



WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

How do you discipline a defiant child?
Time outs don't seem to work.

You can't spank.
You can't yell.
You can't humiliate.
So, what do
you do?

You are correct if you agree that yelling and spanking are out and that time outs are okay, but sooner or later they no longer work. Generally, this is a developmental issue. It's your child's way of saying, "I'm done with that and now you'll need to dream up some new ways to cope with my behaviour."

So, let's listen to that and come up with some ideas. I used to call these alternatives 'increasing the parenting repertoire', but in this day of computers and technology, I now call this 'increasing the menu options when we are in a parenting jam'.

- Fewer options means more impulsive parenting.
- More options allow us to make choices.

These extra choices give us insight in how the day will look and feel for both our children and ourselves. Parenting is about managing our own behaviour.

Managing our own behaviour is as important as the child's behaviour. Spanking and yelling are behaviours that 'work' in the short run but have long-term negative consequences. The more we can avoid being short sighted, and instead think long-term, the better our parenting gets. I have heard from parents who told me that after they have had a moment of short-sighted parenting, their child has said, "Mommy, you need a time out."

OPTIONS AND CHOICES

At this developmental stage you have a number of options and choices that may work for you.

You may want to consider using the ever-popular 'count to three' that tends to work with children at this stage. Present it in the context of making good choices, an approach that allows children to begin to see that they can control their own behaviour and allows them to express the feeling that, "You're not the boss of me." This is common at this age.

The 'count to three' method is to allow children a few moments to think about their behaviour and the choice they are making as they select what to do next. Keep in mind that in suggesting making good choices, I don't mean, 'better decide to pick good behaviour over a bad one before mommy blows a gasket'. I do mean that the child needs to be empowered to stop

and think and realize they can chose certain behaviours and control their overall behaviour as they mature. (Keep in mind that this does not work when children are not feeling well or are over-tired; at this point they are generally less likely to be in control of anything, let alone their behaviour!)

You may want to experiment with using the notion of logical consequences. By the age of five most kids understand cause and effect and that there is a consequence for their chosen behaviour. They are encouraged to learn to make choices based on logical consequences. For example, "Oh, you are choosing to make the stop at the grocery store a miserable one. This has to stop or we will need to go home instead of over to Granny's for cake." This is a logical consequence and may help your child chose to behave in a fashion that will get them what they want. This model requires a bit of trial and error (as does any!).

Some children respond best to a consequence as something that will be taken away, as losing the trip to Granny's. Others need to hear it as something they may earn: "Oh, you're choosing to make the stop at the grocery store a miserable one and I was just thinking about whether we could handle a visit to Granny's on the way home."

Initially this sounds the same, but each version differs in the way it is presented and how individual children may respond. Trial and error helps to fine tune this method. When it works, children feel good about their ability to control their behaviours.

All methods require praise. Reinforcing the positive always works best to keep things on track. "Wow, you stopped your crying and are such a well-behaved boy I can hardly wait to tell Granny when we get there!" will go light years in helping to establish this as a framework for future successes.

I look forward to hearing from you and sharing more strategies along the way. Happy parenting.

Recommended reading: Joe Rich, author of *Parenting: The Long Journey*, published by John Wiley and Sons. Judy Arnall, author of *Discipline Without Distress*, published by Professional Parenting Canada. ●



WE WANT MAIL.

What are your discipline issues?
Send along your thoughts
by email to
susanp@ParentsCanada.com