

# Building Bridges: Linking Practice and Research on Home Visitation



WINTER ■ 2007

## Developmental Issues for Young Children

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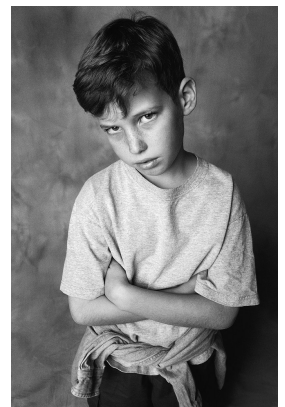
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## Emotion Coaching: What is the best way to respond to a child's negative emotions?

By Darcy Richardson, BA.



As a parent or caregiver, it can be difficult to know how to handle a child's negative emotions. Some parents respond with punishment, others by distracting their child or by assuming the feelings will simply go away. In his book, *The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, psychologist and researcher John Gottman suggests that being empathetic and guiding the child through an exploration of his emotions may have long-term, positive effects. (Gottman and DeClaire, 1997). According to Gottman, many parents fall under one of the following three categories:

Disapproving parents respond to their child's negative emotions by punishing or criticizing.

Dismissing parents attempt to ignore or disregard their child's emotions, as they are viewed as harmful and a poor reflection of their own parenting abilities. These parents prefer to distract their child from the negative emotions rather than face them directly.

Laissez faire parents are empathetic towards their child's feelings but do not know how to help them cope; they simply acknowledge that they will pass.

So how effective are these methods? Research has shown that when parents are too accepting of negative emotions, their children may not learn how to control them appropriately. On the other hand, when these emotions are too strongly discouraged the child may suppress them. Internalizing negative emotions in this way can result in anxiety, withdrawal, and other harmful consequences (Eisenberg et al, 1992). Neither extreme encourages the child to directly face what he is feeling. This is the central premise of emotion coaching.

(Continued on page 2)

## From the Editor:

Child Development. We know that helping children reach their full potential is an important societal value. How can home visitation programs enhance the development of young children? Although helping families care for their infants is a priority in home visitation programs, we must also recognize that parents need support in parenting their older children. Childhood behaviors, such as temper tantrums, can be quite exasperating even for the most talented parents.

In this issue, we gather information that can help home visitors become aware of research and strategies to promote positive child development. Many child development experts are excited about introducing new concepts like emotional coaching that can have a remarkably positive impact on children. We also address childhood aggression, a frequent concern with many children. It is critical that home visitors be able to know when aggression represents a special concern and how to address this with families. Supporting families—across the life span—is an ongoing goal for all of us.

Craig W. LeCroy, Ph.D.  
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### Emotional Coaching (continued from page 1)

How can parents use emotional coaching with their children? Gottman has identified five steps in this process:

1. Become aware of the child's emotion;
2. Recognize the emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching;
3. Listen empathetically, validating the child's feelings;
4. Help the child find words to label the emotion he is having;
5. Set limits while exploring strategies to solve the problem at hand.



Here is an example of how the process might look:

*"I want Zebra! I want Zebra!" she moaned again. Then she started to cry...By now I was getting "do something" looks from the passengers, the airline attendants, from my wife, seated across the aisle...I felt bad. Then it dawned on me: I couldn't get Zebra right now, but I could offer her the next best thing--a father's comfort... "You wish you had Zebra now," I said to her. "Yeah," she said sadly... "You're tired now, and smelling Zebra and cuddling with him would feel real good. I wish we had Zebra here so you could hold him"... "Yeah," she said with a sigh. "I'm so sorry," I said, watching the tension leave her face. She rested her head against the back of her safety seat. She continued to complain softly a few more times, but she was growing calmer. Within a few minutes, she was asleep... Finding out that I understood how she felt seemed to make her feel better... it was a memorable testament to the power of empathy.* (from: Gottman and DeClaire, 1997, p. 1).

Evidence suggests that this technique has positive impacts on child development. In a long-term study with 119 families, Dr. Gottman and his colleagues followed children from age four to adolescence. From interviews, observations of parent/child interactions, and tracking of physiological responses, Gottman found that children whose parents used emotion coaching techniques were better able to regulate their own emotions, soothe themselves when they were upset, focus their attention, and respond in difficult situations (for example, in conflicts with other children) (DeBaryshe, 1998). Other studies have shown that parents who use emotion coaching can help reduce the effects of domestic violence on their children (Schwarz, 2004) and can help them overcome behaviors such as bullying (Morris, 2000). The long-term impacts may include better physical health, school performance, social skills, peer relations and psychological well-being (Ferrer, 2006).

DeBaryshe, B. (1998). A developmental perspective on anger: family and peer contexts. Vol. 35, 205-216. Available: [http://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/Publications/journals/developmental\\_perspective.doc](http://uhfamily.hawaii.edu/Publications/journals/developmental_perspective.doc).

Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., Carlo, G., Troyer, D., Speer, A. L., Karbon, M. & Switzer, G. (1992). The relations of maternal practices and characteristics to children's vicarious emotional responsiveness, *Child Development*, 63, 583-602.

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# Understanding Childhood Aggression: What should we expect?

By Craig LeCroy, Ph.D.

What can research tell us about the normal aggressive behaviors of preschool children? Research findings are summarized as follows (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Hartup & Abecassis, 2002; Underwood, 2003):

- ◆ The frequency of aggression tends to peak at about age 4, and then decreases. Temper tantrums with no recognizable antecedent tend to decrease during the preschool period and are almost nonexistent after age 4.
- ◆ At about age 3, preschoolers increase their retaliatory aggression in response to frustration or attack.
- ◆ Young preschoolers, age 2-3, tend to behave aggressively after parents have set limits. Older children tend to act aggressively in response to peer conflict.
- ◆ Young preschoolers tend to kick and hit to get something they want, such as a toy. Their aggression is primarily reactive in nature. Older preschoolers tend to use verbal aggression in the form of teasing, name-calling, and tattling. They still argue over objects, but their aggressive acts become more hostile and are designed to hurt someone.
- ◆ During the early school years, individual differences in aggression appear to be related to family factors such as socio-economic status, parenting style, and to how children cognitively process social information.


While these facts suggest what is expected and normal regarding aggression, how can home visitors or parents know when children are at risk for developing more severe problems of violence and aggression? The following checklist provides some helpful guidelines. If 2 or more of these items are checked, then a professional should be contacted to suggest ways to help the family.

## Checklist: Warning Signs for Violence and Aggression in Children

### Toddler and Preschool-Aged Child

- \_\_\_ Has multiple temper tantrums in a day, each lasting more than 15 minutes; child is not easily calmed by parent or caregiver
- \_\_\_ Has frequent aggressive outbursts, often with no reason or cause
- \_\_\_ Behaves impulsively and fearlessly
- \_\_\_ Frequently refuses to follow directions and listen to adults
- \_\_\_ Appears to not be attached to parents
- \_\_\_ Spends a significant amount of time watching violent television shows
- \_\_\_ Engages in play that has violent themes
- \_\_\_ Acts cruelly toward other children or animals

### School-Aged Child

- \_\_\_ Often disrupts classroom activities in school
- \_\_\_ Gets into frequent fights at school
- \_\_\_ Reacts to disappointment, criticism, or teasing with intense anger, blame, or revenge
- \_\_\_ Watches violent television shows and/or plays violent video games
- \_\_\_ Has few friends at school; is often rejected by other children; makes friends with other children known to be aggressive or unruly
- \_\_\_ Does not listen to adults
- \_\_\_ Does not exhibit sensitivity to the feelings of others
- \_\_\_ Acts cruelly toward pets or other animals 

### Sources:

- Coie, J. D., & Dodge, K. A. (1998). Aggression and antisocial behavior. In N. Eisenberg (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (pp. 779-862). New York: Wiley.
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# Bringing Home a New Baby

## How to help your other children deal with the transition

By Darcy Richardson, BA

A new baby is soon to join the household. It is an exciting and busy time for parents. For the other children, however, it can be a difficult transition period. Many children are not initially appreciative of the addition to their family. For children between the ages of 18 months and 3 years it can be particularly difficult. They are old enough to notice the new arrival but are still focused on their parents' attention. For children of this age, it is particularly common to see signs of jealousy (Yaqub, 2006).

This jealousy usually begins right after the birth of a new baby, but it can occur during the preparations or not even appear until months after the baby has joined the household. It may appear as aggressive behavior toward the infant. For example, the child may suggest throwing the infant out of the car window or may try to give him hugs that are tighter than necessary. Regression is another common behavioral response. The child may try to act like he did when he was younger; for example, he may revert to wetting his bed, drinking from a bottle, using a pacifier, or sleeping in a crib (Brodkin, 2006).

Other behavioral changes may also be observed, including whining, crying, and misbehaving. Some toddlers may start sucking their thumbs or fussing, while others may scream or try to bite their parents or the infant (Wehrly, 2002).

So what can you do? No matter how the child shows his jealousy, it is important to acknowledge his feelings and also to understand that they are completely normal. Negating or discounting them will not help the child learn to deal with his own emotions. Also, it is important that the parents resolve any feelings of guilt that they may have for the struggle their child is going through. They need to recognize that most of their child's jealousy issues will be resolved over time and having a sibling can be a wonderful part of life (Brodkin, 2006). In addition, there are some steps that can be taken before and after the baby's arrival to help the elder sibling adjust.

Prior to the birth:

- ◆ Help the child know what to expect. Read books and offer information about pregnancy, babies, and siblings. This can include looking at pictures or watching a video of himself as a baby, practicing holding a baby doll, and visiting the hospital or other friends with infants. Encourage him to ask questions.
- ◆ Also, help him understand what it will be like when the baby arrives. Explain that you will be tired sometimes, and that the baby will cry and sleep a lot and not immediately be able to play.
- ◆ Avoid making other major changes in the child's life. For example, try not to start potty training, a new preschool, or move him into a new room close to the due date.
- ◆ Try to encourage the child to be invested in the new baby. For example, speak of the baby as "ours." Talk about how important he will be in the baby's life. Include the child in telling relatives and friends about the new arrival.
- ◆ Don't use your pregnancy as the reason that you are unable to play with or carry your child. Instead, explain that you aren't feeling well, that your back or feet hurt, or that you are tired. Find other activities to do with your child so that you are still spending time together.

After the baby is born:

- ◆ Keep the older child involved in celebrating the new arrival. Have friends bring gifts for the child as well as the infant. (Keep extra gifts on hand in case some only bring gifts for the infant).
- ◆ Set aside time to spend just with the older child. Have friends or family help care for the infant during this time. Listen and acknowledge any concerns the child shares.
- ◆ Have the child help with the infant whenever possible. Let him help with bathing or pushing the stroller, or encourage him to sit with the baby on the couch.
- ◆ Emphasize the important role of the older sibling. Give him some special privileges such as a later bedtime. Remind him that he gets to do things like play at the park and eat ice cream. Praise mature behavior that you notice.



Throughout the process, do not be afraid to ask for help. Your family and friends are invaluable resources. For more information and other recommendations on how to help your other children with the introduction of a new baby, please see the sources described below. Consult with your health care provider for how to handle this change with your own family. 🏠

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Available: [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3934/is\\_200205/ai\\_n9067380](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3934/is_200205/ai_n9067380).

Yaqub, R.M. (2006). Welcoming a new baby: sibling issues. *Parents Magazine*.  
Available: <http://www.parents.com/parents/printableStory.jhtml?storyid=/templatedata/parents/story/data/5843.xml&catref=prt35>

Additional Resources:

University of Michigan Health Systems: Your Child Home (2006). New baby sibling.  
Available: <http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/newbaby.htm>.

University of Utah Health Sciences Center (1999) Welcoming your new baby [From: "A New Baby" and "Welcoming Your Second Baby" by Vicki Lansky]. Available: <http://uuhsc.utah.edu/pated/handouts/pdfs/handout808.pdf>



# Helping Parents & Children Cope With Crisis: Guidelines for home visitors

By Craig LeCroy, Ph.D.

Home visitors often confront difficult emotional situations with the families they serve. There may be domestic violence, accidental deaths, physical family fights, or community crises such as 9/11. How can home visitors help parents and children cope with the complex emotions they experience in the aftermath of a crisis? First, be alert for behavioral changes in children, as these changes can often be reflective of emotional and psychological problems. When dealing with parents, it is important that they do not feel as though they need to handle everything that's happening with their child. Similar to children, parents feel stressed when crisis occurs, and they need to remember that there are services and professionals in their community who are available to provide additional support and assistance to their children, as well as to the parents themselves. The following table outlines suggestions by the American Academy of Pediatrics on how parents and other caregivers can respond to children's emotional needs during times of crisis.



## Responding to Children's Emotional Needs During Times of Crisis: Tips for Parents and Caregivers

<b>Take care of yourself first.</b>	Children need to feel safe and secure. Children will likely be more affected by a parent or caregivers' emotional state than by their words. <u>Discuss your concerns with another trusted adult.</u>
<b>Watch for unusual behavior in your child that might suggest they are having difficulty coping.</b>	Watch for symptoms such as depressed or irritable moods, sleep disturbances (increased sleeping, trouble falling asleep, nightmares, nighttime walking), changes in appetite, social withdrawal, obsessive play (repeatedly acting out a traumatic event to the point of interfering with normal activities), and unusual hyperactivity.
<b>Talk with your child about the crisis.</b>	Silence can suggest to a child that the event is too horrible to discuss.
<b>Ask your child what he/she has already heard about the crisis or events and what they understand.</b>	Listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns.
<b>Explain, simply and directly, the events that occurred.</b>	Older children may benefit from more detailed information than younger children. Take cues from your own child as to how much information to share.
<b>Encourage questions from your child and answer questions directly.</b>	Children can better cope with crises if they understand it.
<b>Don't force the issue with your child.</b>	Extend multiple invitations to your child to have discussions about the event and provide increased physical and emotional presence as you wait for your child to accept an invitation. 🇺🇸

Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2002). Responding to children's emotional needs during times of crisis: An important role for pediatricians. Retrieved from [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

# Curbing Aggression: What parents can do

By Craig LeCroy, Ph.D

With the increase in school shootings in recent years, added emphasis has been placed on watching for signs of aggression in children starting as early as preschool. The hope is that aggressive acts in later years can be avoided if aggression is curbed early in a child's life. Several strategies for decreasing hostile aggressive acts have been researched. Remember, the goal is not to deny or negate the child's very real emotional experience. Rather, the goal is to help the child find adaptive ways of expressing and asserting needs and interacting with others. The following guidelines are frequently recommended as evidence-based discipline strategies for children (Kazdin, 2005; Forehand & Long, 2002; ACT Against Violence, 2006):

- ◆ Setting firm limits. Limit setting is often the first strategy in responding to child behavior problems. Children benefit from knowing clear expectations and having a clear set of rules that will be consistently followed. Parents can establish a baseline set of rules and post these in a visible place in the house. Enforcing limits should include the use of a consistent warning. Follow-through is important and should include praise for compliance and consequences for failure to follow the rule.
- ◆ Ignoring or the "Incompatible Response Technique." This technique promotes prosocial behaviors and reduces aggressive acts by simultaneously ignoring all but dangerous, aggressive interchanges while positively reinforcing acts incompatible with aggression. This method has been shown to reduce verbal and physical aggression while promoting helpfulness. Another advantage lies in the avoidance of punishment and attention paid to aggressive acts. Therefore, children are not reinforced for attention-seeking aggressive acts, and aggression in the form of punishment is not modeled to the children.

- ◆ Time-out procedure. This technique allows adults to attend to and prevent harmful acts of aggression in non-punitive ways by removing the child from the activity and providing a safe place for the child to regain control of behavior. The adult does not unwittingly provide reinforcement for attention-seeking behavior because attention is withdrawn until appropriate behavior can be maintained. Time out is done in a location that is under control and boring or non-stimulating (a bathroom or a chair in the corner of a room). The parent calmly directs the child without arguing or interacting to the time out area. When the time out is done the parent provides positive praise for behaviors that are desirable.
- ◆ Modeling and coaching strategies. This method relies on adults and other children to serve as models and teachers of non-aggressive conflict resolution strategies. Children are more likely to use these alternative strategies if they see someone else obtain success using these methods. This technique has proved effective with chronically aggressive children who have poor problem-solving skills. These strategies are most often provided in treatment or counseling settings as problem-solving or social skills training groups.
- ◆ Creating non-aggressive environments. This method relies on the ingenuity of adults to create play spaces that minimize conflict and the need for physical contact. Large play spaces allow children to play vigorously without physically contacting each other. Play environments that have enough equipment for all the children also prevents conflict. In addition, when aggressive toys are provided, children tend to get into more fights. Keeping aggressive toys out of the play areas of young children can prevent aggressive behavior in the form of play and real fights. 📺

Sources:

Forehand, R. L., & Long, N. (2002). *Parenting the strong-willed child : The clinically proven five-week program for parents of two-to-six year olds*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

ACT Against Violence. (2006). ACT Against Violence Training Program: Discipline strategies for managing challenging behavior for children aged 3-8. From: <http://www.actagainstviolence.org>.

Kazdin, A. E. (2005). *Parent management training*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## DID YOU KNOW?

## Helpful Hints from *The Parent Connection*

<http://www.theparentconnectionaz.org/>

It can be a challenge to communicate effectively with young children. Using positive direction instead of negative statements helps a child know what you need him to do and what your expectations are.

You can expand your child's learning opportunities by encouraging him to participate in household tasks. Through work that is meaningful and helpful to the family or community, children gain a sense of purpose and feel more a part of the group.



Giving your child a little positive power can help avoid a power struggle. By offering your child two or three choices within the boundaries set by you for safety and appropriate behavior, your child feels involved in the decision making.

A recent study found that adolescents who had meals with their family at least 7 times a week were significantly less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and drugs; get poor grades; be depressed; or attempt suicide. Positive time together promotes family identity, a sense of order, and communication.

### *What's Next:*

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