



# An Approach to Discipline

## New York CHAMP/APSAC Webinar

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## Conflicts of Interest

None

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## Acknowledgements

I'm grateful to Barbara Howard, MD, John Stirling, MD, Harwood Egan, MD and Adam Zolotar, MD, DPH for sharing their materials and ideas, and so contributing to this presentation.

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## Objectives

Participants will:

- Know more about alternative disciplinary strategies
- Learn how to share ideas about discipline with their patients' families
- Learn how to incorporate advice about discipline into a busy practice

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## Background

- Corporal punishment (CP) → harm
- Harsh verbal punishment → harm
- Based on science: CP ~ child maltreatment (CM)
- AAP – no spanking <2, no use of implement, encourage alternatives
- Children's rights – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 'Spanking' or 'hitting'?
- **Our goal:** help parents with disciplinary approaches to optimize children's social and emotional development

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## Definitions

- **Discipline** (Latin *disciplina* - instruction, teaching, training, education)
  - Training to develop self-control, character, orderliness and efficiency
- **Punishment**
  - Imposing one's will on another through harshness with the goal of obedience being foremost
- **Spanking**
  - Striking the buttocks to cause physical pain, generally with open hand
  - If with an implement: paddling, belting, caning, whipping

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## Methods of CP – Increasing Severity

- Open hand on buttocks, hand, leg
- Open hand on face, head
- Hitting with closed fist
- Hitting with implement
- Enforced standing, starvation, cold bathing

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## Prevention

- Timing: by 6 mos. of age
  - By 8 mos., 8% of parents report hitting (Zolotar et al. *Front Psychiatry* 2011)
- Help build healthy parent-child relationships

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## Help Build Healthy Parent – Child Relationships

- **The heart of our work, the foundation for discipline**
- Consider parent's abilities, needs, interests
- Parents need to understand child's behavior
- Recognize and respond to child's cues/needs. Being present
- Encourage open, clear communication
- Time in
- Respect child's right to express emotions, appropriately
  - Hurting someone or oneself or damaging property - not OK

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## Prevention

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- Identify and address risky situations

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## Prevention



- Structured screening
    - e.g., the Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK) model ([www.SEEKwellbeing.org](http://www.SEEKwellbeing.org))
- Do you often feel your child is difficult to take care of?  
Do you sometimes find you need to slap or hit your child?  
Do you wish you had more help with your child?
- Identify and help address risk factors for CP and physical abuse
    - Major stress, poor coping, substance abuse, intimate partner violence (IPV)

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## Brief Intervention



**Reflect**  
**Empathize**  
**Assess**  
**Plan**

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## SEEK Algorithm

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## Prevention

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- Help build healthy parent-child relationships
- Identify and address risky situations
- Anticipatory guidance

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## Assessment - Understanding Parents

- Parent may believe CP is necessary, even good

### Why?

- How they were raised
- Limited understanding of child development, behavior
- Don't know alternatives
- Stress - struggling to cope, little support, substance use, IPV
- Low IQ
- Religious belief

- **Understand and address the basis for parent's stance**

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## Getting a Foot in the Door

- "I was hit and I turned out OK!"
  - Yes, but we've learned better ways to teach kids.
  - True, but you may have been even more wonderful.
- "He knows not to wet the bed. Seems he want to annoy me!"
  - Can we talk about that?
- "Nothing works! I don't know what to do!"
  - I hear you. Let's see what can work.

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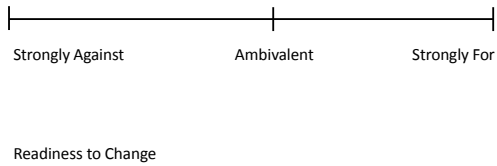
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## Parents' Stance Toward CP – on a Spectrum



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## Motivational Interviewing

- Identify where parent is in 'readiness to change'
  - Pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance
- Motivate
- Elicit their ideas of what to try
- **Jointly** develop a plan – attainable goals
- Follow up, affirm any progress
- Bolster commitment to change

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## Child Factors Contributing to Difficult Behavior

- Difficult temperament
- ADHD
- Intellectual/learning disability
- Hearing problem
- Language disorder
- Sleep deprivation
- Mood disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Traumatic experiences

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## Assessment - Talking with Children, Youth

- How do you get along with people at home?
- What kind of things do you do with them?
- What do you do if you're feeling bad?
- **All kids sometimes behave badly.**
  - What happens when you behave badly?
  - What would you like to see happen?
  - What do you think you could do differently?
  - May we talk together with your mom/dad about this?

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## A Light Touch

- No preaching, admonishing
- Time out for parent ("give yourself a break!")
- Convey concern about hitting
  - Child learns the way to deal with angry feelings is to hit
  - Doesn't work well
  - There are better ways to teach \_\_\_\_
- Expand parent's 'tool box'

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## Assess

- What kind of things make it necessary to spank \_\_\_?
- Why do you think \_\_\_ does that?
- What works? For how long?
- If hitting: how does it make you feel?
- What else have you tried?
- What else could you try?

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## General Points

- Health professionals and parents as role models
- Educate parent about normal development and behavior;  
acknowledge it can be challenging. Reasonable expectations
- Kids do need rules/limits, and flexibility
- Use least intrusive approach that works (e.g., give child choices)
- Nothing works overnight!

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## More General Points

- Prioritize what to work on
  - Dangerous, destructive behaviors
- Planned ignoring
- Extinction – temper tantrums
- Perfect the art of distraction
- Family meetings - older kids
  - Respectful way to discuss issues – positive and negative

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## Positive Discipline

- **Bad behavior – an opportunity to teach or process with child**

- Why child behaved that way?
- What was he feeling?
- Disapprove the behavior, not the child.
- What does she think he could do better?
- Suggest alternatives.

- **Consequences**

- Limits/rules – agreed to in advance (e.g., withdrawal of privilege, grounding)
- Proportionate to the problem, developmentally appropriate
- Apply consistently, promptly

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## Positive Reinforcement

- Regular implicit positive reinforcement
- Praise – “catch her being good” and neutral behavior
- Reward – promptly
- Reinforce intermittently
- Gradually taper the reward

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## Time's Up for Time Out?

- Used excessively
- Used improperly
- People continue to interact
- Child appears to enjoy it
- Child too strong to restrain
- Location frightens/reinforces
- Can shame child
- **Often doesn't work**

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## Time Out

- **Goal:** to help child calm down, or a consequence for bad behavior
- 2 - 7 years of age
- For up to 2-3 problems at a time
- Only 1 warning
- Place in uninteresting place
- 1 minute/year; use timer
- If child leaves, return to place, restrain, playpen
- Once calm, discuss behavior, alternatives

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## “Beat the Clock” - For Habitual Dawdling

- Set timer for reasonable period
- No reminders
- If task done by bell → reward
- If not → no reward

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## Family Meetings

- Make it formal.
- Make it regular.
- Make sure each person is heard, no judgment or interruption.
- Discuss family activities, problems.
- Express appreciation for each other.
- Use problem solving strategy if necessary.
- Write down conclusions.
- Make it fun!

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### When to Refer?

- Discipline – often can be addressed by PCP
- If a persistent and/or severe problems .....
- If other problems, such as parental substance abuse .....
- Know your community resources
  - Behavioral health specialist

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### A Challenge - Sam

Ms. Adams brings in 4 year old Sam for a check up.  
She describes "occasionally popping him."  
Yesterday, "He got a whipping. Broke my vase."

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### Getting a Foot in the Door

- Does hitting \_\_\_\_ work? For how long?
  - Acknowledge CP → immediate compliance for a specific behavior
- How do you feel after hitting \_\_\_\_?
- Can we discuss other ways to discipline \_\_\_\_?
  - We've learned a lot about what's good for kids.
  - I think you want \_\_\_\_ to behave out of a sense of what's right, not because he's scared of you.

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### When to Report to CPS?

- 24-hour rule – a bruise lasting this long
- Any physical injury
- Hitting the face, head
- Other concerns for abuse or neglect
- Severe repeated beatings – with implement and parent resistant to alternatives

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### Corporal Punishment in the Workplace

- Have a policy of ‘no hitting’; post signs
- **Approach**
  - Empathize
  - Convey that hitting is not allowed here
  - Convey wish to help

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### Corporal Punishment in Public

- Awkward, fear of intervening
- What’s the worst thing that’s likely to happen?
- **Suggested approach**
  - Empathize
  - Convey wish to help, especially as a health professional
  - Suggest getting help from child’s doctor or nurse

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## Advocacy

- Parents
- Colleagues, students, residents, institution
- Community
  - Local, state, national

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## Thank You!

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## Resources for Parents

- <http://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/>
- <http://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/positive-discipline/strict-parenting>
- Fay J & Fay C. 2015. *Love and Logic Magic for Early Childhood: Practical Parenting from Birth to Six Years.*
- Cline F & Fay J. 2006. *Parenting Teens With Love And Logic: Preparing Adolescents for Responsible Adulthood.*
- Cray, 1993. *Without Spanking and Spoiling: A Positive Approach to Toddler and Preschool Guidance.*
- Mazlish E & Faber A. 2012. *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk.*
- Faber A & Mazlish E. 1987. *How to Be the Parent You Wanted to Be.*
- Nelsen J. 2006. *Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Problem-Solving Skills.*

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## The Science of Punishment

### Drug trial criteria:

- Phase I: is it **safe**?
- Phase II: is it **effective**?
- Phase III: is it **more effective** than readily available alternatives?

John Stirling, MD

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