



Strategies for Mothers Navigating Difficult Behaviours

*‘When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions,
it’s our job to share our calm, not join the chaos.’ (L.R. Knost)¹*

When supporting mothers, PEACE Program counsellors may be asked for help to navigate difficult behaviours in ways that allow children and youth to feel heard, valued and supported, even when they make mistakes. This section focuses on educating mothers with practical parenting strategies. As a starting point, PEACE Program counsellors may wish to refer to page 257 of the [PEACE Program Toolkit](#) on ‘*Help with Behaviour and Parenting*’.

Positive Discipline Strategies

“When we use punishment, our children are robbed of the opportunity to develop their own inner discipline – the ability to act with integrity, wisdom, compassion and mercy when there is no external force holding them accountable for what they do. Discipline, on the other hand, is not something we do to children. It is a process that gives life to learning; it is restorative, and it invites reconciliation. Its goal is to instruct, to teach, to guide, and to help children develop self-discipline – an ordering of the self from the inside, not an imposition from the outside. In giving life to our children’s learning, we are concerned not with mere compliance, but with inviting our children to delve deep into themselves and reach beyond what is required or expected.” (Barbara Coloroso)²

In this short [90-second video](#) author, former teacher and parenting resource Barbara Coloroso articulates simply the difference between discipline and punishment.

¹ L.R. Knost (as cited by [GoodReads](#))

² Barbara Coloroso. (1994) *Kids Are Worth It; Raising resilient, responsible, compassionate kids*. Penguin Random House Company: Toronto (ON), Page78-79.



This article, [*The Difference between Discipline and Punishment*](#), shares scenarios and examples of positive discipline, and discusses the difference between discipline and punishment.

Barbara Coloroso outlines the four steps of discipline³ as:

1. Show children what they have done wrong.
2. Give them ownership of the problem.
3. Help them find ways of solving the problem.
4. Leave their dignity intact.

Within any conversation about parenting and discipline, it is likely for the idea of consequences to arise. What are consequences and how might mothers utilize them as a part of their positive discipline strategy? PEACE Program counsellors can share with mothers that many parents, regardless of environmental circumstances, have a difficult time coming up with useful and timely consequences. If mothers are struggling with this, ask them to take a step back, remind themselves of their strengths and recall the four steps of discipline. Remind mothers that learning to effectively discipline a child is a process that takes practice and patience, and it is okay if mothers don't get it right all the time.

Barbara Coloroso⁴ suggests using the acronym R.S.V.P., if the natural consequences of a child's actions are non-existent or do not enhance a child's learning. To clarify, natural consequences are the consequences that just happen. Reasonable consequences take a bit of thoughtful reasoning to come up with, but not a lot of energy from the parent and should not feel like a struggle.

R – Is it Reasonable? Does it make sense and is it appropriate?

S – Is it Simple?

V – Is it valuable as a learning tool?

P – Is it practical?

³ Coloroso, B. (1994) *Kids are Worth It*.

⁴ Coloroso, B. (1994) *Kids are Worth It*.



The following list is taken from a book by Faber and Mazlish (2002) *How to Talk So Your Kids Will Listen and Listen So Your Kids Will Talk*⁵ which shares practical and alternative tools to punishment.

1. Point out a way to be helpful.
2. Express strong disapproval (without attacking a child's character)
3. State Your Expectations
4. Show the child how to make amends.
5. Offer a choice.
6. Take Action.
7. Allow the child to experience the consequences of his misbehaviour.

Techniques for Supporting Reconnection & Repair in Mother-Child Relationships

Being a parent is hard work. All mother-child relationships involve conflict at times. In the time PEACE Program counsellors spend with mothers, it may be helpful to share practical tools for reconnection and repair with their children and youth after conflicts and disagreements.

To bring up a topic like this in a strength-based way, PEACE Program counsellors may ask mothers, *'Do you ever find yourself wondering what to do after you have lost your cool or you and your child/youth have experienced a conflict?'* Or, *'If you are feeling stuck in the pattern of these difficult interactions with your child, I'm happy to share some ideas about how to begin to resolve conflict and communicate about challenges together.'*

This section provides PEACE Program counsellors with four steps to share with mothers looking to reconnect and repair with their child or youth after conflict.

Four Steps to Reconnect with Your Child

1. **Apologize** – Model this for your children, even when it feels hard. You are the bigger, older, wiser, mature adult on duty. You might say, *"I'm sorry that I used my angry voice when I asked*

⁵ Faber, A & Mazlish, E (2002) *How to Talk so Kids will Listen and listen so kids will talk*.



you to put away your toys, “I apologize that I got frustrated when you refused to help me clean up after dinner,” or, “I’m a good mom and I had a hard moment, I’m sorry that I got frustrated.”

2. **Take responsibility for your actions** – Be specific about what was not okay about what you did or said. Communicate how you contributed to the conflict or disagreement using ‘I’ statements. Mothers might say, *“I was frustrated, but it’s not ok for me to yell at you when I feel that way. I am going to try it again and use more respectful words this time.*
3. **Give the child/youth space.** Let children and youth feel their feelings about what happened. This may take a bit of time. Mothers might say, *“I understand if you feel upset and want some space. I will be in the kitchen and will listen if you want to tell me how that made you feel.”*
4. **Offer Reconnection** when they are ready. Offering reconnection communicates to a child or youth that the relationship is safe and that you can move back into connection and playfulness. Mothers might say, *“Whenever you’re ready, just let me know. I would love to play a game or help you work on your homework.”*

Additional Ideas for Reconnecting Phrases for Mothers

- *“I’m sorry that I got frustrated. I’m a good mom and I was having a hard moment.”*
- *“I shouldn’t have said that. I was wrong. Can we sit down and talk about what happened?”*
- *“I’m sorry, can I try that again? I think I need a re-do.”*
- *“I was frustrated, but it’s not ok for me to yell at you like that. I’m sorry.”*
- *“I can tell that hurt you. I want to change that. Can we talk?”*
- *“I got distracted. I want to hear you. I’m listening. What you are saying matters to me.”*
- *“I got pretty defensive there, I’m sorry. Can you tell me again?”*



Benefits of Reconnecting

- Reconnecting teaches kids that everyone makes mistakes. Moreover, it gives children permission to admit when they have done something wrong.
- Reconnecting teaches kids how to take responsibility for the things that they have done that have hurt others.
- Reconnecting teaches kids to recognize and care about the impact of their actions on others.
- Reconnecting moves us back toward our resources, strengths, and it orients us towards relationship, connection, and play.

Additional Resources for Mothers

Mothers of children and youth in the PEACE Program are often looking for resources to support them to be the best mother they can be. The list of resources below is not exclusive and BCSTH is hopeful it can be a living document with the option to add great resources, books, podcast and website links as they are recommended by PEACE Programs around the province. Please reach out to info@bcsth.ca if you have a resource to add to this list and we will be grateful for your input.

Books

- Borba, M. (2003) *No More Misbehavin: 38 difficult behaviours and how to stop them*. Jossey-Bass.
- Coloroso, B. (2010) *Kids are Worth It: Raising Resilient, Responsible, Compassionate Kids*. Penguin Canada. (Available in the [BCSTH library](#))
- Faber, A. & Mazlish, E. (2012) *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk*. Scribner. (Available in the [BCSTH library](#))
- Lansbury, J. (2014) *No Bad Kids: Toddler Discipline without Shame*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.



- Siegel, D. (2018) *The Yes Brain: How to Cultivate Courage, Curiosity, and Resilience in Your Child*. Bantam. (Available in the [BCSTH library](#))
- Siegel, D. & Payne Bryson, T. (2016) *No Drama Discipline: The Whole Brain way to calm the chaos and nurture your child's developing mind*. Bantam. (Available in the [BCSTH Library](#))

Websites

- [Deborah MacNamara, PhD, Developmental Science translated into Practical Love.](#)
- [Good Inside with Dr. Becky, Child Psychologist and Parenting Educator.](#)
- [Janet Lansbury: Elevating Childcare](#)

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