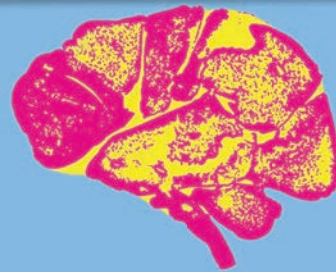


# **The Amazing Brain and Discipline:**

Positive Parenting Builds  
Healthy Brains

By Linda Burgess Chamberlain, PhD, MPH

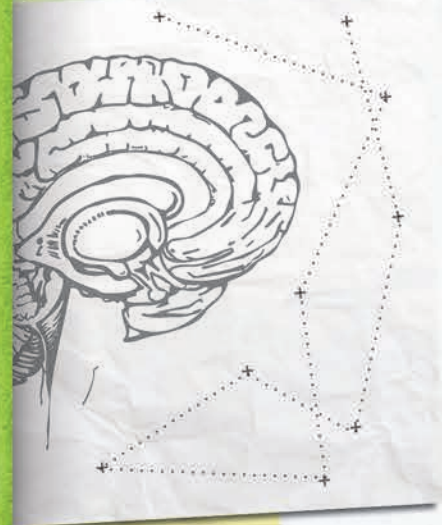


+ The word, **DISCIPLINE**, means  
“to teach or train.”

Positive approaches to discipline work because you are teaching your child how you want her/him to behave.

When children learn, they are building new connections in their brains. Children learn best through relationships that make them feel safe, secure, and nurtured. When you build a trusting, warm and supportive relationship with your child, you are also helping to build your child's brain.

Positive parenting helps your child's brain to mature and to learn from you how to deal with stress in a healthy way.



**Positive discipline strategies can strengthen your relationship with your child. The building blocks for positive parenting and discipline are:**

**Building trust with your child**

Being there, keeping your word

**Showing respect**

Listening, acknowledge their feelings

**Teaching your child how to behave**

Be patient, don't lose your temper

+ The first step is to create a plan for how you want to discipline your child. Think about positive ways to encourage good behavior with your child such as praise, routines, problem-solving, and time-outs. Having a plan for how you want to discipline your child in different situations can prevent you from reacting in a way that you don't want to under stress.

*Without a plan, parents often repeat the discipline that they experienced as children. Ask yourself if there is anything about the discipline that you experienced as a child that you want to be different for your child.*

We can promote healthy brain development and wanted behaviors by following these six basic steps for positive parenting and discipline.



1

## Model Good Behavior

**YOUR CHILD HAS SPECIAL BRAIN CELLS CALLED "MIRROR" NEURONS.** Mirror neurons allow children to reflect what they see you doing in their brains so they can copy or imitate how you behave. Your child can actually feel or mirror the same emotions that you are feeling! The best way to teach children good behaviors is to model good behaviors. Sharing, being kind, being respectful, and giving praise are all ways to teach your children how you expect them to behave.

SHARING

respect

praise

# 2

## Matching Discipline to Your Child's Development and Needs

**EVERY CHILD'S BRAIN IS UNIQUE!** There is no one-size fits all discipline strategy for children. Every parent needs a toolkit of effective discipline strategies that they can choose from based on their child's needs and the situation.

Your child's brain is being shaped by experience and environment—it is constantly changing and you will need to adapt your discipline toolkit to meet your child where he or she is at in their development.

A good example of matching discipline to your child's development is using time-out. This strategy usually doesn't work well with children less than 3 years old—this is the age when a child's brain starts to be able to reason and understand what time-out means.

You can use time-out as a learning experience to teach your child about self-control. Time-out provides the opportunity for a child to calm down. Then your child can think about what he or she did wrong and how to change his/her behavior. Children need to be calm to be able to access the part of their brains where they can understand the lesson you are teaching them and problem-solve about their behaviors.

## 4 Basic Steps for Time Out

- 1 **Set rules for time-out ahead of time (where, how long, when you will use it); the time limit is usually one minute for each year of age.**
- 2 **Choose a quiet location for time-out where you can see your child.**
- 3 **Ask your child to think about what he or she did wrong and how they could do better next time.**
- 4 **When the time that you have set for time-out is over, talk with your child about what behaviors would be acceptable.**

Several positive strategies for effective discipline are shown in the **toolkit** to the right. Ask yourself how you can adapt and combine these strategies for your child. For example, **selective ignoring** can be combined with **redirecting** by ignoring a child's whining because she is upset that she can't watch television and then redirecting her attention to finishing a puzzle to distract her.



## Age

## Strategy

## Example

3 years old or younger

Redirect, distract, surprise

Redirect child to focus on something else such as a new activity; Remove or block access to problem (place gate on stairway)

All ages

Selective ignoring

Stop paying attention to the behavior you don't want; encourage and reward the behavior you do want

All ages; should occur at the time the problem occurred for children less than 7 years old

Withholding privileges

Choose something that your child values but don't withhold something that your child needs such as a meal

All ages

Catch your child doing something right!

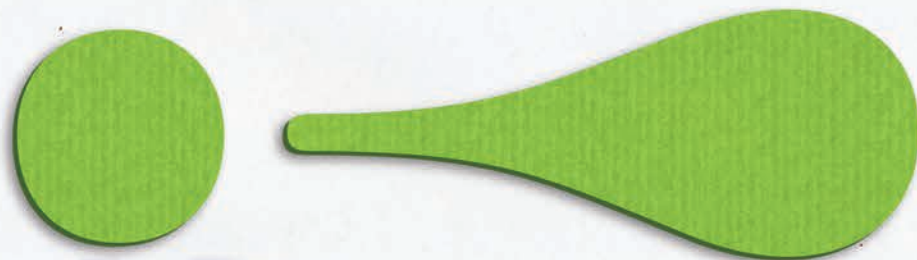
Reinforce positive behaviors with praise and rewards

# 3

## Don't Use Physical Punishment

**CHILDREN CAN'T LISTEN OR LEARN WELL WHEN THEY FEEL SCARED, HURT, OR ANGRY.** Physical punishment often has the opposite effect of what parents want. Instead of teaching children how to behave responsibly, physical punishment is more likely to increase problem behaviors including resistance, power struggles, anger and rebellion.

Physical punishment can interfere with healthy brain development. Children build and keep brain connections that are reinforced by experience. Physical punishment, pain, and fear can wire and shape a child's brain in unhealthy ways that lead to unwanted behaviors. These problems include aggression, conduct problems, depression, and substance abuse. Children who are hit are more likely to hit their friends and siblings.



Parents often say that they used physical punishment as a last resort when **"they lost it"** and that they had regrets afterwards. When a parent gets angry, their child can feel or mirror that emotion and get angry too. When children get angry, they cannot use the upper area of the brain that helps them control emotions and impulses. When a child is angry, they also cannot use this part of the brain to learn right from wrong.



# 4

## Be Consistent

**CHILDREN'S DEVELOPING BRAINS LEARN THROUGH REPETITION—** by repeating experiences and routines. It is important that you are consistent with discipline so that your child knows what to expect and what you expect from them. Being consistent does not mean being rigid. Adjust your discipline strategies as your child's brain matures and different situations arise.

Setting up routines for activities that you do with your child such as getting up in the morning, going to the store, and getting ready for bed can help. Follow through with consequences that you have set ahead of time for unwanted behaviors. Remember to praise and reward good behaviors!



The Amazing Brain  
Acrylic on Paper  
2011

Peter Camburn

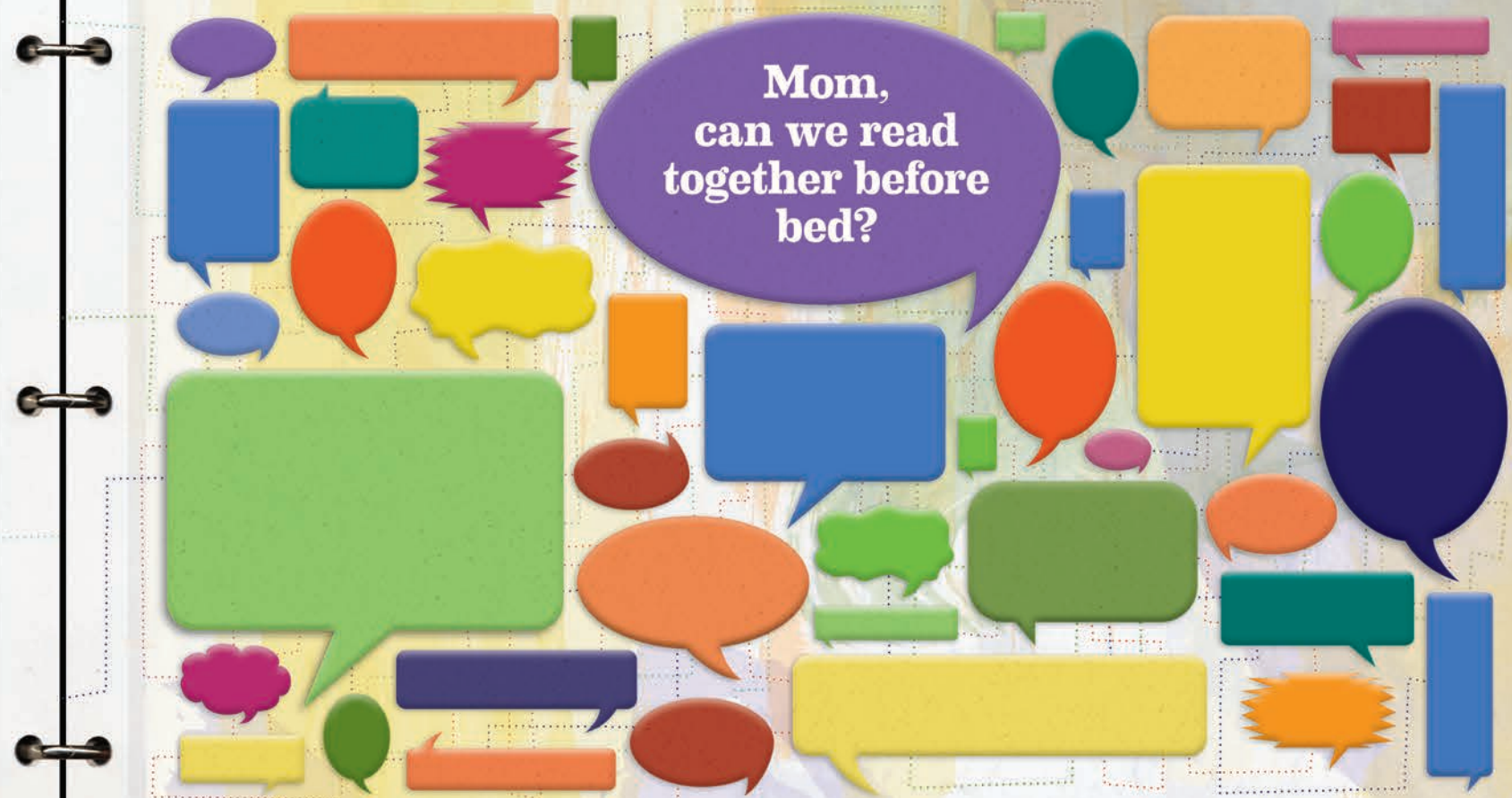
# 5

## Talk About It!

### TALK WITH YOUR CHILD SO NEXT TIME THEY GET IT RIGHT!

Talking with your child—is a brain builder. Use words that your child can understand to teach your child why a behavior was not acceptable. When your child is 3 years or older, you can discuss what went wrong and ask for suggestions about how he/she could do it differently next time.

Children need practice making choices and experiencing the natural consequences of their choices. Create safe opportunities for your child to practice making choices such as which book he wants to read or if she wants to take her bath before or after reading a story.





# 6

## Take Care of Yourself

**PARENTING IS HARD WORK.** To be a good parent, you also need to take care of yourself. Getting enough sleep, asking for help when you need it, and taking time out for yourself can help you to stay healthy. Taking a few deep breaths when you are feeling frustrated with your child's behavior and giving yourself a time-out to call a friend can give you the time to think through the situation and decide what will be the most effective response.

Negative experiences that may have happened a long time ago can resurface when you are stressed, over-tired, and dealing with the many challenges that parents face. Being in an unhealthy relationship with a partner who is abusive and/or controlling, can interfere with how you want to parent your children.

If you feel that your parenting is being affected by experiences you had as a child or current problems that you are experiencing, talk to someone you trust and ask for help. Remember, when you learn new things and practice strategies such as positive discipline, you are changing your brain too!



*Don't forget that humor is a great discipline tool. Singing a song, making a child laugh about a funny story, and turning tasks into games can help to redirect your child to the behavior that you want.*

# HA

HA  
HA

LOL



## RESOURCES

### WEBSITES

[www.phoenixchildrens.com](http://www.phoenixchildrens.com)

Offers a parents' brochure on effective discipline strategies and a report on the harmful effects of physical punishment

[www.developingchild.net](http://www.developingchild.net)

Describes the developmental stages of children

[www.stopthehitting.com](http://www.stopthehitting.com)

Information on how physical punishment can harm children

[www.healthychild.org](http://www.healthychild.org)

Has tip sheets on child development and effective discipline

[www.sparetherod.org](http://www.sparetherod.org)

A Philadelphia Initiative to end physical punishment with multiple resources for parents, providers and policy makers

### BOOKS

**How to Raise Emotionally Healthy Children, a parenting guide by Gerald Newmark, PhD**

Shows parents and teachers how to nourish emotional health at home and at school.  
[www.emotionallyhealthychildren.org](http://www.emotionallyhealthychildren.org)

**Caring for your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5**

American Academy of Pediatrics. Ed. SP Shelov. 2009. Bantam Books, New York, New York.

**Positive Discipline for Preschoolers**

by Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, and Rosyln Ann Duffy. 2007. Three Rivers Press, New York.

**Positive Discipline: The First Three Years**

by Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, and Rosalyn Duffy. 2007. Three Rivers Press, New York.

**Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline: The 7 Basic Skills for Turning Conflict into Cooperation**

by Rebecca Anne Bailey. William Morrow, 2000.

### FOR HELP

**National Parent Helpline** – 1.855.4A.PARENT (1.855.427.2736)

[www.nationalparenthelpline.org](http://www.nationalparenthelpline.org)

**Child Help** – 1.800.422.4453

If you are feeling frustrated or angry with your child and just need to talk

**National Domestic Violence Hotline** – 1.800.799.7233

If you are worried about you or your child(ren's) safety

# RESOURCES

# WWW.HELPFORPARENTS.COM



**The Amazing Brain: and Discipline: Positive Parenting Builds Healthy Brains**, 2011, Philadelphia, PA. This brochure was written by Linda Burgess Chamberlain, PhD, MPH with support from the Institute for Safe Families, Multiplying Connections of the Health Federation of Philadelphia, and Prevent Child Abuse PA.

**Linda Burgess Chamberlain** is the founding director of the Alaska Family Violence Prevention Project. An epidemiologist specializing in domestic violence, she is an internationally recognized speaker on the effects of violence on children and brain development. She lives on a rural homestead outside of Homer, Alaska with her dog team. A national Kellogg Leadership Fellow, Dr. Chamberlain is also a motivational speaker and uses "lessons from the trail" to promote key strategies for teamwork and leadership. [howlinghusky@gci.net](mailto:howlinghusky@gci.net)



**The Institute for Safe Families (ISF)** is a Philadelphia non-profit organization, whose mission is to strengthen families to create healthy, nurturing environments that promote the positive development of children and prevent family violence before it happens. For over 20 years, ISF has been an incubator for new ideas, developed innovative programming, and convened forums for cross-systems dialogue and collaboration aimed at building greater capacity for more effective prevention and response to all forms of interpersonal violence. [www.instituteforsafefamilies.org](http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org)



**Multiplying Connections** of The Health Federation of Philadelphia is a cross system collaborative whose mission is to translate the research on early childhood brain development into better practice through professional training and organizational and policy change. Multiplying Connections is developing materials and strategies to promote trauma informed and developmentally appropriate care across the public child and family service system in the City of Philadelphia. This capacity building initiative is funded by the William Penn Foundation. [www.multiplyingconnections.org](http://www.multiplyingconnections.org)



**Prevent Child Abuse PA** is one of 47 chartered state chapters of Prevent Child Abuse America with the mission of preventing the abuse and neglect of Pennsylvania's children before it ever happens. [www.preventchildabusepa.org](http://www.preventchildabusepa.org)