Parenting MATTERS

Punishment

Help or Hindrance?

I found my child lying to me to avoid punishment

I have to yell more and more to make them listen

It works temporarily. They will listen because they are scared. But if I am not there, they will not do what they are supposed to do

Additional section on POSITIVE DISCIPLINE included

Booklet 1

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BOOKLET 1

PARENTING WITH CONNECTION

PUNISHMENT
A help or hindrance?

INTRODUCTION

Since 2004, Parenting Matters has been creating spaces for parents to explore, share, and learn through workshops and parenting groups. This journey has given us innumerable insights into the challenges and experiences of parents in the Indian cultural context, and the many factors that influence parenting.

In our workshops, we examine the dominant paradigm of parenting in our society—what is helpful to children and what is not—in the light of the latest research on brain and child development.
Our sessions with parents bring out some areas of conflict between long-held beliefs and practices, and the information provided by modern science about what children need in order to thrive. We have observed that our beliefs sometimes hold us back from doing what is best for our children. Listening to the participants' views and understanding their perspectives inspired us to work on a series of booklets that will help parents understand themselves, and their actions in relation to their children.

In these booklets, we have taken everyday concerns faced by parents and have discussed each topic around them, based on real-life stories and opinions shared by our participants. We have also presented the research and neuroscience around these themes, in an attempt to help parents, reflect and gain new information that will support them in making informed choices, and find ease and joy in parenting.
These booklets are dedicated to all the parents who have shared their deepest feelings with us and shown us how hard we all work to be the best parent we can be.

Punishment - a help or hindrance

'Misbehaviour and punishment are not opposites that cancel each other, on the contrary they breed and reinforce each other.'

- Haim G. Ginott

Raising children in today's world is challenging. With the invasion of technology and consumerism, and breakdown of large families and close communities, children are growing up in a very different environment. Parents who come for our workshops feel that parenting is much harder today. They say, 'As a parent, I often feel confused—what do I allow or not allow? Am I supposed to be the strict, traditional parent or the fun parent who does not say "no"? What exactly should I be doing to build discipline in my child? Is it ok to hit or punish? What about timeouts?'

Listening to their dilemmas over the years, we have realised that one of the issues that most baffles parents is discipline and punishment. How can I help my child learn to behave in constructive ways? What really counts as effective discipline? Parents are not happy about frequently having to yell to get children to cooperate. Yet, they see no other way. This booklet attempts to share the questions that many parents have raised on this topic, their beliefs and challenges, and some answers we have arrived at using the latest information from neuroscience about child development.

Let us start by looking at some common scenarios:

Scenario 1

You are having lunch at a restaurant with your friends, and there is a mother with her four-year-old. The child is running around the restaurant—not sitting at the table even when her mother tells her to— but choosing to explore and move around the restaurant while humming loudly. The mother worries that other people may be getting disturbed.

Mother: Priya, look, the yummy dosa you wanted is here. Come sit at the table, let's eat. *(Child is still running around and not hearing her mother)*

Mother: Priya, come to the table, please. let's not disturb the others. Come, eat your dosa. It's getting cold, and it won't taste nice if it gets cold.
Child: Nooooo! I just want to play for a bit, Amma. You feed me.
(After a few minutes)

Mother: Priya, come to the table now, please. This is the last time I'm calling you.
(Priya is very engrossed in playing. She is now squealing with delight.)

Mother *(raising her voice)*: Priya, come here right now! Sit at the table and eat your dosa, otherwise, I will send it back and you will have no food to eat. And I will not get you any ice cream either.

Priya eventually comes to the table, crying and evidently upset, and reluctantly eats her dosa.

Scenario 2

Three-year-old Aliya finds her crayons and wants to explore, so she starts drawing on the wall.

Mother *(enters and yells)*: Aliya! What are you doing?! How many times have I told you not to draw on the wall? Never do this again! If it happens one more time, I will be really angry, I will not talk to you!

Scenario 3

Seven-year-old Suresh is playing with his younger brother and they start fighting. Suresh hits his brother and his brother starts crying.

Father: Suresh, what is wrong with you? Don't you know that you are older, and you cannot hit him like that?

Suresh: But he started it!

Father: You are always rough with your brother. You are very mean to him. As a punishment, I am not going to allow you to play on your PlayStation this week. Now go to your room and sit quietly and think about what you did.

Scenario 4

Ten-year-old Kavya has just come back from tennis class. She is still tossing the ball and hitting it with her racquet lightly. She hits one shot hard and ends up knocking a glass off the table and breaking it. Her mother comes from the kitchen and, without any hesitation, whacks her on the head and says, "You are so careless! Don't you know that you should play with the ball outside the house?"

> ***'Good discipline is more than just punishing or laying down the law. It is liking children and letting them see that they are liked. It is caring enough about them to provide good, clear rules for their protection.'***
>
> - Dr Stanley Greenspan, child psychiatrist

In all the above incidents, **the parents felt frustrated, helpless, irritated, or angry**. Their reactions may be seen as natural, given their upbringing and beliefs. Their intention is to raise their children well. They found their children meeting their needs in ways that were inconvenient and affecting others around. They hope to raise their children to have a sense of responsibility, sensitivity to others and inner discipline. Hence, they took various actions with the intention of teaching their children important life skills. Let us now examine these actions.

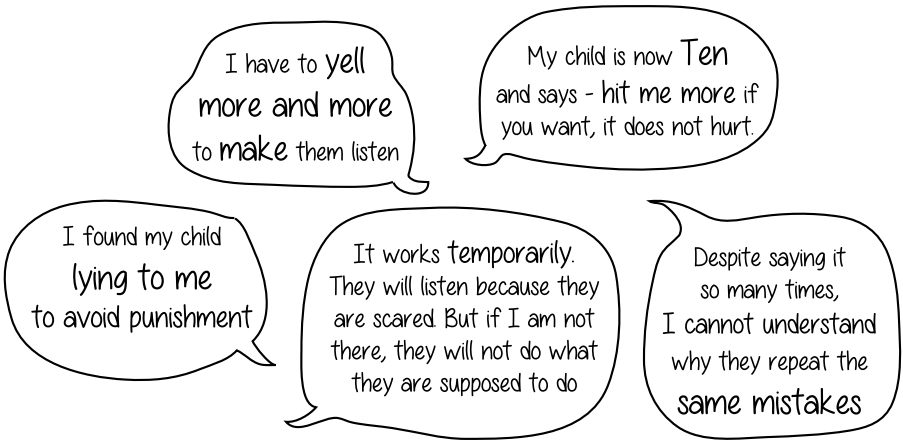
- Priya's mother, in her attempt to get Priya to come to the table and eat, **threatens her with the consequence** of no food or **withdrawal of privilege** like ice cream.

- Aliya's mother scolds Aliya and threatens to **withdraw her love** if she does not behave.
- Suresh's father **shames and scolds** Suresh by calling him 'mean', **takes away his privilege** of playing on the PlayStation, and sends him into his room for a **timeout**.
- Kavya's mother ends up **raising her hand**, hitting her child and labelling her as careless because she broke something.

All these are forms of PUNISHMENT. The parent wants the child to cooperate and eat, to play without hitting, to be more careful, or not to scribble on the wall, but do these punishments help in achieving these goals?

A few questions for you to explore about punishment:

- Does punishment help a child learn to behave in ways which are beneficial to him?
- Does it promote inner discipline in children?
- Do you feel that punishment will build the child into the person you would want him to be?



In our groups, parents have discovered upon reflection:

One parent said, '*Before I became a parent when I watched a child being yelled at or threatened, I would silently vow to never treat my child like that! But now, when I am thrown into the world of parenthood, I find it hard to manage without resorting to these tactics to keep my kids in check*.'

Sometimes, after we have "lost it" with our kids, we feel guilt and remorse and

wish we had spoken differently, been more patient and understanding. Yet, the situation repeats itself and we argue that they are "pushing our buttons".'

These responses highlight some of the frustration that parents experience. We, as parents, love our children and want the best for them. We do not want to harm them, and sometimes we do realise that punishment hurts children and harms our relationship with them. Yet, we are convinced that this is how children learn.

Punishment has been around for centuries, and we are obviously conditioned to believe that it is both necessary and useful. Yet, recent advancements in neuroscience have given us a glimpse into the developing brain and how our actions impact a child. We have come to discover what children most need in order to thrive, and that punishment definitely harms a child's sense of wellbeing.

Many of us are aware of this and yet find it so hard to let go of punishment. What makes us continue to believe in it and hold on to it? Let us look at some of the beliefs parents have shared with us over the years:

Belief 1:

"When children do something wrong, unless they are made to feel bad, they will not improve."

Eight-year-old Rohan returns home with very low marks on his Math test.

Rohan's father's thoughts, and fears: *'If he keeps getting low marks, he will fail or lose interest in Maths.'*
'Even after working with him and sending him for tuition, why has he scored such low marks, does he have difficulty understanding? Is there something wrong with him?'
'If he keeps doing badly in school, how will he get into college or get a job?'
'Have I been too lenient or too strict?'

Father's reaction to Rohan: 'Why have you done so badly? How did your friends do? How are they scoring much better than you? Why can't you apply yourself more? You don't even try. The problem is you watch too much TV!'
Quite simply, none of us would like to be spoken to like this. Yet, we do it all the time with children. What is this father trying to achieve by this interaction? What beliefs does he hold, that make him think that this response will bring about a change in his son's behaviour?

This is what the parents in our groups say...

'Only if he is scolded will he know he has to do better.'
'He will realise that he is in the wrong.'
'When he recalls the correction and scolding that he got, he will work harder.'

But, what is actually happening to Rohan?

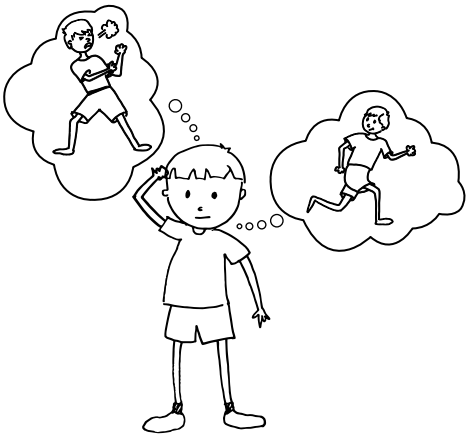
He is angry at being scolded like this. He is thinking, 'My dad does not like me.', 'I have tried so hard he just doesn't get it.' He is wondering, 'Next time, maybe it's better to cheat in the test just to get the marks.' And, he probably feels that his father doesn't understand that Math is difficult for him even if he does his best. Most importantly, Rohan is so flooded with hurt and sadness that he is not thinking about what he can do to improve his marks.

And this is what is happening inside Rohan's brain:

Research shows that the **higher brain in young children, which is responsible for rational thinking and logic, is not fully developed**. Children operate largely from their emotional brain. We, as adults, have the unique opportunity to help our children learn to manage their emotions and slowly develop connections with the thinking part of their brain.

When we scold them for not picking up their toys, or not getting ready on time, or get angry with them for not eating, children are thinking, '*Amma is angry with me. Appa is going to hit me. I am scared.*'

When children are sent off into their rooms for timeout, they feel abandoned and insecure; they think, '*My parents don't like me, they don't want to be around me.*'



When children feel threatened, their brain goes into **Fight or Flight** mode. That means they either want to escape from the situation or rebel against it. Children are definitely not thinking about what they did wrong. With their brain in alarm mode, and flooded with emotions, they are unable to think about how to behave differently, or even listen to the parents 'suggestions'.

When we are irritated and frustrated, we simply do not know any other way to react. In our anger, we want the child to feel miserable. But we have to recognise that making children feel bad does not help them learn at all!

On the other hand, if we respond in a calm manner, hold them gently, empathise with them, and explain to them why their actions or words are not beneficial, they feel safe and secure with us instead of feeling threatened. The alarm is turned off so to speak. Physically, in the brain, the happy hormone oxytocin is released. This chemical helps build stronger pathways in the higher brain, which helps in improving rational thinking, decision making, problem-solving, curiosity, and empathy. They are able to process what we are saying to them.

Based on Rohan's case, let us look at what children actually learn from scolding or punishment:

- Fear of the adult and fear of further shaming or punishment
- To resent authority: 'I cannot wait until I am old enough and don't have to listen to you.'
- To lie or hide to avoid the punishment
- Low self-worth: 'I am bad.'

Besides these effects on his personality, research has also shown us that getting such reactions persistently from parents and caregivers negatively affects the child's development. Our actions have a direct effect on the long-term chemical balance in our children's brains. Constant shaming and punishment heighten the level of the **stress hormone cortisol** in the body. It reinforces pathways which may make the child grow to be an adult who is defensive and hostile in as she sees the world as an unsafe place. On the other hand, when we create a warm and caring environment, they grow to be secure and confident.

'Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first, we have to make them feel worse? Think of the last time you felt humiliated or treated unfairly. Did you feel like cooperating or doing better.'

- Jane Nelsen, counsellor & author of Positive Discipline series

Even when I am angry and upset with my child, can I find ways to teach and guide him which will be helpful to his development.

Belief 2

**"The child must fear at least one parent.
You lose control over your child otherwise."**

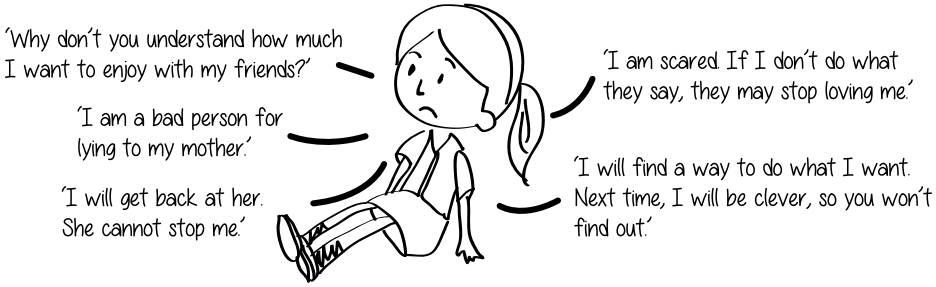
Thirteen-year-old Neha goes for a movie without telling her parents.

Neha's mother's thoughts and fears: 'What if something had happened to her, I wouldn't have even known?'
'I am so hurt, why did she lie about this and not talk to me?'
'How many times has she done this kind of thing without telling me?'
'I am so scared about the kind of person she is turning out to be.'

When her mother finds out, she reacts by screaming and scolding her,
'How could you lie to me? I cannot trust you now! You are not allowed to go anywhere from now on other than school and home!'

Shouting and other forms of punishment build fear. And along with fear, comes a host of other feelings such as anger, guilt, resentment, deceit, and mainly, disconnection between parent and child. Is punishment the best way to build discipline? It may ensure that the child complies out of fear of the parent, but will the child do what is best or what they need to do when the parent is not there? As parents, are we enabling our children to make the right decisions, for the right reasons when we resort to punishment? Fear may prevent the repetition of an act, but it also harms our relationship with our child. Is that a risk we are willing to take?

Let's look into what could be going on in Neha's mind.



Some children do things out of the fear of losing our love or approval. It's scary for a child to know that parents' love might be withdrawn if they do not

'behave' as expected. It makes them insecure. With fear, there is no room for a child to develop qualities of inner discipline and of taking responsibility and ownership.

Now, let's look at the same scenario with a different conclusion. Neha has chosen to go for a movie without telling her parents. This is her mother's response when she finds out:

Mother: 'Neha, I am upset about what happened. I am curious to know why you felt you couldn't tell me. If you really wanted to watch that movie, we could have discussed it. I worry about you being safe; I would feel comfortable if you could let me know where you are and with whom you are, Neha.'

We have to bear in mind that the Mother is not using an accusatory tone, but genuinely voicing her concern.

Don't you think Neha would have connected more with her mother when spoken to in this manner? Neha would have been able to share her point of view, and they could have worked out a solution where both their needs were met. Moreover, such a discussion would have helped Neha feel safe and willing to approach her mother in the future.

Maybe it's not fear but a deep connection that is required to guide our children in today's confusing world.

Belief 3

"'It is okay to hit children. Punishment will teach them!'"

When a child hits a child, we call it aggression.
When a child hits an adult, we call it hostility.
When an adult hits an adult, we call it assault.
When an adult hits a child, we call it discipline.
- Haim G. Ginott, *Child Psychologist and Parent Educator*

'I was hit as a child! Look at me. I turned out fine.' Does the line sound familiar? Have you ever given this reason to validate your actions towards your child?

It is understandable if you have, because it is a human thing to do. Sometimes

it is an involuntary quick reaction in an extremely stressful situation, when the parent's feelings are highly triggered and far from regulated. It also seems easier to raise our hands on children, because of the simple fact that they are literally physically smaller than us.

There would have been moments when your own parents had hit you, shouted at you, or punished you as a child. How did you feel then? Think about a specific situation and ask yourself—how did I really feel?

Usually, what tends to happen is that we focus on the fact that we might have learnt something from that punishment and therefore assume that punishments work.

The following is an exercise that will help you reflect on your own beliefs. Please pick up a pencil and fill out the answers.

When you made mistakes/did something wrong, what actions did your parents take? How did they express anger towards you?

_____

_____

As a child, how did your parents' actions make you feel?

_____

_____

When your child make mistakes/does something wrong, what actions do you take? How do you express anger towards him or her?

_____

_____

Is there anything you would like to change about the way you discipline your child today? Why? How?

_____

_____

Credit: This exercise has been taken from the Textbook for Parenting with Nonviolence by Ruth Beaglehole and Susan Goldberg, Echo Parenting and Education, Los Angeles.

That puts things into perspective, doesn't it? After doing this exercise, you may see that punishments might show results in the short term but do not necessarily help build a child into a secure, confident human being.

In our workshops, when parents reflected more deeply, they recalled the pain they felt after being punished—the humiliation and the loss of self-esteem. This made them rethink whether this was really what they wanted to do to their children. While some may have felt they were not affected by the hitting, others were! We asked the group if this was a risk parents were willing to take.

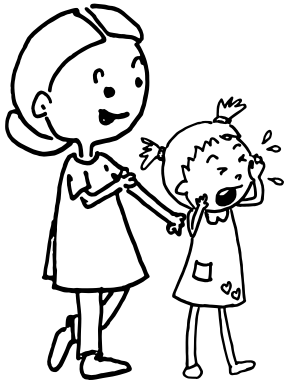
Isn't it extremely confusing for a child when the person they most trust, the person who is their source of safety, is hurting them or inflicting pain on them?

So, what does discipline without punishment look like?

Here are some real life examples shared by participants:

Rohit accidentally spills milk on the floor. His father comes into the room and says, '*What happened? Oh, it is all right, accidents happen. Okay, let's get a mop and clean up.*' Next time there was a spill, Rohit ran for the mop and cleaned up on his own. He now knows **how to make amends** and that it is okay to make mistakes.

Eight-year-old Sam is playing with his four-year-old brother. He doesn't like his brother grabbing the ball from him, so he gives him a whack. His mother observes this and says, '*Sam, hitting is not okay. In our home, we do not hit. I can see that you are angry with your brother. Can you tell him in words that you did not like it when he takes your ball without asking you?*' Sam learns how to **express himself constructively, without hitting**.



Three-year-old Preethi wants to take her friend's toy home with her and starts crying when her mother says no. Her mother—embarrassed as the friend and her mother are watching—holds her and says, '*I know you really like Anjali's toy. You wish you could take it home. I am sorry I cannot allow you to do that as it belongs to her.*' She holds and comforts Preethi until she calms down. Preethi's mother has **stated a rule** and **set a limit** without shaming her child.

Six-year-old Tara finds it hard to be ready on time for school, and every morning, her parents get stressed out yelling at her to get ready quickly. They sit down and do an exercise in problem-solving where the parents find out why it's hard for Tara to get ready on time and together, they

find solutions to make the mornings easier. They make a chart with the morning schedule laid out like this:

Now, mornings are so much easier.

Ten-year-old Suneel loves to spend time on his PlayStation. His teacher writes a note that his homework is often incomplete. He sits with his dad and makes an **evening timetable** with fixed timings for games and for homework. When he forgets and does not switch it off on time, his dad says, '*Ok Suneel, PlayStation time is over. I can see you are finding it hard to put it down, but we have to.*' The father sets **clear and firm limits**, which his child learns to respect.

Sarika's parents found out from a friend that Sarika was in a coffee shop with a boy when she was supposed to be attending tuitions. They were furious but decided that grounding or taking away privileges was not going to help. She would just hide more stuff from them. They felt they had to keep the **doors of communication open**. They spoke about it and asked her who this friend was. She said he was a classmate who was special to her and that they were seeing each other. For Sarika's family dating was not acceptable so her parents told her they would prefer if she called him over home. It was hard for them to feel comfortable about their daughter having a boyfriend, but they also realised that showing strong disapproval would only alienate her. They decided to give her freedom with some boundaries so she could be safe. She understood their point of view when expressed without blame or punishment and worked hard to win their trust back.

Having narrated these examples, we can assure you that parenting in this manner is not as simple as it sounds in the short version of the stories above! Each of these parents have worked hard to develop the skills to interact with their children in this way. They have realised that it is a journey to unlearn what one has seen all one's life and learn new ways of being with children. It is a challenge to set limits with love and empathy, to regulate and avoid going into autopilot, resorting to shouting and punishing the child. All of them try to see themselves as coaches. In each situation, the parents have put in the effort to understand their child's needs and their backstory and only then expressed their own feelings and concerns. This conscious interaction helps both the parent and the child to understand each other and also to develop a deep awareness of the reasons underlying their actions.

In each of the examples, the **parent focussed on setting limits with empathy for the child, teaching and guiding them through different situations. In the long run, when guided this way, children learn to manage their emotions, deal with stress and anxiety, and make balanced life choices**. The parent has coached the child with sensitivity, focusing on keeping alive the parent-child bond. This is the key to cooperation as children will respond willingly to those with whom they feel loved and connected.

Parents who let go of punishment say...

'It is almost a relief to know that I don't need to yell at my child and that there are so many other ways of guiding him.'

'Once I realised that punishment harms the child, I considered it as a road I simply could not take. I knew I had to find another way.'

'When I hit my child, I would end up feeling so miserable, but we thought it was necessary. Now, we are so much happier.'

Once we let go of our beliefs about punishment, we can find so many ways to build discipline in our children. This is inner discipline, which comes from children being responsible and doing the right things for the right reasons. Being connected to our children is the only way we can guide and keep them safe in today's world.

EXERCISE
Moving away from punishment

Behaviour that bothers me	How do i feel?	What do I want my child to do differently?	How do I coach my child? *
It bothers me when my child does not keep his books and games back in the right place everyday	I feel tired and frustrated. It has been such a long day, and I'm so exhausted already.	I would like him to put things back after reading or playing.	Arun, I feel frustrated to see the books on the floor. These books belong on the shelf. Would you like to do it now or before dinner?

*This step requires you to read the links given in our annexure and learn new tools for teaching children.

The second column is necessary for the parent to be in touch with his/her own feelings. Sometimes our anger and irritation may not be a result of the child's behaviour but because we have had a hard day or are tired. Even if the anger is triggered by the child's behaviour, it is important to recognise that unleashing that anger will not help the child learn the things you want them to learn. Hence, recognising your feelings and perhaps sharing with another adult or finding other ways to calm down—deep breaths, a cup of coffee, some music, a short walk—will help you to be in a more regulated frame of mind before handling your child.

Moving away from our conditioning and finding meaningful, positive ways to discipline our children is not easy. This booklet does not attempt to provide all the answers. It is only a starting point for us as parents to question our beliefs. Once we are convinced of wanting a different way of being and interacting with our children, there are many resources to help us.

"Your kids require you most of all to love them for who they are, not to spend your whole time trying to correct them.' - Bill Ayers

Please refer to the **Additional Section: Positive Discipline: Finding and learning alternative skills to punishment**

Log on to ***www.parentingmatters.in/resources/websites*** to find resources to learn more on this topic

Besides this, you can attend our workshops to learn hands-on practical skills to work with your children and build inner discipline and self-esteem.

ADDITIONAL SECTION

Positive Discipline: Learning alternative skills to punishment

WHAT IS POSITIVE DISCIPLINE?

Drawing from the work of various experts in this field, information from neuroscience and most importantly from our experience of working with parents for over 16 years, we have arrived at an understanding of positive discipline as explained below.

Positive discipline is a way of guiding and teaching our children keeping this mantra in mind:

"Honour the mind, body, heart and spirit of the child. Do no harm"

- RUTH BEAGLEHOLE,
Founder of the philosophy of Parenting with Nonviolence.

In positive discipline, the adult does not use **"power over"** the child to make the child comply. The adult focuses on supporting the child with love and empathy in learning social and life skills and taking responsibility for things they need to. They also, coach the child to manage feelings and express needs in a constructive manner. This is done by using **"power with"** methods which are respectful and collaborative. In positive discipline, we move away from all forms of punishment such as shouting, shaming, timeouts, consequences, threats, hitting withdrawing privileges or even withdrawing our love. We also move away from rewards.

As Alfie Kohn, renowned author of numerous books on parenting and education explains,

"Punishment and rewards are two sides of the same coin, and that coin does not buy very much"

"Few readers will be shocked by the news that extrinsic motivators are a poor substitute for genuine interest in what one is doing. What is likely to be far more surprising and disturbing is the further point that rewards, like punishments, actually undermine the intrinsic motivation that promotes optimal performance."

"S. Neill put it, promising a reward for an activity is "tantamount to declaring that the activity is not worth doing for its own sake." Thus, a parent who says to a child, "If you finish your math homework, you may watch an hour of TV" is teaching the child to think of math as something that isn't much fun."

- ALFIE KOHN

Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes

Also, when we withhold a reward, the child experiences it as a punishment. We are not building inner discipline but only using a different kind of power to get children to comply.

Principles of positive discipline:

Positive Discipline uses the latest research and information from science that tells us that from the moment children are born their brains are seeking safety and connection with their caregivers. **Children are willing to be guided by adults with whom they feel a close bond**. Methods of Positive Discipline ensure that all our actions to discipline strengthen rather than harm that bond. Hence the first principle of positive discipline is to build a deep CONNECTION with the child.

The second principle of positive discipline is **REGULATION**. As parents or caregivers, we don't want to say or do things that hurt or harm our children. But in the frustration of the moment, we just lose it. Positive discipline invites us to **PAUSE** when our children's actions make us uncomfortable, and first regulate our emotions. **Breathe!!** This pause helps us to respond in ways that truly contribute to the child's growth and development

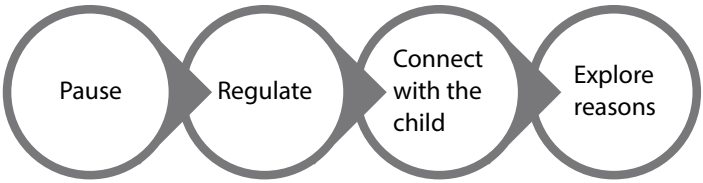
The third principle we keep in mind when faced with a behaviour which we are concerned about, is to always **EXPLORE THE REASON BEHIND THE BEHAVIOUR** so that we can help the child.

According to Ross Greene, Author of "Raising Human Beings"

"Children do well if they can. If they can't, we adults need to figure out what's getting in the way so we can help".

They are not doing things to trouble or manipulate us. They are simply trying to meet their own needs.

Building on the above three principles, Positive Discipline is a journey in which we make a conscious choice of honouring the child. We invest in learning the tools and skills needed to actively guide and teach children, respectfully. The adult uses empathy, connects with the child's feelings, and ensures that the child feels safe, physically and emotionally.



A few examples of what this looks like:

Your child is crying in public. She is very upset that you are not buying her a toy she wants.

Pause: You remember to not react on autopilot but take a pause before responding.

Regulate: You are thinking, (inner conversation) This is so embarrassing. Everyone is looking at us. She is crying so loudly, and I am sure everyone thinks I am a bad parent. Why doesn't she realise that I cannot buy her everything she wants? I need to calm down. Let me drink a sip of water and take a few deep breaths. I want to respond in a way that helps both of us. I need to connect with her, figure out what is going on.

Connect with the child: I can see you are very upset that I did not buy you that toy. You really wanted it, isn't it?

Explore the reason: I know that she has got over-excited being in the shop surrounded by so many toys. Plus, she is very tired and cranky as her routine has been disrupted. She needs her nap. I just have to help her calm down by holding her.

Your teenager is constantly on the phone when you are trying to talk and interact, find out about her day, even at the dinner table.

Pause: You remember to not react on autopilot, take a pause before responding.

Regulate: You are thinking (inner conversation) This is so annoying. Every time I am trying to talk, she is so distracted by that phone. What is so important on that phone that she cannot put it down for two minutes, she is addicted to it! I need to calm down, otherwise, I am going to yell again. Let me take a few breaths here before I talk to her.

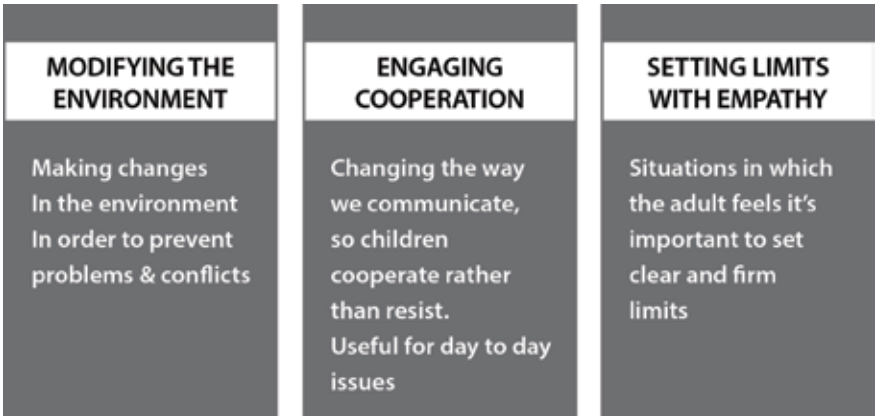
Connect with the child: Hey, looks like you are really busy chatting with your friends.

Explore the reason: She is a teenager and being a part of the peer group is a huge developmental need now. She wants to always be sure she knows what is happening so that she doesn't feel left out. This is how children communicate these days.

Having laid the foundation for the adult to now work with the child in a "power with" approach, we can now figure out what life skills the child needs to learn and how to teach them. Some options- By asking the child to make a "wish list" of toys she wants so that when the time comes to buy, she can choose from that list. By agreeing on rules about when she can use the phone. By setting limits on phone time. There are many options and many tools which could help us.

Tools for positive discipline:

Different situations require different approaches. Your approach may also vary according to the nature of your child and the family environment. There are no easy answers. Sometimes the child is doing something unsafe - like touching a plug point - which requires immediate action. Sometimes your child's actions may be hurting or harming someone else, and you need to step in promptly and set a limit. There may also be other day-to-day situations which are not quite so serious, for which you want your child's cooperation. There may be persistent problems like getting ready on time in the morning or eating what is cooked for them, for which you have tried many things, and nothing seems to work. We are outlining three broad approaches (each have a number of tools) which have been helpful to all the parents we have worked with. We have shared their real-life stories here while changing names.



1. Modifying the Environment

It is a nonverbal action taken by the parent to change the environment so that both the child's and the adult's needs are met without conflict.

When to use: Sometimes the child is not feeling equipped to handle the emotions rising in him or meet the expectations or tasks put before him. There can be too many distractions and the child is confused and frustrated. We can support the child and avoid problems by making simple changes in the environment

Tools:

Adding to the environment
Reducing things in the environment
Changing the environment
(Use the acronym ARC to help you remember)

Stories:

When Vineet was scribbling on the wall, his mother understood that his need was to explore and to express himself. So, she **added** into his environment a blackboard to write on and chart papers to scribble on. She firmly said, "The blackboard and charts are for writing, not the walls".

Shanaz's child was spending too much time on the screen. She was worried about this. So, what did Shanaz do?
She **added** board games, some hands-on toys, physical activities and friends. She added herself! Spending time playing with her child and having conversations.
She **reduced** the number of screens and the viewing time whether mobile, TV or computers. She consciously kept her phone away for certain hours in a day so that she could be a role model.
She **changed** the environment by going on outings, taking her child to the park and also keeping books for her to read.

More examples of modifying the environment -

- Keeping a stool for the child to reach the basin and wash their hands
- Taking colouring books or toys to places where your child will be bored e.g. a waiting room in a doctor's clinic, a restaurant
- Giving the child an alarm clock so they can get up by themselves
- Reducing noise and lights in the home after eight p.m. so that the child calms down and goes to sleep

- Moving the TV away from the central part of the home
- Eating meals together so no one eats in front of the TV
- Not keeping junk food in the home. Only healthy snacks
- Keeping dangerous items out of the reach of toddlers
- Taking a snack when you go to pick up the child from school as they are hungry
- Creating a space for the child to play where there are no breakable items

Thus, we can reduce the number of 'No's that we may feel the need to say during the day. Instead of 'No TV! No junk food! No cricket in the house!', we can change the environment so that the child is able to act in ways that are comfortable to both adult and child. We can offer an alternative activity which is acceptable to both. This is applicable even to teenagers where we can modify the environment to give them a quiet place to study, or a place to keep their clothes in a systematic way.

(*This concept is from the book - Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children- By Dr. Thomas Gordon*)

2. Engaging the Child's Cooperation

What makes children 'switch off'? What makes them resist doing what they are asked to do? What makes them unwilling to cooperate?" It is the way we communicate.

"Anita, Anita, Anitaaaa... How many times do I have to call you before you answer?

Santosh…. That's the tenth time I have asked you to change your uniform. You are so stubborn; you just don't listen!

Nitu, you better come to eat dinner right now, else you will get a tight slap!

Tools for engaging cooperation show different ways to communicate with children respectfully. They are based on the principle of communicating our needs or expectations and trusting the child to respond to them, instead of demanding obedience.

When to use: These tools are useful for the things we want our children to do on a day-to-day basis. Tasks like putting things back in place, washing hands before eating, getting ready on time in the morning and innumerable other things. These are things for which we are constantly reminding them because they are so caught up with their own work and play that they often do not respond.

Tools:

- Give information
- State the rule
- Give choices
- Express your feelings
- Write a note
- Say it in a word

Stories:

After playing with his toys, Arun would leave them on the floor when they needed to be put back in the basket. Children are so absorbed in their own world that they do not pay attention to the things around them. Clearing up is not a priority when there are many other exciting things to do. So, what did his mother say? "Toys belong in the basket." (**Give information**), or just (**Say it in a word**) - "Toys!'. These simple reminders worked like magic since Arun did not feel commanded and knew that he was being trusted, and hence did not mind doing what was asked.

Sonia found her daughter forgetting to bring home the books needed for homework. Not wanting to nag or label her child as careless, she said to her, "I am frustrated and find it hard to help you with your homework when you do not have the required book." (**Express your feelings**). She asked her daughter if putting a reminder note on the bag would help. "Books for homework" was pinned inside her bag. (**Write a note**). Without feeling blamed, her daughter cheerfully began to be more mindful of bringing home the required book.

Ramesh had a lot of Hindi homework. To help him plan his time, his dad asked him to choose, "Would you like to start it now or after a fifteen-minute break? You could even break the work into smaller tasks. You decide." (**Give choices**)

John was always struggling to get his children to wash their hands and come to eat on time. They would keep asking to eat in front of the TV. Simple rules and some information helped change the situation. "We all wash hands before eating. We all eat together as a family." (**State the rule**). "Eating in front of the TV is not healthy." (**Give information**)

A parent shared how stating the rule helped her and her children move away from hitting, "*I know that there have been times when I have been so angry that I have hit you. I want you to know that what I did was not right. I will try my best not to do it again. At the same time, I also want you not to hit each other. From today, let's make this a rule for all of us.*"

Our participants shared these rules which their children made for them!! "*Mummy and Daddy must not talk on the phone from 7 pm - 9 pm! No hitting allowed in this house.*" They wrote it on a big piece of paper and displayed it for all to see.

More examples:

- Shoes belong on the rack/ Biscuits will get soft if the box is not closed (**give information**)
- Water bottles need to be filled before going to school breakfast / We speak respectfully to elders/ We don't use the phone during mealtimes (**state the rule**)
- I am scared that you will get hurt when you cross the road without looking/I am worried about your test / I get stressed when we are late for the school bus (**express your feelings**)
- Do you want to drink from the red or the blue cup? Do you want to wear this dress or that one? Do you want to bathe now or later? (**Give choices**)

By communicating in this manner, the child sees a purpose in what he is being asked to do. He realises that the adult now trusts him to take ownership of tasks concerning him, and so, he will respond accordingly. Such non-blaming statements help the child develop a sense of responsibility over time. The child develops the ability to discern, consider, evaluate and make choices for himself as he grows up. This builds the child's independent thinking and the child feels a sense of being in control.

(These tools are from the book "How to talk so kids will listen and How to listen so kids will talk" By Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish)

3. Setting Limits with Empathy

There are situations in which the adult needs to set clear and firm limits to behaviour. These limits are set without punishment, lectures or harshness.

When to use: Sometimes, despite giving information, or stating expectations and rules, or giving choices, the problem does not get addressed.

- We may need to set limits as it affects the child's health and wellbeing. The child may still be struggling to get ready in time for school, or complete homework or stop fighting with her sibling. They may not be able to get to bed on time or brush their teeth. They may be finding it hard to put off the phone or the TV.
- Sometimes we need the child to take certain responsibilities such as putting away their toys or completing their studies.

- There are other times when the child's behaviour requires immediate intervention from an adult. It may be a safety issue where the child may be trying to run onto the road, or the child may be causing hurt or harm to someone else. Maybe grabbing from another child, hitting, making noise and disturbing others, destroying property etc.
- There may be some cultural or family values for which you may choose to set limits such as eating together as a family or going to a place of worship.

Whatever the situation it is important when setting a limit for the adult to remain curious about what is causing the behaviour or what the child is needing.

Limits have to be set with empathy. That means understanding the child's needs and feelings and communicating respectfully while setting limits. The parent needs to provide support so that the child eventually learns to set limits for herself. Now even though the parent is respectful when setting limits, the child may not like the limit being imposed and hence may cry or protest. At that point, it helps to stay on track by accepting their frustration and continuing to connect with the child's feelings.

Tools:

- Guiding
- Taking action
- Problem solving

Examples:

After repeated reminders, if the child does not take responsibility to do some routine activities, sometimes it helps, especially with younger children, to gently physically **guide** them. Like for brushing teeth, the parent can gently guide the child by putting a loving hand on the small of the back and take the child to the bathroom. Then wait till child brushes. Most importantly, do not pull the child's arm. With older children - we could link our arms with theirs and gently tug them saying empathetically, "*Looks like you are so engrossed in doing the puzzle / reading the book*", and to say firmly, "*It is time for a bath/dinner*". Beena was playing in the park digging in the sand with some other children. She was experimenting by throwing sand. Her father said, "*Beena I am worried about the sand getting into other children's eyes. I cannot allow you to throw sand*." Beena continued to think it's a lot of fun and kept throwing. Her father then picked her up gently and took her to another part of the park. **Taking action**, he said, "*Beena I can see you are enjoying throwing sand. It's OK to throw sand here*." Beena was upset at being separated from her friends. Her father said, "*When you feel ready to play near them without throwing sand*

we can go back". He conveyed trust that she could manage to play without throwing sand when she felt ready.

While Raju and Vikram were playing, they started fighting over a toy. They were getting very rough and were not inclined to listen to elders. The parents realized that all they could do was **take action**. Each picked up one child and said '*I am sorry. There seems to be no way of working this out. You two need a break from each other.*" Each parent took one of the children to a different room to calm him down. Each taught the child to take deep breaths and regulate themselves. After a while, the parents brought the children together to help them **problem solve**.
Mother says, '*We see two very angry children who are finding it hard to find a solution. You know the rule in our house- No hurting allowed. We have one toy and both of you want it. What can we do?*"
Raju says, "*I want it first. Then I will give it to Vikram.*"
Vikram suggests, "*We can play together, first 5 mins for me and next 5 minutes for you.*"
Father concludes, "*I see you can solve the problem and have a win-win solution. We are going to be in the next room. Call when you need us.*"

Remember to keep an open mind as children at any age often come up with surprising solutions. For instance, 3 year old Diya would forget to close her bottle cap tightly and brought a wet school bag home every day. Her mother stated the problem and asked the child if she could think of a solution. Diya drew a bottle on a piece of paper and asked her mother to stick it onto the bag as a reminder to tighten it. And the solution worked well!

Problem solving when done with a lot of listening also helps us get to the root cause of the problem. We move away from just trying to do a quick fix.

More examples:

Guiding children gently to do things in the morning when they are getting late/ Guiding them out of the play area or beach after playtime, when it's time to go home.

Taking action - Sheela wanted yet another chocolate. Amma put the box away and took Sheela on to her lap and said, "*I can see how much you want another chocolate. We have had enough chocolates for now.*"

Shreedhar is very angry and hitting his sibling/ parent - Appa holds his hands gently and says, "*I cannot allow you to hit. looks like you are upset. Let me help you calm down. Shall we both take deep breaths?*"

Raju was throwing his toys. His mother gently stopped him from throwing and guided him to another room and asked, "*Wondering why you are throwing your toys. Is something bothering you? Toys are not for throwing.*"

When Rohit's parents found him getting totally addicted to video games, they decided that only a complete break would help him stop wanting to play all the time. They had a discussion with him, told him their concerns and that since all schedules and problem solving had not worked, they would be taking away the video games. They spoke to him with a lot of love and empathy saying they understood his struggle and hence had to help him. They started doing many activities with him such as playing board games and going for walks together. They promised him that when he had got over this phase and felt he could manage his gaming time better, they would give the video game back to him with regulations.

Problem solving - Can be used to brainstorm for ideas on getting to school on time, making sure homework is done, working out a schedule for TV time/ Video games/ Phones, figuring out when, where and how long to go out with friends. (For steps for problem solving read "How to talk so kids will listen and How to listen so kids will talk" By Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish)

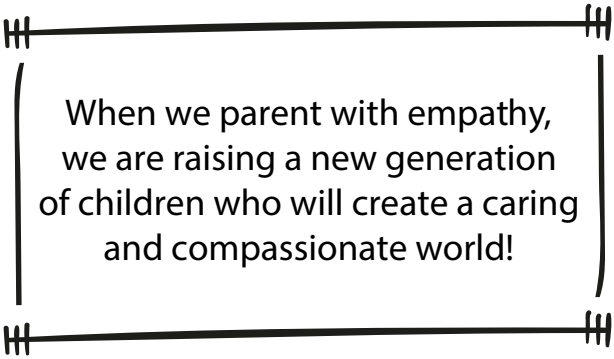
While using these tools the table below can help you gain greater clarity on the difference between punishment and positive discipline:

	PUNISHMENT	POSITIVE DISCIPLINE
Approach	**Harms** the body, mind heart and spirit of the child	**Honours** the body, mind, heart and spirit of the child
Focus	Child must suffer for **past** behaviour. Change behaviour through **causing pain and rejection**	Teaching desirable **future** behaviour. Change behaviour **with love and guidance**
Aim	Aims to **stop behaviour** without finding out the reason for the behaviour	Aims to explore the **underlying cause of** the behaviour. What is the child's need?
Power dynamic & Parent-Child Relationship	Uses **power over** to make the child comply. Child feels hurt and misunderstood. Loss of trust in the parent. Parents also suffer by losing the connection they wish for	Uses **power with** to work with the child. Limits are set respectfully. Child feels protected and loved. Parent-child connection is strengthened
Impact on child's brain architecture	Triggers the **emotional brain to fear a consequence**. Pathways to lower brain (Alarm Centre) are strengthened. Grows to view the world as an unsafe place. May become rebellious or submissive.	Able to access the **thinking brain to learn new behaviour**. Pathways to higher brain (Thinking Brain) are strengthened. Grows to view the world as a safe place. Sets a solid foundation to regulate and problem solve in the future.
Long term effects and sense of self	May work in the **short term**. Relies on external force to do the right thing. Child begins to doubt himself. May view himself as a **bad person**.	Helps children learn to control their own behaviour in the **long run**. Develops inner discipline. Child develops **confidence and high self-esteem**.
Impact on Society	Punishment perpetuates a cycle of **violence**.	Positive Discipline builds a caring and compassionate society

Disciplining with punishment or reward is what we are most familiar with and making a shift from this, requires a lot of unlearning on our part as parents or caregivers. When we move from "power over" to "power with ", we are not just raising children who are self-disciplined and responsible, we are also building a new world.

Robin Grille the author of "Parenting for a peaceful world" says,
"A society's destiny rests on how it treats its children."

He also says
'The human brain and heart that are met primarily with empathy in the critical early years cannot and will not grow to choose a violent or selfish life.'



Parenting Matters is a cause-driven organisation that uses not-for-profit principles to focus on parenting for a better world. We have been working with parents, teachers and caregivers since 2004 to strengthen their parenting skills, reduce the stress they face, and help them enjoy the journey of parenting. Our mission is to empower parents and others who care for children with knowledge and skills to aid them in nurturing their child's full potential.

We believe that parents who are empowered with practical tools and the science of parenting can forge a deeper connection with their children. They can create nurturing environments that help children grow up to be self-disciplined and compassionate individuals.
Raising children is one of the most important tasks in the world. Our children become the world we live in. Yet, in today's complex and constantly changing world, parents do not always have the support and information they need to raise their children in the best possible manner.

We see our work as part of a larger movement to ensure that justice is done to every child as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states that governments the world over, and everyone in society must do all they can to protect children from unfair, unjust and harmful treatment. We believe it is important to realise that this does not apply only to children who are in the most vulnerable circumstances but to every child. We strive to bring awareness to how we adults can be sensitive and respect the rights of all children

We are a team of ten certified parent educators (certified under Ruth Beaglehole, founder of the philosophy of Parenting with Nonviolence and Echo Parenting and Education, Los Angeles, USA). We work with parents - from those with babies to those with teenagers and even adult children - through workshops and programs that we have designed over the years, drawing from the experiences and struggles that parents from a variety of backgrounds and family settings have shared with us.

Our Parenting Resource Centre in Chennai provides parents with a range of resources - workshops, talks, discussion groups, movie screenings, book readings, a library of parenting books, videos and books to help children with specific issues, individual parent coaching and more. We also conduct our workshops and talks in business organisations, schools and neighbourhoods and also have online programmes.

To know more about our work visit us at:
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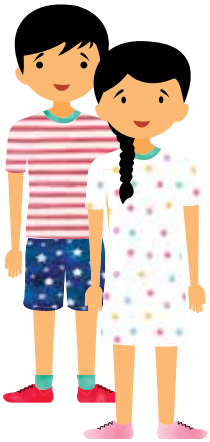

From whom do we learn how to parent?

Our parents? Our family? Our culture? Peers? Books? The Internet? What drives the decisions we make regarding our children? Are they based on the science of what really helps children thrive, or simply on our own conditioning?

Parenting Matters has explored these questions over many years of working with parents and has compiled the learning in this series of booklets.

These booklets highlight key parenting beliefs and the challenges most of us face in our cultural context. They aim at helping parents reflect and learn from the latest research and science of parenting, to help them make choices that will nurture their children's full potential.

This booklet looks at the broad range of actions that could be defined as punishment—from threats and scolding to the withdrawal of privileges, and time outs, or even hitting (which we euphemistically call spanking). Do these tactics help children learn responsibility and life skills? Do they build in them the qualities we wish them to have? What happens in a child's brain when they are punished?

We have also included a section on exploring Positive discipline along with practical tools.

Written by the team of Parent Educators at Parenting Matters, who are as passionate about their own parenting as they are about supporting other parents, this series reflects the various moments of struggle, joy, and connection that each of us experience during the roller coaster ride that is parenting. Grounded in science and research and drawing from real experiences, this book endeavours to understand parenting in the Indian context.

Parenting MATTERS