and allow differentiation between parent and child.

One of the tasks of toddlerhood and early childhood is to feel like “me”, someone separate from mom and dad. Another pull of these stages is to not let go of infantile pleasures. To get the good feelings that come with being “me”, eventually the infantile pleasures are given up, and the child branches out, to enjoy new and enriching

experiences beyond the relationship with mom.

The child gets the best feelings by doing and “me do” becomes the mantra of many toddlers. When the child insists on doing things alone, he is also establishing his sense of self, which is different from his parents. He may push hard against the mother, especially, to feel separate.

This is an exceptionally difficult task for parents who have formed a positive and strong attachment with their babies when they push away during toddlerhood. Parents begin letting go, which means relinquishing some body closeness with toddlers through weaning, helping them sleep alone, give up diapers and the body closeness that comes from touching the child’s body during diaper changing.

Figuring out how quickly to let go, how much to ask of children and how much to do for them is a constant challenge for families. The following examples show what did and did not work well for the parents and their children in several different families.

### **Asking Too Much**

Leslie was gifted, provocative, attractive and still 12 years old when she started high school. Since she skipped a grade in elementary school, her friends in grade 9 were 14 and even 15 years old. Leslie seemed as mature as her friends. Her mother felt Leslie was ready for the independence and freedom she asked for, and that the other grade 9 kids had. Leslie’s mother was wrong.

Leslie had a very difficult year in grade 9 – and often skipped school to hang out with friends. From being near the top of her class in grade school, she failed four of her eight subjects in first year high school. It wasn’t until Leslie began skipping school, lying to her mom and failing that her mother realized that Leslie was not coping well. She had not developed a level of self-discipline that would allow her to succeed with the increased pressures of high school. It was a big jolt for both Leslie and her mother to face these problems in her first year of secondary school.

Leslie’s mother realized that “grounding” and taking away privileges would do nothing to help Leslie feel in better control. Although Leslie pretended not to listen, her mother made many attempts to talk about what she saw – that Leslie was having a very hard time in grade 9, and although she wanted to handle everything herself, it was clear that she needed some adult help to get back on track.

Leslie’s mother became “re-involved” in Leslie’s life, not buying Leslie’s proclamations that she was “handling things OK”, but by keeping much closer track of Leslie. To this, Leslie objected strongly. Her mother felt uncertain, not sure whether she was “controlling” her daughter too much. Leslie objected. They kept talking about what was fair and reasonable.

Within a few months, her mother knew her interventions had helped. With “uninvited” parental support, Leslie settled down considerably, and by the time she reached Grade

10, had returned to good marks and far more reasonable behaviour.

It wasn't until Leslie's difficulties surfaced that her mother realized that she had asked too much of Leslie – she expected more maturity than Leslie had yet developed. The answer, it turned out, was giving Leslie *more* parental support than Leslie appeared to want or need. This increased input from her mother seemed to be what was required.

### **Asking Too Little - Zoë Stops Nursing**

Leslie's mother, it turned out, needed to be more involved in her daughter's life. She was asking more of her daughter than her daughter could manage. We can't conclude that having greater parental input will always help, however. Zoë's mother found just the opposite – that she was asking too little of her daughter.

Linda was nursing her 4-year-old daughter, Zoe. She felt that this closeness was important for both her and her daughter. Although her daughter seemed to enjoy nursing, the little girl's behaviour was very difficult in other areas. At times, she was extremely uncooperative and the family faced many "meltdowns" when Zoë would fall apart, over very small issues - when her favourite blue socks were in the wash, for example. Eventually, Zoë decided, all on her own, to give up nursing. She had not nursed for several days. Zoë then changed her mind. One dreary, cold winter morning, she snuggled beside her mom and took her mother's breast. An hour later, Zoë was in a terrible mood, furious with her brother, and she threw a terrible tantrum.

Zoë's mother wondered whether there was there a connection between the temper tantrum and the return to nursing. She talked with Zoë and they wondered together whether her frustration and anger at her brother could have been to do with nursing earlier. Zoë said that she wanted to stop nursing. Her mom asked if, although it tasted good, it made her feel "little" when she had "boobies". Feeling "little" might have made her in a bad, angry mood. Zoë agreed. Her mom, with this discussion, helped Zoë start to make the connection between her angry feelings, feeling "little" and nursing.

### **Mixed Feelings**

Zoe, and all children get good feelings from "doing" things – striving to be as grown-up as they are ready to be. They also get deep pleasure from baby experiences – like nursing. It is hard to understand how a child could want two opposite things at the same time, for example – to nurse and not to nurse - but all children do at the weaning stage. When children's wishes are in conflict, they are often very cranky and upset.

When children have trouble giving up infantile pleasures, they can feel "babyish", a feeling they dislike very much. Troubles with attachment and separation lead to discipline difficulties.

### **B) “Doing” for Oneself Creates Good Feelings**

Finding the balance between when to hold on and when to let go, or asking too much of children and too little is extremely difficult for parents. Often we can only tell by watching our children’s reactions *after* we have chosen to handle things in a particular way. Leslie’s mother did not know until things started going badly for Leslie in grade 9 that she was under too much pressure. Zoë’s mom believed she was on the right track and thought lengthy nursing would make her daughter feel secure, not angry. The numerous temper tantrums were difficult for her mother to understand – why should they be so frequent if Zoë was feeling secure?

In both cases, Zoë and Leslie’s mothers were unable to perceive their children’s needs clearly until the children showed distress. Their distress helped their mothers understand they needed to keep thinking – and with more thought, both Zoë and Leslie settled down and felt happier.

Here is an example of one mother who either luckily (or thoughtfully) “got it right”. It has to do with “doing” for oneself.

#### **Heather Stops Nursing**

Heather, at 2 years 4 months, looked out the window one day and told her mother about all of the children who lived on the street. She explained that the babies got “boobies” but the big kids didn’t. Heather’s mother was astounded that Heather could name the children, much less figure out who nursed and who didn’t. She recognized through this conversation that Heather was thinking carefully about what a “big kid” was all about, and assumed this meant Heather was wishing to be like the “big kids”.

Heather was nursing 3-4 times a day at this point, her mom, Sue, had believed Heather was nowhere near ready to wean. But now, she felt Heather had given her a message, about wanting to “be big”. She tentatively suggested Heather should give up nursing. She was expecting a big fuss and assumed that Heather would not give up easily. Sue suggested that they would read a story instead of having “milkies” before her nap. Heather readily agreed. Within a few days, Heather easily gave up all nursing, only asking once or twice more for “milkies” and easily agreed when her mom suggested a story instead.

#### **Heather’s Amazing Development**

What astounded Sue more than how easily the weaning went was the amazing development that she noticed in Heather in the months that followed her weaning. At 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  Heather joined a music class, which she loved. After 4 or 5 weeks, Heather was pushing her mother out the door, saying she wanted to stay all by herself for the 45 minute class.

The weaning allowed Heather to invest the emotional energy that was previously attached to her mom, to outside interests. She enjoyed her new experiences thoroughly,

which gave her good, big girl feelings of accomplishment. Her good feelings, in turn, helped her tolerate frustration and led to reasonably co-operative behaviour in most areas of her life.

“Doing” and being capable creates good feelings. Recognizing and supporting a child’s wish to move forward enhances self-esteem, which leads to the capacity for disciplined behaviour.

### ***C) It Had Been a Bad Day***

Inside feelings can lead to difficult behaviour, and outside influences can as well. Zack is 10-years-old. His mother reports that when he is difficult to get along with at the end of the day, she can often trace his uncooperative attitude to events of the day. Recently, the reason for Zack’s cruel teasing of his brother came to light.

His mother pointed out that it was quite mean of Zack to criticize the work his brother was showing off proudly. She asked if Zack could figure out where his mean feeling might be coming from. First Zack was angry with his mother for asking, and he stormed off to his room. She followed, and again said that he didn’t seem like himself, that she thought something must be wrong. With that Zack started talking, and revealed that he had failed a spelling test that day, because he forgot to study.

As his mother listened, and as Zack talked, his bad mood eased a little. They talked together about how Zack could get his good inside feelings back. He said he had to correct his spelling words on his paper, and that he was feeling bad about teasing his brother Paul. He wanted to apologise. He came out of his room, with a very different attitude. He went to his brother’s room to talk to him. The evening went well.

In thinking about our children’s difficult behaviour, it is important to try and figure out how events in the child’s day-to-day life might be leading to troubled behaviour.

### ***D) Building the Conscience***

#### **The Inside Helper Story**

Hanna Perkins Center in Cleveland OH is a treatment facility with a commitment to treating behaviour difficulties without the use of medication. This includes ADHD (Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder), Tourette’s Syndrome, OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), etc. All behavioural/emotional conditions have an emotional basis. With careful, and thoughtful work, parents are helped to help children with their

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inside feelings. When emotional knots are unravelled, children get better.

A tool that has been developed at Hanna Perkins to help children and parents with conscience development is a story called "Your Inside Helper. This story is available on the Web site at: <http://www.cwru.edu/affil/hanna/>.

## **PART 3 – Difficult Feelings**

### ***A) Known & Unknown Feelings***

Difficult feelings come up in families – all families. All parents relive problematic aspects of past relationships as they get “replayed” in parent/child relationships. Often these replays remain *unconscious*. The very real psychological discomfort of “the unconscious” often cannot exactly be defined. It may be experienced as anxiety, obsessive behaviours, depression, anger or just a “bad mood”. Children and parents contend *all day, everyday* with their unconscious. This is one thing that makes family life tense and unhappy at times. The following example shows how feelings stored in one mother’s unconscious lead to troubles for her with her son.

#### **4-year-old Pushes Toddler**

Janet came to parenting class because she felt exceptionally angry with her 4-year-old son. He often hit or pushed his year-old sister. Others in the class agreed that they felt angry when their older children were rough with the baby as well. Janet said that she often couldn’t get over her anger, and felt her rage was out of proportion to her son’s behaviour.

This led to a discussion of our “unconscious” – the part of ourselves which is unknown – a part we would rather not recognize. The part that remains repressed or denied – or “foggy”. I explained that we all “re-enact” old, unresolved angers from our own childhood. When our anger cannot be easily unexplained, often something unconscious has been triggered. Janet looked at me blankly. I suggested she try to go beyond her difficult guilty feelings, and to keep thinking about her feelings towards her 4-year-old. I urged her to “free associate” (let her thoughts float – one to the next) and notice if anything comes to mind that could explain her angry feelings that wouldn’t let up.

The next week, she couldn’t wait to share her insight with me. She had remembered, that as a little girl, an older brother had often shoved her around. She hated him at times for bullying her. She realized that she felt similar feelings towards her son, when he pushed her daughter.

She was able to figure out for herself that she had been (unconsciously), seeing her daughter as herself, and the strong, furious feelings were left-over feelings for her bully big brother were getting “replayed” . This childhood problem had re-surfaced and was interfering with her feelings of love for her son.

With this insight, she was more able to see her son as a little boy, having trouble with jealousy, rather than a bullying big brother to be hated and punished. Searching for and getting a glimpse of her hidden, unconscious feelings helped her in her relationship with her son.

## ***B) Accepting Aggressive Feelings***

A very difficult reality for parents to accept is the universal fact that all children, at times, hate their beloved family members, and wish them harm. As children, we had the same feelings, but as we get older, we understand that those feelings are hurtful to others, and we do our best to keep them under control. Many of us feel shame about these strong feelings especially if we were not helped with these them as youngsters. If we didn't really "get over" issues that left us very frustrated, enraged, upset and angry, they can still remain an active part of our psyche. On some level we may feel guilty about our anger, hatred and rage, and we repress these feelings to our unconscious. The feelings do not go away. Repressed emotion leads to all kinds of difficulty, probably the most common being digestive difficulties or depression

Once we have repressed our own anger, it becomes harder to bear it in our children. Many of us feel very upset to hear our children pretending to have one toy "kill" another, wish to play with "violent toys" like guns or swords, or even worse, screaming "I hate you!" at us.

It is very helpful if parents can help children to differentiate between thoughts, fantasies and actions, and help them not feel guilty for their thoughts. When children are able to think aggressive thoughts without feeling too much shame, they can often verbalize the thoughts. *Putting the thoughts into words* discharges the tension, and helps children control their behaviour more effectively.

If a child is shamed for his thoughts or wishes, he will try to hide them, and ironically, keeping the feelings hidden inside may increase the power of the impulse. When children cannot control their impulses, this can lead to misbehaviour.

*i.e. if his mother responds sympathetically to a 4-year-old who screams that he hates his 2-year-old brother and "is going to kill him" for knocking down the Lego, the boy is more likely to be able to control his urge to hit. If he is shamed for having such thoughts and wishes, and tries to hold them in, he may end up hitting. Putting feelings into words discharges the impulse, reduces the pressures and therefore allows the child greater control. Having a parent understand the intensity of the feeling also helps the child with control.*

In order to manage in a "disciplined" way, children need ample opportunity to "work through" their strong and aggressive raging and hateful feelings. They need to know these feelings are not "bad"; uncomfortable yes, but not "bad". They especially need help controlling themselves when aggressive, hateful feelings arise so they don't hurt others, which leads to guilt.

Here are some ways children discharge difficult feelings.

### 1. Through Play

Children “play” at things that are on their mind, often play has to do with their problems or things they wish for. When aggressive ideas are played out in imaginary ways, often children can get relief from the inside pressures without feeling guilty.

#### **Baby Overboard;**

*"Play has very important meanings for children, but wise parents will not attempt to structure a carefully organized play program for a child as though it were a well balanced diet. In play, spontaneity and inner direction are of supreme significance; without them, much of the value of play is destroyed." (A Good Enough Parent – Bruno Bettelheim P212)*

The way children can use play to reduce some of their inner tensions is evident in the following example. Three young boys, each of whom had a new younger sibling in the family, took great delight in playing "pirate ship" all afternoon and evening one summer day. The game took place on the back patio of a town house. The patio represented the ship. There was a captain, and two helpers. The captain sailed the ship. One of the others took great delight in heaving an old bundled up towel off the patio. As he did, he yelled with glee, "Baby overboard!" The other helper took as much pleasure in "plunging" overboard to rescue the baby, and brought the baby safely back to the ship.

The boys each played each role in the game. The game interested them for hours. Likely by the time the boys went home that night, they felt relaxed, tired and happy to see their real life baby brother or sister. When an activity fascinates children for a long period of time, the activity is offering the child satisfaction and usually an opportunity to express something from his own personality. Often the enjoyed activity offers ways to settle some conflicted feelings.

In this case, each of these boys had a desire (an unconscious impulse) to throw their real life baby overboard. They also had a desire to treat the baby well and please their parents. These opposing feelings are in conflict. There is little opportunity to satisfy both desires. In play, they could satisfy the urge to get rid of the baby without ever hurting the baby. They could also rescue the baby, thereby feeling they were "good boys". Much of the desire to hurt the baby would be worked through (for that day anyway).

Adult directed activities can never offer a child the kind of satisfaction these boys experienced by responding to their own unconscious feelings, of which they were probably completely unaware. Quite likely they believed they loved their siblings and harboured no ill feelings. Therefore, without ever even having to admit their hostility, they found their own way to discharge it.

### **Ernie goes over the chair.**

A young toddler with a pregnant mother took great glee in climbing up on a big chair, and pitching his stuffed toy "Ernie" over the back of the chair. His mother didn't quite recognize that "Ernie" was a substitute for the baby within her, but did worry that if she allowed this behaviour, she may be giving him the message that he could do the same with the real baby.

In this case, the toddler was expressing, as the boys above on the "pirate ship" both sides of his conflicting feelings. One was his wish to throw the baby away and secondly, his wish to retrieve the baby. The next example shows another variation on the same theme.

### **The School Bus Accident.**

Children address everyday problems through their play -- often problems that parents have no way of knowing the child has -- except by observing how the child plays and listening to what the child says.

*i.e. A twenty-six month toddler, shortly before the birth of his new brother or sister, played the same game over and over. He filled his school bus with several small animals and people and took them on for a drive. The bus crashed on each trip, spilling all the people out, and the child then rushed them all to the hospital to get fixed up.*

The bus is enclosed and holds small people -- like his mother -- with that big bulging tummy. Through play, this toddler can express his unconscious wish -- to dump the "little people" out of his mother, and never have to feel guilty for wanting to do, what even he, at 26 months, understands as "bad" -- hurting mommy. He can enjoy this symbolic effort to get rid of the baby daily, express some of his aggressive wishes through play and does not suffer guilt. Having expressed some of his aggressive feelings freely and without feeling like a "bad boy", he then feels more like loving his mommy and the baby.

By taking the people from the bus to the hospital, he expresses his loving nature, and can enjoy his expression of his "good" intentions.

If parents disapprove of the child's play, he may stop expressing his negative feelings about the birth of his sibling in such a harmless and positive fashion. Ironically, if the child is discouraged from such play, he may start to express his wish to get rid of the baby more openly by hitting his mother's big tummy, or more subtly by refusing to co-operate with her.

## **2. With Words**

Sometimes, aggression is very strong and children are literally "falling apart" psychologically (which we know from their "falling apart" behaviour). When they are supported and encouraged to tell, in words, about their angry thoughts and wishes, this

gives an emotional release and helps them calm down and regain control. There are numerous clinical examples that suggest babies as young as six months (and maybe even younger) can benefit from parents using words to explain what is happening to them. The parent's explanation seems to contain the infant's worry.

Here are some examples of how parents were able to help "contain feelings" of their children and help them cope by talking about their big, angry or frightened feelings and experiences.

### **Baby Lila awakens frequently at night.**

Mrs. S. consulted with a therapist about her daughter's frequent night-time wakings. For several nights, the baby had been waking as often as every 45 minutes. Mrs. S said she watched her daughter start to cry while still asleep, and then struggle to wake herself up. This had been going on for several days. "What has changed in her life?" asked the therapist. "Well," said the mother thoughtfully, "I guess she started waking up last Thursday and that was the day she took her first steps.

Mrs. S. went on to say how the whole family, including her grandfather, had cheered Lila on, encouraging her to try again after she took her first steps. There was lots of excitement.

The therapist suggested that Lila might have felt over-whelmed with the excitement and felt under too much pressure with everyone encouraging her to try again. She suggested that Mrs. S. tell Lila that she would be there to help her walk when she was ready and hold her hands if she wished. When Mrs. S. took Lila on her lap to talk with her, Lila looked intently into Mrs. S. face while she spoke. Lila reached for her mother's hands when her mom mentioned them. She listened carefully, although Mrs. S. had no way of knowing how much her daughter understood. It seems the words did help Lila thought, as Mrs. S. reported that Lila's sleeping improved that night.

### **Can't Stay at Grandpa's for lunch.**

4-year-old Jeremy was at his grandpa's farm, working with his mom, dad and brothers in their garden plot. When it was time to go home for lunch, Jeremy wanted to stay at Grandpa's. Grandpa made no move to invite Jeremy. Jeremy became very angry when his mom and dad told him it was time to go home, and refused to get into the van.

This created a very tense situation. Jeremy's grandfather believed very strongly that his son and his wife were "too soft" the way they tolerated their children's "bad" behaviour. It was embarrassing to have Jeremy act this way in front of his critical grandfather. Although embarrassed by his son's poor behaviour, Jeremy's father took him quietly away to talk his troubled feelings through privately. Jeremy's father listened about him wanting to stay and his anger that Grandpa wasn't inviting him. Dad stressed that Mommy and Daddy couldn't do anything about that, but were sorry Jeremy was so upset.

With his father's support, eventually Jeremy calmed down and came back to the van. He hopped in with his mom and brothers without further incident – and headed home for lunch.

Jeremy's putting his anger into words, and his father's empathetic response helped Jeremy "work through" his frustration. He regained control and recovered from his anger and could then behave himself again.

The especially nice ending to this story is that the gruff "spare the rod, spoil the child" grandfather later acknowledged to his son that he felt the son's way of managing Jeremy's upset was a much better than the old way. Grandpa could see that helping a child through his difficulty is much better than giving him a spanking.

### **C) Sweet Dreams**

We can know more about our children's troubles, worries, and frustrations by listening to what they say about their dreams. Leftover feelings, wishes, frustrations and upsets from the day get "worked out" at night through our dreams at night for adults as well as children.

*Freud gives the following example to illustrate how clearly children's wishes are expressed in their dreams. 2-year-old Herman was required to share his favourite fruit (cherries) with siblings and cousins. This meant he did not get as many as he wanted. In the morning he awoke with a big smile and said, "Herman ate chewies!". In his dream, he had what he wanted. Likely Herman's parents had no idea that sharing the cherries was difficult and left Herman longing for more – for the rest of the day.*

By listening to our children tell about what they have dreamed, we get a deeper understanding of how they are experiencing everyday living.

As we get older, our dreams disguise our wishes for us. Just as the 2-year-old is often the only one who knows of wishes filled with murderous rage, their dream wishes are also quite clear. For the rest of us, our dreams disguise our wishes, so the imagined gratification reduces our tension and stress.

### **D) Nightmares**

Sometimes, feelings are too strong, and we can't work them through in our sleep. Nightmares come when our dream work cannot disguise our wishes enough that we are able to tolerate them.

If a child had nightmares that a monster is chasing him, it would be important to talk about monster feelings, and explore whether the child ever has big feelings, like the monster, and would like to chase somebody too. Is some problem feeling like "a big monster" to

him? It is important to try to help the child recognize his own monster feelings. Here words become important again. If the child can talk, the reasons for monster dreams may come to light. Is he the monster? Does someone in his life seem like a monster to him? Could big, angry inside feelings seem like a monster?

Through talk, it may be possible to find out more about what trouble in the child's life is leading to the bad dreams.

## **PART 4 - Fun – Not Excitement**

### ***A) Excitement***

When children are exposed to things that get them excited, or when their own inside thoughts and ideas get them too excited, they cannot cope as well. We all know how common it is for the “birthday” boy or girl to have a day that includes tears, and often he (or she) gets punished. Gleeful playing can become tearful fighting in a short while when excitement levels get more than children can manage.

If adults can notice when a child is becoming excited, and can intervene to help the child calm down, it is much easier for the child to control impulses.

### ***B) Fear***

Fear can be exciting too. Many people love horror movies, as they like the feeling of being scared. Children also like the excited, keyed up feeling of being scared, and so often beg to watch things on TV that are really too much for them.

Watch for any type of anxiety, too much activity, or play fighting for signs that children are over-stimulated. Remove source of stimulation, help them calm down, and point out that they feel better “inside” when the excited feelings are gone, even though they are likely disappointed that they were not allowed to watch what they wanted.

### ***C) Fun***

Fun is being fully engaged in an activity, thinking creatively and using one’s own capacities fully. Helping children become quietly engaged in work or play that is meaningful and satisfying to them is a good way to help children control their behaviour. Co-operative rather than competitive activities for groups of children are a better choice to help children control impulses.

Watch for any type of anxiety, too much activity, or play fighting for signs that children are over-stimulated. Remove source of stimulation, help them calm down, and point out that they feel better “inside” when the excited feelings are gone.

## Conclusion

Although it is understandable that parents wish for an immediate answer to discipline, there really isn't one. Punishing difficult behaviour does nothing to build within the child the capacity to manage better. Children can and do develop the capacity for self-discipline with lots of help from parents.

Discipline is a way of maintaining order. It is looking for ways in which you can help your children maintain or regain control. To maintain good discipline, the bigger picture must be considered. What else is going on, in either the child or the parent's life that might be influencing the child's behaviour? What problems might be besetting either that makes reasonable, orderly behaviour more difficult?

The more parents can consider the points that we have discussed, the better able they will be to help the child to behave in a reasonable, disciplined manner and the better the child will feel.

To develop discipline is a life long process; don't be discouraged if your child has not mastered all that is required to control him or herself yet. Patiently set reasonable limits, and think about the following points:

1. Use discipline, not punishment.
2. Take attachment and separation issues into consideration to help children develop impulse control.
3. Encourage and support "doing", taking into consideration that asking too much can lead to difficulties.
4. Listen to and sympathize with children's aggressive feelings.
5. Create opportunity for working feelings through in play and words.
6. Strive for fun, not excitement in children's play and lives.