

CCDC – UNESCO Teleconference #3:

Summary Report POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ALTERNATIVES TO CORPORAL PUNISHMENT Held Thursday 22 September, 2011

This 3-hour teleconference was attended by 97 colleagues in 11 countries, including Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago.

Presentations by two guest presenters were well received:

1. Dr. Helen Henningham, Lecturer in Child Development at the University of the West Indies, Mona. Her research focuses on early interventions for children who are at risk for learning and behaviour problems. Her work involves interventions in the community, school and primary health care settings and involves working with parents, practitioners and volunteers to promote children's development.

Dr. Henningham gave a brief overview of the difficulties faced by children with behaviour problems (e.g. children who frequently display aggressive, disruptive, inattentive and/or overactive behaviours) as they enter school. Participants discussed how social, emotional and behaviour problems in early childhood can place young children on a negative developmental pathway such that these behaviour difficulties persist through later childhood and adolescence. They also discussed how schools can cater to the developmental needs of these children and place them on a more positive developmental path.

Participants were introduced to The Incredible Years (IY) Teacher Training Programme which is used to train teachers in strategies to promote children's positive academic and social behaviours and which we have piloted and tailored for the Jamaican basic school context. They discussed how to build positive relationships with children, partnering with parents, preventing behaviour problems through the use of developmentally appropriate rules and routines, promoting positive behaviour with attention, encouragement, praise and incentives, decreasing inappropriate behaviour using a discipline hierarchy and teaching social and emotional skills in the classroom.

Dr. Henningham shared practical experiences of the IY teacher training programme by conducting a selection of short activities from the training programme. This involved watching video vignettes, group discussion, brainstorming exercises and practice activities based on each video.

Participants were:

- Sensitized to the importance of creating a positive emotional climate and using effective behaviour management strategies in early childhood institutions

- Informed of the various components of behaviour management and the importance of each component
 - Learned some key principles and explored skills and techniques used to prevent behavior problems in the classroom
2. Hermione Baptiste, who began teaching almost 30 years ago, is a Curriculum Development Officer (HFLE), in Grenada’s Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development.

Mrs. Baptiste’s presentation follows:

Caring for young children is one of the most challenging tasks an adult will ever face. No matter how much you love your child, there will be moments filled with frustration, anger, and even desperation. Over the years, many caregivers, just like you, have come to use more positive methods of teaching and nurturing to raise or prepare children to achieve competence, self-control, self-direction, to be caring for others, responsible, respectful, and resourceful.

Why do children behave? What do we mean when we say “BEHAVE” to a child? Do they understand “BEHAVE” when told to them?

In Grenada, for example, it is popular for a care-giver to say “behave” to the child. But, this does not tell the child what he/she should do or not do! As adults (parent/caregiver/teacher) when we discipline the child, we need to be clear. On the other hand, why do children misbehave? Once you understand why they misbehave, it is easier to know what to do about it or how to discipline children using positive and effective techniques. Children react to approval, encouragement and kind words the way a flower reacts to the sun. They turn to the source of warmth, then bloom and blossom beautifully

Reasons for discipline

It is a fact that young children by their very own nature, during the period of early childhood development, are curious, adventurous and can quickly get bored. They will even cooperate better if their care-giver is clear and consistent. Thus, Children need discipline in order to understand their limits, learn self control and know when to stop. Since children don't instinctively know all the rules, it is up to care-givers to inform them; letting them know up-front, what the consequences of unacceptable behaviors are, so that when we must enforce the rules with positive discipline, they won't be surprised.

Developmental Approach to Discipline - Age Appropriateness (livestrong.com)

Infants (birth – 1)

The earliest discipline strategy is **passive** and occurs as infants and their caregivers gradually develop a mutually satisfactory schedule of feeding, sleeping, and awakening.

Infants need to explore and the way they explore is through their senses. They need to see, feel, taste, hear and smell the world around them, so they need to be given safe opportunities to discover their world. They can also be over-stimulated by too much noise, colour or action. Some quiet time in a rocking chair with the care-giver provides a welcome relief. Infants love to make messes, throw food, bang cups, and may even “explore” others by biting, pinching or pulling their hair. It is typical too, for infants to experience separation or stranger anxiety, so an infant will likely need to spend a lot of time in close contact with the parent.

Biologic rhythms tend to become more regular and adapt to family routines. Signals of discomfort, such as crying and thrashing, are modified as infants acquire memories of how their distress has been relieved and learn new strategies to focus attention on their emerging needs.

The main parental discipline for infants is to provide generally **structured daily routines** but also **to learn to recognize and respond flexibly to the infant's needs**.

Toddlers 1 – 2

While disciplining a child begins at birth, it's never too late to start disciplining your child. Developing a positive relationship with their child results from positive reinforcement, redirection, modeling and setting realistic expectations for the child's age or ability level.

As infants become more mobile and initiate more contact with the environment, parents must **impose limitations and structure to create safe spaces** for them to explore and play. They have learned many new skills such as walking; climbing and running but have no understanding of consequences.

Toddlers are made to move, and move they do! They are active and need an environment and routines that support their active, busy nature. They are experiencing a greater range of feelings but do not yet have the language to express those feelings. Sharing and taking turns are not concepts that come easily to toddlers. They have no sense of time – to them five minutes may seem like a lifetime. They are developing a sense of independence, wanting to do things themselves, even before they have all the necessary skills. Once they have a new skill they will want to repeat it again and again and again.

Equally important, parents must **provide safe opportunities** for them to practice these skills; **protect them from potential hazards** (e.g., by installing safety covers on electric outlets and by removing dangerous objects from their reach) and **introduce activities that distract their children from potential hazards**. Such proactive behaviors are central to discipline for toddlers. Communicating verbally (a firm no) helps prepare the infant for later use of reasoning, but parents should not expect reasoning, verbal commands, or reprimands to manage the behavior of infants or toddlers.

Clearly, a form of discipline that works for a 2-year-old (“trouble twos”) won't work for a teenager; as children grow and develop, altering disciplinary measures to suit their age is fundamental. Until a child is 2, the best approach is to eliminate as many temptations as possible (Kids Health Website). As the child crawls toward something the care-giver

can't remove, such as a TV or stereo, say, "No" in a calm manner and distract him/her with a more acceptable object or remove him/her from the area. Toddlers, preschoolers and early elementary age children generally respond well to timeouts.

Pre-school (3 – 5)

Understanding your preschooler's development and filling your toolbox with positive discipline parenting tools will go a long way toward resolving conflicts with your young child. It also helps to know that temperament, birth order, brain development, physical and intellectual abilities, and skill acquisition underlie much of your child's behavior in these early years. Still, even the most delightful preschooler isn't perfect, and misbehavior can be frustrating.

Carla is playing happily on the floor while her mom pays the bills. The phone rings, Carla's mom answers—and suddenly Carla is glued to her mother's leg, whining for juice. No amount of whispered urging will make Carla return to her play. Why?

OR

Albert knows that brushing his teeth is part of his bedtime routine. He also knows that this procedure is extremely important to his father. When Albert's dad approaches with a loaded brush, Albert folds his arms, furrows his brow, and clamps his mouth tightly shut. Albert's dad threatens, pleads, and brushes Albert's lips, but Albert keeps his mouth tightly closed. Why?

Are these children misbehaving? Well, it certainly seems so. Most parents have experienced moments like these and have struggled to find a solution. As stated before, you can help your child choose different behavior, but you must understand why your child is behaving this way, and what he is trying to accomplish with his behavior.

Behavior actually is a coded message that reveals a child's underlying beliefs about himself and about life. When your child misbehaves, he is telling you in the only way he knows that (at least for the moment) he is feeling discouraged, or that he doesn't belong. As you learn to decipher the code, you will find that your responses (and eventually, your child's behavior) will change.

There is a parable that urges us to walk a mile in someone else's shoes before we condemn or criticize his actions. When you can get into your child's world (and walk in his small shoes), his behavior may begin to make sense.

Thus, as children grow older and interact with wider, more complex physical and social environments, the adults who care for them must develop increasingly creative strategies to protect them and teach them orderly and desirable patterns of behavior. As a result of consistent structure and teaching (discipline), children integrate the attitudes and expectations of their caregivers into their behavior. Preschoolers begin to develop an understanding of rules, and their behavior is guided by these rules and by the consequences associated with them.

They are becoming more interested in pleasing those around but often forget what the rules are. Their curiosity often leads them to ask everyone questions about everything. Time is a difficult concept for them but they do not like to be hurried, wait for snack nor their turn (they are testing their assertiveness muscles and tend to be bossy).

Middle Childhood (6 – 8)

Older children have a better idea of what is acceptable and what is not. They should know the consequences of unacceptable behavior, which might be curfews and removal of privileges. Rewarding good behavior can help prevent many slip-ups. Discipline is not designed to hold children back from having some say over their lives. It teaches children freedom without infringing on the freedom of others.

Children need to be taught discipline in the right way without denying them the freedom to evolve on their individual paths. Above all, they need support and unconditional love to help them develop into happy and confident human beings.

As children become school age, rules become internalized and are accompanied by an increasing sense of responsibility and self-control. They experience new challenges fitting into the larger/less-sheltered work of the school yard. They experience many fears and uncertainties that they can't understand or express. These fears show themselves as frustration and anger. They may sometimes feel that they are old enough to make their own decisions. They are influenced by their peers and may bring home all kinds of new and different behavior challenges. They may swear, tease, name call and tattle others.

Responsibility for behavior is transferred gradually from the care-giving adult to the child, and is especially noticeable during the transition to adolescence. Thus, parents must be prepared to modify their discipline approach over time, using different strategies as the child develops greater independence and capacity for self-regulation and responsibility.

For example:

Connect through Conversation

- Communication is the key to effective discipline and needs to go both ways with both adult and child feeling understood; provide regular positive attention, sometimes called special time; listen carefully to children and help them learn to use words to express their feelings; providing children with opportunities to make choices whenever appropriate options exist and then helping them learn to evaluate the potential consequences of their choice; Affirm that you appreciate the child's frustrations, by saying things like, "I know cleaning up seems boring, but we'll both be happier in a clean room," or, "I want you to read your book even though it's hard." Make eye contact with the child to show empathy and respect.

Be Proactive

- Adults can prevent a great deal of misbehavior by proactively interacting with their children. Ideas for proactive discipline include: discovering the cause of misbehavior, using discipline to educate, rewarding self discipline and modeling anger management. Reinforcing emerging desirable behaviors with frequent praise and ignoring trivial misdeeds; modeling orderly, predictable behavior, and

collaborative conflict resolution strategies. These proactive measures help children learn to regulate their own actions consistently

Demonstrate Love and Affection

- Disciplinarians need to connect good nurturing and affection to the disciplinary process. According to psychologist, Jan Jewett, children respond best when adults use "techniques that are authoritative rather than authoritarian and that offer the child free expression of affection....". Since children often misbehave because they feel disconnected from others, it's important that the disciplinary process affirm their value as members of the group.

Separate Stress from Anger

- Parents and educators often attribute misbehavior to children without fully assessing the child's actions in context. Adults must separate their own stress and anxiety from the child's misbehavior. Before taking disciplinary action, mentally check in with yourself to ensure you are not overreacting. Childhood development expert, Janet A. Clark, suggests asking yourself questions like, "Did the child truly know what she did was wrong?" as part of this mental check-in process.

The process of discipline can be more challenging with “gifted” or “special needs” children (those who have developmental disabilities /special need) who may require additional or more intense strategies to manage their behavior. For example: consistency, structure, routine and especially for the autistic child, use of clear and proper language during communication with them.

Discipline - Gender Considerations

In the Caribbean, the way we raise boys and girls can be captured in the saying “tie the heifer, loose the bull” (a saying from Guyana) or “Tie you hen me cock let go” (a saying from Grenada), which means that we are more protective of girls and monitor them closely but allow and encourage boys to be more independent and free in their movement. This comes out in the way that we expect boys to react to discipline as compared with girls.

The manner of discipline for the boy is different to the girl. For example:

- **Beating** - use of a belt for the girl but stick for the boy
- **Boys reaction** to the beatings is expected to be different to the reactions of the girls (boys are not expected to cry – if at all – during the beatings because it is a sign of weakness and being too soft)
- **Boys are not expected to be fearful** of beatings because showing fear is a sign of weakness and make them vulnerable to others
- **The number of lashes** applied/given being more for the boys than the girls.
- **Boys are expected to get over beatings very quickly.** Expressing any hurt after the event is being “petty” and “girl-like”

In contrast to the boys, girls are perceived to be of the weaker sex needing more protection:

- Girls receive less beatings
- Girls are expected to cry, scream and show other emotions during beatings because they are perceived as being more emotional
- Girls are more likely to be comforted after the beatings

Even the type of toys allowed for boys (car, gun) are different to the girls (dolls, dining sets) creating concepts of gender disparity even unto adulthood.

Thus, this method of disciplining or socializing boys has resulted in **poor self discipline**, **poor education** and **turning to violence and sexual prowess** (superior/exceptional ability or skill) to boost their self esteem.

In girls, these differences may teach them that **emotional reactions** or **making others feel guilty** can get them what they want.

Corporal Punishment

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the most effective and positive parenting, respects the child's rights and teaches the rules without using physical force.

Corporal Punishment, a painful and intentionally inflicted (typically, by striking a child) physical penalty administered by a person in authority for disciplinary purposes is often used. Corporal punishment can occur anywhere in the form of whippings, beatings, paddlings, and flogging which indeed are specific forms of corporal punishment used (Cohen, 1984). Because of this range in the form and severity of punishment, its use as a discipline strategy is controversial and basically discouraged.

Although significant concerns have been raised about the negative effects of physical punishment and its potential escalation into abuse, it remains one of the most commonly used strategies to reduce undesired behaviors, here in Grenada and the rest of the Caribbean.

Many rights-based activists dictates zero-tolerance for corporal punishment as well as accumulated research supports the theory that corporal punishment is an ineffective discipline strategy with children of all ages and, furthermore, that it is often dangerous. Corporal punishment most often produces in its victims: anger, resentment, and low self-esteem. It teaches violence and revenge as solutions to problems, and perpetuates itself, as children imitate what they see adults doing. Studies have also shown that disciplinary techniques which rely on corporal punishment and psychological aggression impact negatively on child development.

In Grenada, caregivers often say, “We were spanked and turned out just fine, didn’t we? While many adults experienced bodily punishment as children and turned out okay, Dr.

Jane Nelsen, author of [*Positive Discipline*](#), would like parents to remember that there is something inherently wrong with the notion that making someone feel bad will help them do good. How do any of us respond when a boss or partner uses threats, belittlement, and insults to get us to perform? Do we want to do better or do we want to get even?

When discipline is too punitive, children tend to respond with revenge, resentment, and resistance. When discipline is respectful, children have the opportunity to learn the social skills they actually need to be successful. Punishment focuses on paying for past behavior, but does not necessarily teach a child how to behave in a similar situation in the future. Positive discipline teaches skills needed for a lifetime of learning.

Article 19 of the Convention specifies that State Parties (i.e., governments that ratify the Convention) must take appropriate measures to protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation."

Although Grenada does not have any legislation or policy that bans corporal punishment, Grenada has ratified the convention on the rights of the child. The Education Act narrows the possibility of teachers using corporal punishment and has clearly stated that only the Principal or person in charge of the school should deliver corporal punishment to the child.

Alternatives to Corporal Punishment are:

- 1) Setting firm, consistent, age-appropriate, and acceptable limits. For example, although a 5-year-old child may be able to resist the urge to touch things, it is not reasonable to expect that a 2-year-old will be able to handle such limits. Therefore, parents may need to childproof their homes to protect breakable items, and to keep children away from dangerous objects.
- 2) Supervised and age appropriate time out is encouraged with an explanation before and after the timeout period.
- 3) With-holding privileges (TV shows) from the child.
- 4) Model patience, kindness, empathy, and cooperation. Parents and teachers should be aware of the powerful influence their actions have on a child's behavior.
- 5) Provide daily opportunities for children to practice rational problem solving, and to study alternatives and the effect of each alternative.
- 6) Encourage and praise children. A nonverbal response such as a smile or a nod, or a verbal response such as "good" or "right" not only provides incentives for accomplishment, but also builds primary grade children's confidence.

- 7) Allow children to participate in setting rules-and identifying consequences for breaking them. This empowers children to learn how to manage their own behavior.
- 8) Take a cue from the student's behavior and perhaps see a need to change the environment so it will be more conducive to the children. Also motivation can be re-directed by modeling (examples) and teaching (explanation). It is important that children be shown positive directions and learn what is correct behavior.
- 9) Health and Family Life Education (a subject on the schools' curriculum) if taught interactively, teaches children conflict resolution and mediation skills, including listening actively, speaking clearly, showing trust and being trustworthy, accepting differences, setting group goals, negotiating, and mediating conflicts. Thus in the long term we are actually preparing students for their adult roll tomorrow.
- 10) Education is key in helping caregivers to use positive forms of discipline.

In Grenada, the Ministry of Social Development offers a "Parenting Trainer of Trainers Course" for interesting persons. After training many of them now go out into the communities and conduct parenting sessions, especially in rural areas, schools' PTA, at pre natal and anti natal clinics. This is really making its mark as parents make adjustments in their manner of parenting, seeking opportunities to communicate more with their child; they understand now that there's a clear distinction between punishment and discipline; creatively using other forms of discipline etc. Also via the Roving Caregiver's programme teen parents are learning parenting skills and positive discipline strategies. This opportunity creates a better relationship between parent and child; discourages corporal punishment and allows teen mothers to use more creative discipline methods.

Thus, "The habits of the home in one generation can become the morals of society in the next. As the old adage says: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."