

NEWSLETTER

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NO SCREAMING, NO SPANKING!

Late yesterday afternoon at the market I saw a mother, scream at and threaten her two-year-old. The little guy was at first startled, then terrified, and started to scream himself.

In her defense the mother was obviously pregnant, no doubt tired, and at the end of her rope. I wasn't there at the beginning of the incident but probably the little boy was whining because she yelled, "If you don't shut up I'm going to leave you here all by yourself!"

Then the mother did something smart. She picked up the screaming child, left her shopping cart, and took him out of the store. He was still crying loudly but I could hear her say, "I'm sorry I scared you, I won't leave you alone."

Just about every parent I know loves his or her child and wants to protect the child from being hurt. So why do such scenes occur? Why does a parent scream the very thing that scares a child most?

Here are some suggestions for preventing VERBAL ABUSE:

Don't let yourself get to the end of your rope. Be aware of how you feel before you are about to lose it. Although this takes "awareness practice", getting in touch with your own feelings is a useful parenting technique.

Remember my slogan, BEFORE YOU EXPLODE OR DROP, STOP!

If you're tired, don't go to the store. If you're overwhelmed, get help. Most of us are unwilling to ask for help or we don't know how. But it's not out of line to ask a neighbor to watch your child while you go to the market or ask that person to pick up a few essential groceries for you. You can return the favor.

If you're about to lose your temper at home it's better to stop what you are doing with your child and leave the room (after making sure the child is safe, of course). Yes, the child may cry at being plopped into the crib or playpen but nothing is worse than being confronted with an out-of-control parent.

Prevent problems. Don't let your child get overtired or hungry. Simplify your life and don't try to do the impossible. Don't expect too much of yourself or your child.

Parents are teachers. You don't want to teach your children how to have a temper tantrum or that screaming and threatening are acceptable behaviors.

Is verbal abuse as harmful to children as spanking?

Chronic yelling or screaming or threatening is poor parenting because 1) Such disciplinary techniques don't work. 2) Children are frightened by these parental behaviors. 3) Eventually the kids will tune you out and start behaving as obnoxiously as you do.

Screaming like spanking HURTS. If you had seen the little boy I saw yesterday you would know how frightened he was. Kids know they are helpless and dependent on you and your threats or out of control behaviors are terrifying.

What if you did spank or scream on occasion? Not to worry. The majority of US parents admit they spank and lose their temper sometimes. I certainly did. Apologize, say you love the child and you will try to be a better parent in the future.