

This is how to discipline a toddler

BY GEOFFREY MUTEGEKI

As your child starts school, one of the greatest lessons for her is to learn to live in harmony with other people.

Psychologists say consistency is important for young children.

If two toddlers fight over dolls, one should find a consistent solution, which children will adopt as a solution to their bickering.

No matter how badly your child is behaving, hitting them should not be an option. Spansks and slaps teach children to be afraid of their parents.

"They do not know what they are doing; beating them would be a waste of time. They just need to be shown how to play safely and together," Michael Musinguzi, a counselling psychologist, says.

And even though you would never intend to hurt your child, it is easy to lose control when you are angry. If you feel like hitting your child, give yourself a time-out, until the feeling subsides.

"Think of discipline as a form of teaching for your

A toddler may need to hear something a hundred times before they get the message

child and not a form of punishment," Musinguzi urges.

Rose Banura, an early childhood development researcher, explains that the best method of disciplining a child is by using affection-oriented techniques, which will also help the child learn to socialise.

The technique involves reasoning with the child about the rules; the parent can point out the consequences of the child's action to her, show or instill in the child the responsibility and concern for others in order to prevent her from doing the same thing again.

"A parent can say: 'Do not pull Mary's hair. It hurts



Do not discipline to punish, but to teach

her!" Or: "Stop throwing the toys under the chair. You will struggle getting it out," Banura advises.

Also, if John is always pulling Kate's hair the parent or teacher should tell him: "What you did was bad," not

"John, you are a bad boy," Banura says.

She explains that such statements draw the child to the feelings and emotions of other people. This will encourage the child to reflect on her own behaviour and then later help them understand rules.

She says parents and teachers need to be firm, but gentle when disciplining the children and to portray affection. Psychologists also say the parent should set rules that are consistent.

"If you find a child removing bottles from the cupboard and throwing them out, make him put them back. After he has put back them back, tell him to play with toys, not bottles. This will show the child that there are always consequences for their actions," Banura says.

She urges parents to teach children how to get along with others and stay safe.

Maureen Katusiime, of Childhelp Centre in Kampala, says praising a child is also important, in instilling values.

"If you discipline your child and later find him doing the right thing, praise them. This motivates a child to continue doing the right thing," Katusiime says.

Parents are advised to use commands, without necessarily

barking at the toddler.

When he misbehaves, he does not need a lecture. Give him a firm "no," perhaps with a quick explanation such as "you could get hurt" or "that is not a toy." Then redirect him to a more desirable activity. Toddlers have short attention spans, so he will probably be happy to move on.

Why to avoid time-outs

Time-out is a form of behavioural modification that involves temporarily separating a person from an environment where unacceptable behaviour has occurred.

Time-outs can be helpful, but few children understand the concept, until they are at least three years old. For a younger child, time-outs are confusing and frustrating.

It is advisable that parents make it as easy as possible for the child to do the right thing. Try to avoid putting the toddler in situations he cannot handle. For example, do not take him on long shopping trips when they are tired and hungry.

As a parent, Banura says, it is your job to reinforce the lessons with consistency, patience and compassion. A toddler may need to hear something literally a hundred times before he gets the message.



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