



Instead of Hitting by Peggy O'Mara

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At a meeting I attended recently, I mentioned an article we wanted to solicit entitled "Instead of Hitting." One woman asked what the title meant. Another said, "But doesn't the Bible tell us to hit our kids?" Later in the conversation, when I questioned the wisdom of time-outs, people were even more confused. Well, if we don't hit or punish—I could hear them all wonder silently—then what are we supposed to do? These are legitimate concerns. When I was a new mom 30 years ago, I had these same questions.

I started out hitting my kids. I would lose my temper when their behavior got out of my control, and I would hit. I never felt good about it, but I didn't know what else to do, and I thought it was effective because afterward I had regained control of the situation. I thought that I had to hit them because I had to control them. Certainly, others expected that I should, and I thought that was what parenting was all about. But it just didn't feel right.

About the time that my third child was born, I saw a bumper sticker that read, "People are not for hitting and children are people too." I was flabbergasted because I believed this, but I was still hitting my children. I was waiting to discover something else to do first and then to stop hitting. When I saw the bumper sticker, I realized that I would just have to stop. Then I would figure out what else to do. And I did.

I was initially inspired by a concept I heard at La Leche League meetings: that discipline is based on loving guidance. Later I read the books *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children* and *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, and I had the opportunity to interview the authors. But their concepts were foreign to me. I embraced them intellectually but didn't have an emotional clue about how to implement them. I grew up in an authoritarian household, and my own upbringing was what I knew habitually.

The books of Faber and Mazlish are based on the work of the psychologist Haim Ginott, author of *Between Parent and Child*. What they all recommend is a fundamental paradigm shift from authoritarian parenting to cooperative parenting. In fact, in Dolores Curran's book *The Traits of Healthy Families*, she found that in healthy families no one family member is dominant. While corporal punishment of children produces short-term obedience, it has long-term negative consequences

on character and behavior. Research at the University of New Hampshire found that children who are rarely or never spanked have higher scores on cognitive tests than children who are frequently spanked.

But how do we change our habits and our beliefs? When I read *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children*, I was terrified. I felt totally out of control. It took me a while to get my sea legs and to realize that the control I achieved by spanking was an illusion. My children would learn to hide their bad behavior from me if I spanked them, but I could never ultimately control them, and they would learn to resent me. The only hope I had of truly "controlling" things—that is, of having my own needs met—was rooted in our relationship. It is ultimately the relationship of love and mutual respect that ensures socialized behavior.

We want to make sure that as parents we do teach our children to be effective socially. Others expect this of us as well. Our desire to control our children is often thus precipitated by our image of ourselves as good, caring parents. At times, our concern for our own image can affect our actions toward our children more than our concern for their welfare. Often when we spank, we do so because we just can't tolerate our children acting in such a way. Our pride is hurt.

I think loss of pride is little compared to the loss of intimacy with our children that comes when we spank and punish them. We have to be very honest with ourselves to shift to a paradigm of cooperation. We have to be willing to take responsibility in conflicts with our children and to acknowledge that our own attitudes or beliefs might be contributing to the problem. We have to try hard not to take conflict personally, but to see it as an opportunity to learn new information that will help us prevent future conflict. We must learn humility.

Being humble, however, does not mean that we give up our authority. A parent's authority is based not on being right all the time but on being the one in charge. You do not have to give up your authority as a parent or be permissive to parent in a more cooperative way. However, you do have to learn a new language, and it takes time. The more you practice cooperation, the more skilled at it you become.

Instead of Hitting Con't...

What is this new language? What are the elements that help us discipline nonviolently with loving guidance, and without punishment, time-outs, or spanking? They are words. They are attitudes. They are beliefs. They are demeanor. For example, the number-one trait of a healthy family is the ability to communicate and listen. Loving guidance implies that children, like adults, have good reasons for their behavior and that their cooperation can be engaged to solve problems.

How do we engage the cooperation of children? We talk to them in a different way. Here are some examples of new ways to approach problems with our children:

We can describe what we see.

I see a glass near the edge of the table.

We can describe the problem.

The kitchen is a mess.

We can give information.

Bikes left out in the rain will rust.

We can make a statement of appropriate function or behavior.

We don't hit people.

We can offer a choice.

You can wear the red outfit or the green outfit.

We can say it in a word.

Shoes!

We can describe what we feel.

When I come home tired from work, I feel sorry for myself when I have to make dinner. It would be so nice to come home to dinner being cooked and to have some help in the kitchen.

We can write a note.

The communication suggestions above stand in sharp contrast to poor communication, which blames, accuses, calls names, threatens, commands, lectures, warns, evokes martyrdom, compares, is sarcastic, or prophesies. Notice the example under "We can describe what we feel," above. It encourages family members to come forward to help. It is an "I" message and talks totally about the speaker's feelings without accusing anyone else of anything. The word you is not in the sentence.

If instead a parent said something blaming and self-pitying, such as "I can't believe I have to come home so tired and make dinner, too. Why don't you ever make dinner for me? Why don't you ever help me? I have to do everything myself," family members would begrudgingly offer help, but they would be more likely to mentally focus on defending themselves than on the needy parent. Communication is a skill we can always improve upon, and communicating means we have to get comfortable with strong emotions and be willing to talk about anything. Good communication is fostered by spending time talking together and by being sensitive to timing and context. And, perhaps most important, good communication requires that we learn to rebound from anger and to reconcile with others afterward.

To rebound from anger, we have to free ourselves of blame and judgment, even toward ourselves. It is easier to be tolerant of others when we are tolerant of ourselves. In fact, it helps to have a kind of radical self-acceptance and to trust in things as they are. This doesn't mean that we don't try to change things or to get our own needs met, but we do so with the compassionate understanding that we all have good, even if sometimes mistaken, reasons for our behavior.

When we appreciate that others have good reasons for their behavior, it allows us to approach them with love in our hearts. That way we are more likely to frame our arguments in some of the ways that Haim Ginott suggested decades ago:

- Express nuances of anger without nuances of insult.
- Talk to the situation, not the character of the person.
- Disagree without being disagreeable.
- Change a mood, not a mind.

When I was a new parent trying to figure out this new language of engaging cooperation, I put lists of suggestions like those above on my refrigerator. I put up a list of alternatives to punishment. The list helped me to remember new solutions instead of habitually relying on old, adversarial ones. Eventually I made these solutions my own. You will, too.

Here are some alternatives to punishment:

- Point out a way to be helpful.
- Express strong disapproval without attacking character.
- State your expectations.
- Show your child how to make amends.
- Take action.
- Allow your child to experience the consequences of his or her own behavior.
- Sympathize with the child. Be compassionate but stick to your decision.
- Give an early warning.
- Give specific instructions. Tell what to clean up, not just to "clean up."
- Ask your child if you can help.
- Ignore some annoying behavior. Don't reinforce negative behavior by giving it too much attention.
- Do nothing.
- Tackle one problem at a time. Correct one behavior at a time.
- Use your sense of humor.
- Give yourself time to grow and change.
- Be affectionate.
- Make sure the children are getting enough sleep.
- Use the Golden Rule for children. Do unto them as you would like to have done unto you.
- Convey respect.
- Overlook differences that don't really matter.
- Don't do for your children what they can do for themselves.
- Schedule family time.

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- Use "I" statements.
- Don't reward inappropriate behavior.
- Use encouragement and honest praise rather than blanket praise.
- Stop and think before you act.
- Don't make a big fuss over spills and accidents.
- Acknowledge positive behavior.
- Sometimes just listen and be sympathetic. You can be sympathetic to both sides.
- Be willing to change your mind.
- Say "yes" as much as possible.
- Get support and inspiration as a parent so that you remember you have choices.
- Continue to think of your child as an emotional equal and figure it out.
- Just say "no" to spanking.

At the end of the day, we want to preserve healthy, intimate relationships with our children into adulthood, while also giving them correct guidance during childhood. As the parent of adult children, my experience has been that a good way to do this is by engaging cooperation rather than by hitting or punishing. Some would argue that this dilutes authority, but that hasn't been my experience. It has been my ability to take responsibility as a parent, not harsh discipline, that has given me authority with my children. Harsh discipline produces compliance based on fear, which is not as binding as voluntary cooperation based on affection.

When I get confused about discipline, I think about what I would do in a similar situation with an adult friend. I would not slap my adult friend, for example, for spilling her drink. I would assume that she made an honest mistake. I would not punish my friend for acting immaturely in a group. Instead, I would try to understand and sympathize, would give her the benefit of the doubt, and would be eager to hear her side of the story. We give our friends a wide berth because we do not feel responsible for their behavior in the same way we do for our children's behavior. It requires a huge leap of faith to trust our children to their own destinies while we also guide them through ours. We love our children more than anyone else on earth, and we want to give them tools to be effective in the world. It makes sense to model compassion. It works.

****While this article contains valuable information, it is not on the API-approved article list and may contain some passages that do not follow API Philosophy. Please use your own discretion in reading these books or in considering any parenting philosophy.****

"Connections" Pendant, New for Mother's Day

Support peaceful parenting through the purchase of the stunning "Connections" pendant. Attachment Parenting International has partnered with Barb Lattin, owner of Little Things, to produce this original, hand-crafted sterling silver pendant, available exclusively from API .

Representing the connections evident in the lives of all women, the pendant is especially beautiful as a symbol of motherhood. The inner nest and its connections to the outer frame invoke powerful images of family bonds, interpersonal relationships, friendship networks, emotional support structures, and even spirituality. The stunning design embodies the name "Connections".

Each pendant, made entirely of sterling silver, measures 1" across and 1.5" in length. It is of substantial weight, yet light enough to wear daily. "Connections" will complement a t-shirt as well as a little black dress. Each pendant is individually hand-crafted, making it unique, and arrives strung on an adjustable black satin cord in a lovely purple gift box. An anti-tarnish strip is tucked under the cotton in the box.

"Connections" is an exclusive design created for Attachment Parenting International using the same care and artistic flair that Little Things customers have come to expect. Little Things will donate 50% of the proceeds to API, contributing to programs which offer support for families around the world.

A work at home mom, Barb Lattin started the first API group in Colorado five years ago. Soon after the birth of her third child, she started her business Little Things, and began selling her high-end handmade jewelry online at www.LittleThingsJewelry.com . She is honored and excited to be able to make jewelry, and at the same time support an organization she believes in with all her heart.

Only a limited number of pendants can be crafted in time for Mother's Day delivery, so order yours today!

"At the end of the day, we want to preserve healthy, intimate relationships with our children into adulthood, while also giving them correct guidance during childhood".



Upcoming Events

TBA - API Family Day

April 30 - Spank Out Day USA, Local Events Supported
by API-Stark Co.

May 13 - Mother's Day

Other Resources

API has approved a list of articles regarding positive discipline.
They may be found at:
www.attachmentparenting.org/books&articles.shtml and include:

- "Ten Reasons Not to Hit Your Kid" by Jan Hunt
- "Punished by Rewards" by Ron Brandt
- "Natural Consequences" by Rue Kream
- "The Case Against Time Out" by Peter Haiman
- "Children Really Don't Misbehave" by Thomas Gordon

Our Newest Attachment

API of Stark Co. welcomes our newest baby!
Isabelle Anna Corey was born to Glenn, Jennifer,
and Sophia. Congratulations!!

Websites:

The Center for Effective
Discipline
www.stophitting.com

Project No Spank
www.nospank.net

10 Reasons Not to Hit
Your Child
www.askdrsears.com/html/6/T062100.asp

Contacts:

API-Stark Co. Leaders:

Traci Singree -
harmonydesoleil@
verizon.net

Amy Dunnerstick -
apmammaof2@yahoo.com

Dedra Keoshian - (also
Secretary & Newsletter
Editor)
dedrakeo@yahoo.com

Book Librarian:
Jennifer Hall -
halljene@muc.edu

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Discussion Group:

[http://groups.yahoo.com/gro
up/APIofStarkCounty/.html](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/APIofStarkCounty/.html)

Our Mission

API's mission is to promote parenting methods that create strong, healthy emotional bonds between children and their parents. These methods nurture and fulfill a child's need for trust, empathy, and affection, providing a lifelong foundation for healthy, enduring relationships. Through education, support, advocacy, and research, API seeks to strengthen

families and increase awareness of the importance of secure attachment, ultimately helping to reduce or prevent child abuse, behavioral disorders, criminal acts

Support API Through Membership

By becoming a member of API, you help reach other parents and professionals through education, support, advocacy, and research. Our efforts touch the lives of parents worldwide through local support groups, our quarterly publication, *Attachment Parenting: The Journal of API*, this newsletter, and national advocacy efforts. In addition, your membership donation contributes to innovative projects such as the creation of a comprehensive Attachment Parenting curriculum, the formation of strategic alliances with like-minded organizations, the expansion of our network of AP-Friendly Professionals, and the upgrade of our Web site to become the premier Attachment Parenting online community.

Benefits of Individual / Family Membership, which is \$35 per year, include:

- Four issues of *Attachment Parenting: The Journal of API*
- Membership in local parent support (mention your local group when you join and \$15 of your membership is retained for use in your local community)
- Discounts and early registration for API conferences and select other events
- Share your passion; opportunity to become an API Leader, start a new support group, or donate your skills to the API Headquarters Team upcoming events or a special offer that promotes a new product.

"As long as the child will be trained not by love, but by fear, so long will humanity live not by justice, but by force. As long as the child will be ruled by the educator's threat and by the father's rod, so long will mankind be dominated by the policeman's club, by fear of jail, and by panic of invasion by armies and navies."

BORIS SIDIS , from "A lecture on the abuse of the fear instinct in early education" in *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* , 1919