

**A Kid Is  
So Special  
(KISS)**

# **UNDERSTANDING TOGETHER Handbook**



# It's Not Easy Raising Children

There are so many parts of being a parent that are fun and enjoyable. There are other parts that are not always enjoyable, such as *discipline*. Disciplining children is a normal and necessary part of being a parent. When situations come up when you must discipline your children, it's a chance to teach them values, morals, and boundaries that will help them in the future.

It's understandable that many children who witness domestic violence have a difficult time listening to and obeying household rules. Sadly, by hearing mean and humiliating words and seeing violence directed toward you, they may have learned about disrespect; that males are superior to females; and that hitting another person is an acceptable (okay) way to resolve problems.

All children, including those who have witnessed domestic violence, need limits and rules; they need to know what are acceptable behaviors. It's normal for children to test you and the limits you and others have set. Your role as a parent is to set limits and be consistent.

## Helpful Hints For Setting Boundaries

Tips that make setting boundaries easier:

- ✿ Make boundaries positive, simple, and within reason.
- ✿ Adjust boundaries as your child becomes older.
- ✿ Let your child earn more freedom as he shows more responsibility.



# Ways The Violence May Have Affected Your Role As A Parent

## Letting Children Make The Rules

- ✿ Have there been times when you have given in to the children – let them get away with things because you felt guilty about what was occurring in the relationship?
- ✿ Have there been times when you have not disciplined or corrected the children to make up for the way the batterer has disciplined them?

**When we don't set any rules with our kids, or we let them act disrespectfully, we are not helping them.**

## Unable To Pay Attention

- ✿ Have there been times when you have not been able to pay attention to the children's behavior because you felt overwhelmed with what was happening in the relationship?
- ✿ Have there been times when it was safer for the children if you ignored certain behaviors because the batterer would discipline them more harshly or when it would be dangerous to stand up for them?

## Unable To Contain Your Anger

- ✿ Have there been times when you have felt angry because of what was happening in the relationship and taken your frustration out on the children?

**When we fail to set limits, we may get angry and resentful at our kids for the way they act. We find ourselves getting "fed-up" and we may become too harsh.**

## Feeling Stressed And Tired

- ✿ Have there been times when you felt so stressed and tired that you just didn't have the energy to deal with behavior problems when they came up?

## Afraid To Discipline

- ✿ Have there been times when you have felt afraid to discipline the children because you were afraid of the batterer's threat to report you to child welfare or sue you for custody?
- ✿ Have there been times when you could not discipline the children because he would hurt you for interfering?

## Remind Yourself

- ✿ You did the best you could at the time.
- ✿ The violence was not your fault.
- ✿ An abuser is responsible for his own behavior.

# Learning The Difference

## Punishment Versus Discipline

Discipline is about a child growing and developing through the use of teaching, education, experience and example.

Punishment is about hurting or inflicting pain on a child.

Which of these do you think is best for a child, adolescent or young adult?

### Lessons Children Learn When They Are Physically Punished

- ✿ That physical violence is an acceptable thing to do.
- ✿ Hitting is the best way to get people to do what you want.
- ✿ People who are bigger and stronger have the right to hit people who are smaller and weaker to make them do what they want.
- ✿ It's okay to be hit and hurt by someone you love and who says they love you.

**Together you can come up with a set of rules to live by. You may be surprised that children are often very good at this.**

### How To Begin

As the parent, it is your responsibility to:

- ✿ Decide what behaviors are not acceptable.
- ✿ Make sure everyone knows the rules **and** what will happen for breaking rules.
- ✿ Be consistent with rule-setting and discipline.

**When we are inconsistent in limit-setting, kids become confused. They learn that they don't have to respect limits or be responsible for their behavior.**

### Do's And Don'ts Of Discipline

#### Do

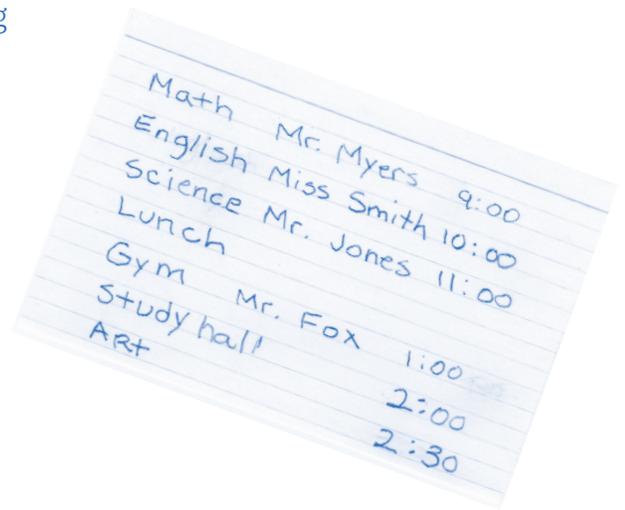
- ✿ Notice and comment when your child does something well. Be specific.
- ✿ When a rule is broken, respond quickly.
- ✿ Respond consistently.
- ✿ Make sure your child understands the reason he is being disciplined.

#### Don't

- ✿ Only pay attention to your child when he breaks a rule.
- ✿ Use threats.
- ✿ Attack or make fun of your child.
- ✿ Use labels, such as "You're lazy" or "You're such a slob."

## Depending On The Child's Age, You May See Some Of These Behaviors When They Have Lived With Violence In The Home

- \* Acting out (being aggressive) or withdrawing (being passive).
- \* Refusing to go to school, do homework or chores.
- \* Lying to avoid confrontation.
- \* Being defensive or argumentative.
- \* Physically fighting with siblings, you, friends.
- \* Crying and/or whining.
- \* Clinging behaviors.
- \* Throwing temper tantrums.
- \* Difficulty sleeping and/or having nightmares.
- \* Complaints of headaches, stomachaches, etc.
- \* Being overly fearful of people, places or things in general.

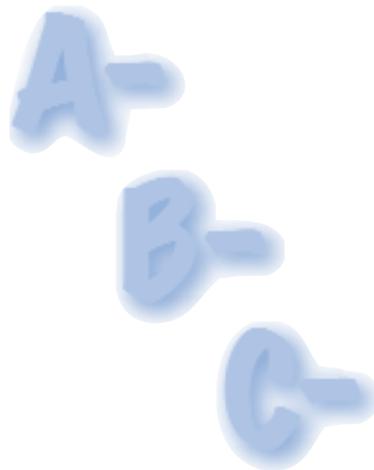


## When Is It Time To Consider Getting Professional Help For Your Child?

Some signs that your child may benefit from seeing a counselor:

- \* Learning or attention problems (can't be still in school, can't finish homework, loses interest quickly).
- \* Behavioral problems (such as lots of anger, acting out).
- \* A significant drop in grades, particularly if your child normally maintains high grades.
- \* Being the victim of bullying or bullying other children.
- \* Engaging in overly aggressive behavior such as biting, kicking, or hitting.
- \* Excessive school absenteeism or tardiness.
- \* Signs of alcohol, drug, or other substance use (including prescription drug abuse).

If you feel your child might have an emotional or behavioral problem or needs help coping with a difficult life event, trust your instincts.



# Discipline Is Just One Part Of Parenting

## Remind Yourself About The Other Areas Like Playing Or Teaching That You Do Well

✿ Make a list and keep it as a handy reminder when you are feeling frustrated. \_\_\_\_\_

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✿ Ask your children to make a list of the things they think you do well. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Separating Anger At Your Partner From Anger At Your Child

It is normal to feel angry about the violence you and your children may have experienced. There are things you can do.

- ✿ Ask yourself, “What am I really angry about?”
- ✿ Decide whom you need to talk to about your anger. When there has been violence in a relationship, it may not have been possible to talk to anyone about your anger. However, it is very important not to take out your bad feelings on your child.

## What To Do When You Are Feeling Angry Or Frustrated

### Self-Calming Thoughts

Self-calming thoughts help us to cool down when we’re angry at our kids, or at others. They help us to be more respectful in how we communicate.

Tell yourself things like, “I can be calm and talk quietly”.

### Time-out for Parents

It is very difficult to be respectful with our children when we are extremely angry, frustrated, overwhelmed, or irritated. Time-out for yourself is a tool you can use to calm down and communicate respectfully with your children. **Time-out is:**

- ✿ The first step towards working out any problem with your children, or other people.
- ✿ A chance for you to get away from a difficult situation so you can think it through, and so that you can better solve the problem when you come back.
- ✿ A short break that **you** decide you need to take.

### After a Time-out

When you come back into the situation, decide what you’re going to do. Here are some choices:

- ✿ **Let it go:** While you are cooling down, you may realize that you can drop whatever you were upset about. Maybe you misunderstood the situation, and now that you are calm, you see things more clearly and you realize that you are no longer upset. Then you can let it go.
- ✿ **Put it on hold:** You may recognize that the issue is important for you and your child to discuss, but you can decide to do this at a later time. Taking some time to think about an issue can help you to see it more clearly. Putting it on hold also gives you more time to be calm so you can communicate to your child in a way that is respectful.
- ✿ **Discuss it:** When you are feeling calm you may decide you are ready to talk about the situation with your child. You must be ready to listen and to communicate respectfully. Remember, you can always take another time-out.

– Adapted from Dr. Anne Ganley – Seattle V.A.

# How Many Ways To Tell Or Show Children "I Love You"

- ✿ Have a competition to see who can say, "I love you" the most times without stumbling on the words.
- ✿ Say "I love you" at the end of every phone conversation and when they leave the house.
- ✿ Give lots of hugs for no reason.
- ✿ Tell them something special that you love about them.
- ✿ Make a list of all the things they do well and give it to them.
- ✿ Slip notes in the backpacks that says, things like "You're the best."

## Even Heroes Make Mistakes

The odds are that you are your children's hero. Even if they don't say it and you don't often feel it, in their eyes you're a tried and true champ. But guess what – even the best of the best sometimes mess things up.

Some of us take missteps pretty often. It's okay – healthy in fact – for children to know that. It can help them be more comfortable with their own "setback," and it gives you the opportunity to teach them an important lesson about taking responsibility, dealing with consequences, and learning from experience.

- ✿ In what ways would your children or others see you as a hero? \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Are You An Open-Door Parent?

The way you talk with your children can open the door so they'll keep talking to you and sharing their feelings with you. Or it can close the door and leave both you and your child feeling alone, scared and helpless.

## Some Tips for Keeping the Door Open

- ✿ Speak in a quiet, calm voice; nobody likes yelling.
- ✿ Look in your child's eyes, bend down to be near your child when you talk.
- ✿ Practice listening. Ask your child about his friends and school, and really listen.
- ✿ Respect your child and talk to her with the same respect you would give a friend.
- ✿ Praise your child. Use lots of touching to let him know he is on the right track.
- ✿ Children are never too old to be told they are loved. Say it as often as you can.
- ✿ Pay attention when your child is talking to you. Turn off the TV or music and let your child know he is important.

### Door Openers

"Tell me more about it."

"Sounds like you had a rough (or great, or scary, whatever day)."

"That's interesting."

"You have lots of questions today."

"I'd like to hear your opinion on this."

### Door Closers

"Tell me later; I'm busy now."

"You're too young to understand what's happening."

"That's none of your business."

"Why do you want to know about that?"

"You are always talking."



"Walk a little slower. Mommy",  
Said a little child so small.  
"I'm following in your footsteps,  
And I don't want to fall.

Sometimes your steps are very fast,  
Sometimes they're hard to see;

So walk a little slower. Mommy,  
For you are leading me.

Someday when I'm all grown up,  
You're what I want to be;

Then I will have a little child  
Who'll want to follow me,

And I would want to lead just right,  
And know that I was true;

So, walk a little slower, Mommy  
For I must follow you.