

Kindness, Boundaries and Consciousness

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES PROGRAMMES

LAAM

 ALDEAS
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Foreword

All children and young people have the right to respect for physical and mental integrity and to protection against all forms of violence. Unfortunately, violence is taking on new dimensions in all environments, affecting physical and mental health. In addition to this, relationships between adults and children and young people are approached from a hierarchical and adult-centred perspective, promoting relationships of power leading –in some cases– to unhealthy relationships.

In this regard, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges the primary role of parents or caregivers in the upbringing and education of children. It recognises that parents and caregivers are not to treat children as their property, though. Additionally, this Convention (Article 19) addresses the need to take appropriate measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation.

SOS Children's Villages Latin America and the Caribbean (LAAM) has a clear commitment to promoting child safeguarding through alternative parenting styles, in order to ensure realisation of children's rights and develop their full potential. Along these lines, implementing actions for families and caregivers to raise children with respect to secure their rights and dignity is promoted.

The targets set forth in our Child Protection Policy linked to positive discipline are:

- To recognise the best interest of the child as our primary consideration
- To take children's rights into consideration
- To protect children from all forms of abuse, abandonment and violence
- To leverage children's autonomy and responsibility for their development and protection
- To promote participation and thinking in terms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours

In this way, promoting good treatment and positive discipline was necessary for children to be actively involved in their upbringing, education and development –processes that are helpful for their autonomy, self-esteem, safety, identity, as well as for respectful, assertive and non-violent bonding with other people, inside and outside programmes.

That is the framework for this Guide on Positive Discipline, which is the result of joint efforts by *Espirales Consultoría de Infancia* (international consultancy firm specialising in childhood), SOS Children's Villages International Office region LAAM and National Associations in SOS LAAM.

This guide intends to be a frame of reference and support to all Member Associations in Latin America & the Caribbean and to other regions interested in the subject. We are confident that this material will be very helpful and, therefore, ask you to influence assertively in developing skills and affective bonds between adults and children.


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Introduction

SOS Children's Villages Latin America and the Caribbean (LAAM) works to promote child safeguarding through alternative parenting styles, ensuring realisation of children's rights and developing their full potential.

To do this, programmes in the organisation working with a rights-based approach under the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy are promoting strategies for core care co-workers and families of origin to raise children in their care with respect, securing their rights and dignity with a good treatment and positive parenting approach.

This guide intends to be a practical guide to help caregivers, technical staff and families of origin to raise children in their care with a good treatment and positive parenting approach through one of the key tools: **positive discipline**.

For this, it is important to understand the context of the organisation. SOS Children's Villages works with children without parental care or at risk of losing it. Additionally, working with families of origin and communities is essential. To work with our target group, alternative care and community intervention programmes are being developed.

Therefore, SOS Children's Villages works with children who:

- ✓ have suffered or might suffer human rights violations;
- ✓ have witnessed their full development not entirely secured;
- ✓ might have suffered emotional, cognitive and/or social damage;
- ✓ have suffered neglect, maltreatment and abuse, forcing many of them to develop dissociative coping mechanisms; and
- ✓ might experience emotional ambivalence: they need to have their bonds with families of origin protected but at the same time embrace alternative care from SOS Children's Villages staff through programmes.

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This guide includes tools to handle situations that might take place in this context, involving children with unique stories and experiences. It is important to point out that these tools need to be handled by highly sensitive adults with emotional stability –only achieved through self-care and the ability to express and contain emotions, and properly trained on the specifics of the children they work with.

Goodwill and affection of adults are not sufficient. Preparation, consciousness and technical support resources from the organisation are required to ensure implementation of the proposals contained in this guide.

Chapter 2

Why use positive discipline in child care in SOS Children's Villages programmes?

Positive discipline aims to promote our consciousness and self-care so that we, adults, build strong and respectful bonds with the children we educate. We understand education as a long-term process to provide children with life skills and make them feel safe and appreciated¹.

When teaching with a positive discipline approach, we need to consider some key principles. The most important principles are:

1. Understand that **behaviours of children (and adults) always have a purpose**. This purpose is related to the behaviour and not to the recipient of the behaviour. Children behave not "just because" or "to drive families and teachers crazy." Some of the most important goals can be:
 - a. Emotional connection and a sense of belonging: a sense of belonging to the family, to primary emotional bonds –these are essential to survive: to be loved, accepted and chosen by those who raise them.
 - b. Identity and relevance: children want to understand the world and themselves. Give voice to their needs, wishes and longings. This starts from the time they are babies and lasts a lifetime.
 - c. Meet their basic needs (food, sleep, appreciation, affection) that have been unmet or overlooked by us as adults.
 - d. Feel useful; feel that their existence has a meaning and makes a contribution to the people around them.



Make
kindness
and
firmness
compatible.

Therefore, there is always a purpose related to their inner self. The only problem is that they sometimes choose inappropriate ways to show it. What is important is to be part of the children's world. When someone says that a child "misbehaves," it comes from an adult perspective without taking into account the child's experience –it may be lack of motivation, discouragement, boredom or sadness. Based on positive discipline, we are not questioning the reason for the behaviour but looking for more positive and effective ways to meet that goal.

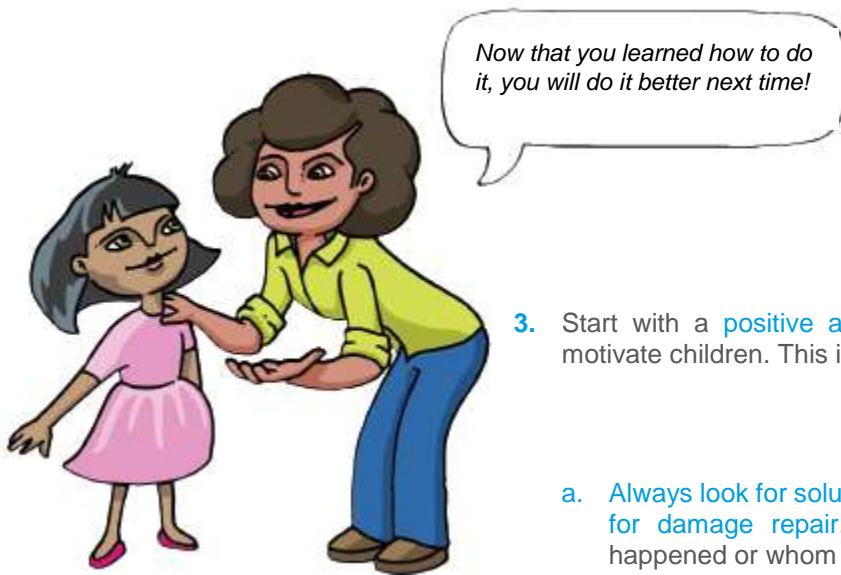
2. Attempt to **make kindness and firmness compatible**. Teaching with a positive discipline approach ensures child protection for three reasons:
 - a. It keeps emotional bonds –essential for the full development of the child and for living in a family and at home;
 - b. It excludes any form of physical or emotional violence; and
 - c. It does not challenge the norms and boundaries but states that these are a children's right as they ensure a safe environment for their full development. Specifically, children need boundaries for their:
 - **Physical protection** (physical protection, food, exercise, etc.).

¹ Positive discipline is based on the theories of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikus, updated and adapted to teachers and families by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott, among other authors.

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- **Emotional independence** (safety, allow for separation, allow for mistakes).
- **Social integration** (respect of human rights, rules of coexistence, non-violent conflict resolution).

Teaching with a positive discipline approach is one step further, promoting a teaching model where boundaries are set with firmness and kindness, respecting children's rights and their emotional needs, and keeping the emotional bond with families and their homes. It is not about setting rules but raising consciousness about how to do it. Establishing mutual respect with democratic education and regulated freedom allows for recognition of the rights and needs of both children and adults. Children should be corrected with dignity and respect, recognising our needs (clarity when setting rules and assurance that these are understood) and their needs (a loving and protective environment).



3. Start with a **positive approach** to encourage and motivate children. This is built upon three pillars:

- a. **Always look for solutions to problems raised and for damage repair.** Do not focus on why it happened or whom to blame but on how to fix it.

- b. **See mistakes as an opportunity for growth, learning and strengthening emotional bonds.** We all make mistakes, children and adults. These mistakes teach us a lesson. It is important to learn from them. That is why punishment is not considered, for learnings and mistakes should not be penalised. Legal and natural consequences are set out rather than punitive punishment. For example, if a person soils the floor, he/she is reasonably expected to clean the mess. If a person destroys an object, he/she is expected to do something appropriate for their age to repair the item. For example, a five-year-old boy may draw a picture of the repaired chair and give it to the repairer; an eight-year-old girl may bring the toolbox and help the repairer; a teenager may try to repair the chair or take it to a carpentry... The same applies to emotional aspects. If a child or adolescent "breaks up" the atmosphere of safety and well-being at home, he/she will have to "fix it" according to their abilities with the support of adults: a teenage girl may help her brother –previously yelled at by her– with his homework; a child may write an apology letter expressing how he feels taken care of and how he wants to care for...
- c. **Promote appreciation for what has been received, recognition of the bond and validation of emotions.** In this way, positive bonds, children's capacity for empathy, leadership and participation in the educational process are promoted.

See mistakes as an opportunity for growth, learning and strengthening emotional bonds.

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Equally important as the key principles is understanding that in the work context of SOS Children's Villages, **positive discipline can only be possible under the following conditions:**

Safe
environment
and
conscious
kindness

- i. Create a **safe environment** where an education relationship takes place, either at home between families and children or in a shelter between caregivers and children in their care. This safe environment includes a physical and protective environment, an emotionally warm and positive environment, conscious adults and children leading their own lives.
- ii. **Involvement and conscious kindness of adults:** Positive discipline is not possible without the involvement of conscious adults consistently promoting the following:

Respect
emotional
bonds and life
stories of both
adults and
children.

- a. their ability to show kindness physically, through words and actions, tailored to children's sensory channels
 - b. Consciousness about potential emotional bonds
 - c. Special care in the initial and final stages of any relationship or intervention In the case of alternative care homes, bear in mind time periods such as occasional visits outside or return to the family of origin, admission to or exit from a house, moving in between houses, etc. In the case of families, consider the admission of a sibling, the death of a family member or a child leaving the house, etc.
 - d. A conscious look into the pain of children, stemming from their life stories.
 - e. Respect for emotional bonds and life stories of both adults and children. It is especially important not to judge families of origin.
- iii. **Emotional strength of adults** is determined by:
 - a. Systematic self-care patterns: Only if adults can manage emotions from children's behaviour can they approach them with a positive discipline approach.
 - b. Development of a life story by each adult
 - c. Technical training and ongoing monitoring by the teams
 - d. Networking to provide a safe environment to adults when engaged in technical monitoring or necessary emotional support
 - e. Firmness in protective rules to ensure a safe environment for everyone living in it
 - iv. **Promotion of emotional networks** in SOS Children's Villages programmes: Only child rearing and education through networking allow for emotional strength of adults, their time-off and self-care, as well as the care of children in their care. And only child rearing through networking promotes social interest and positive bonding patterns.

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A challenge
for us as
adults... A
long-term
process

Teaching with a positive discipline approach has clear benefits for children and their families: it changes how adults relate to children, strengthening emotional bonds in families and at home and facilitating deep empathetic communication and respect for everyone's needs. It also encourages children to lead their own lives, their ability to understand and manage their emotions, as well as emotional integration of their thoughts, emotions and experiences. It teaches them positive ways to face difficulties and conflicts throughout their lives.

But we should not forget that positive discipline is [a challenge to us adults](#), for it makes us think of and take our time to decide on and be aware of our own story. And as any other challenge, positive discipline is always a [long-term process](#). Teaching with a positive discipline approach is not achieved in a couple of days or months. It means that we should be open to ongoing inner change as families and caregivers.

A change that makes us **stop, feel,
think and
act
differently.**

Chapter 3

Where is the boundary between discipline and violence?

3.1. Punishment, rules and consequences

A rule is a guideline that we adults use to create a safe environment and protect the children living there. **Rules are a right of children, not adults.** They are a right as they ensure their protection and full development. We adults as duty bearers regulate living together and set boundaries to ensure safety. Rules allow for a safe environment in families and at home for those who live there can develop to their fullest potential, as children and adults.

But to ensure protection, rules should be followed by everyone: not only children but adults too. From our perspective as adults, we sometimes believe that these guidelines are set by us and followed by them. However, it is important to remember two important points: First, if these are protective rules, they should protect children and adults alike. Second, if we want to teach children to follow these rules, they will learn from the example of significant adults following them in the first place. They should be followed by both children and adults. We set these rules without violence, involving everyone living in such environment.

Natural and logical consequences in life are derived from any action, applicable to both children and adults. They are originated and applied simultaneously as they are logical.

When a rule of discipline is set for a child, he/she needs help to see and understand natural consequences. For example, if a child treats another child badly, this naturally makes the second child feel angry and hurt and step away from him, while affecting the home environment. Helping the child to see this process is a key part of education. When adults decide to intervene –when necessary, they look for actions that meet the 5 R's:

5 R's for adult
actions:

Related

Respectful

Reasonable

Repairing

Realistic

- **Related:** Actions are always related to a child's behaviour.
- **Respectful:** Actions involve no humiliation, blame or allegation.
- **Reasonable:** Actions are always understandable for children.
- **Repairing:** Actions are intended for repairing any damage caused and finding a solution to the problem.
- **Realistic:** Children are expected to do the repair work when requested. If not well suited or absent, we will feel more frustrated and resentful toward ourselves.



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To ensure protection, rules should be followed by everyone.

Of all the actions that adults can take in the educational process, some are punishment. A punishment is a decision made by adults, in principle, with the educational intent to raise consciousness in children about their mistakes or misbehaviour. This decision causes discomfort in children, depriving them of something they like or forcing them to do something they dislike. Possible punishment used by adults includes violent and non-violent punishment.

For example, violent punishment includes hitting, insulting or humiliating a child in front of others. Non-violent punishment includes making the child clean the stains he left, not allowing the child to spend one day with friends or not allowing the child to watch TV one afternoon.

In some cases, a child displays a rather violent behaviour (hitting, insulting, challenging adults), and we ask ourselves how to take action following the 5 R's and considering the consequences. Children react aggressively when their brain loses the ability to regulate emotions, and we as adults need to act as a "borrowed" brain. It is the time to use force as protection rather than as violent punishment. We may need to stop and physically restrain a boy wanting to bite, a girl wanting to break something or adolescents wanting to hit each other. We may also need to use emotional restraint. We may take a girl who is insulting to her room and set boundaries firmly but kindly ("You are entitled to be angry. You are indeed! But we all want respect in this home, so I am not letting you insult your sister. You and I are going to your room so that you calm down"). We may confront an adolescent by providing them with clarity and structure ("I understand you have only been here for a week and you would rather be somewhere else. But I am treating you with respect, and I expect the same from you. If you lower your voice and use other words, I will listen to you as long as you need").

3.2. Lines we should never cross

Violent punishment is punishment using physical, verbal or emotional abuse, causing physical or emotional harm to children in the mistaken belief that this is education. This punishment involves abuse of power: from adult to child, from older to younger sibling –the group left alone. It is important to be aware that –deep down– we inflict punishment because we can. And that is not it... We do not use violent punishment on those we want but on those we can because violence cannot be used without a former situation of power likely to be abusive.

Corporal punishment includes slapping, spanking, clipping, blowing on the head, hair and ear pulling, pinching, locking in the dark, and the resulting humiliation. Verbal or emotional punishment includes insulting, public humiliation, comparing siblings or children from the same house, manipulating, blackmailing, blaming, etc. All corporal punishment involves emotional punishment, but some forms of emotional punishment are just as, if not, more harmful than corporal punishment. In fact, sometimes the way we act –and not the behaviour itself– makes the situation violent and harmful.

Although violent punishment –corporal or emotional– violates the rights of children, it is unfortunately a legally and socially accepted form of violence against children. Education not only disproves the use of violence but makes us reject it, if we want to be consistent. Yelling, humiliating and hitting are forms of violence either against a child or an adult.

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Violent punishment –corporal and psychological punishment– harms not only the child but also the families and households as it affects the emotional bond between the child and the adult, hinders communication and intimacy, blocks child's initiative and leadership in the home life, and legitimises violence as a way to relate to families in households.

And of course, violent punishment –corporal or emotional– damages the development of children. It damages their self-esteem and makes them feel scared, angry or powerless. It also internalises violent patterns of relationships. But it also legitimises three harmful educational messages:

- **It brings love and violence together.** "I do it for your own good. I do it because I love you," "I hit you because I am your father"... Children end up believing that the people who love them can hurt them just because they love them, when actually families and caregivers should be expected to hurt them the least and protect them the most.
- **It brings authority and violence together.** "I hit you to make you a good person." They learn to obey out of fear and submission and that authority is imposed through violence.
- **It teaches that violence is an acceptable way to solve conflicts.** "You behave so badly that you leave me no other choice than to hit you."

Boundaries families, caregivers and technical staff must maintain include:

- **Always question children's behaviours not themselves or their feelings.** Say to a child: "What you did was wrong" instead of "You are a bad person" or "I do not like when you do that" instead of "I am ashamed of you."
- **Do not talk badly about or judge the child's family.** Judging their family means judging them and makes them feel the need to stand up for them.
- **Never threaten children with leaving them** when they misbehave, for example, threatening them with leaving them on the street, locking the door to the house or leaving them in a shelter.
- **Do not make them feel bad for or guilty about what they did.** They have made a mistake but can learn from it and change. If they caused harm, they need to find ways to fix it. For example, always avoid phrases such as "You are such a dork. You always break everything" or "No wonder your parents left you. You are such a trouble maker."
- **There is never an excuse for hitting,** slapping or spanking. Ever!
- **Do not isolate, lock or exclude the child from the group or house.** Never keep children under lock and key or send them to the basement. Never leave children outside the house, at the door or the stairs.
- **Do not make basic needs conditional on good behaviour.** Never punish with food, sleep, play time or family outings.

Although violent punishment – corporal or emotional– violates the rights of children, it is unfortunately a legally and socially accepted form of violence against children.



Boundaries families, caregivers and technical staff must maintain



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When crossing these lines, we violate the rights of children in our care and inflict violence upon them. In addition, we damage the emotional bond with children and teach them with our own limitations to legitimise violence as a way to solve conflicts. We miss the opportunity to connect emotionally with their pain and help them cope with it. We have not been firm. We have lost control over our behaviour and our own emotions.



Chapter 4

Our experience as families and teachers

4.1. We raise people from our standpoint.

Just as we cook meals everyday with clean kitchen utensils and make sure rooms are neat and clean, we need to check and pay attention to how we interact with children: **our key tool to educate and convey values is ourselves. Teaching is a complex endeavour that requires tremendous responsibility.** That is why self-care is so important as to include a time and place to think about and analyse what is triggered within ourselves when interacting with each child and handling different behaviours. How do we manage our emotions triggered by children's behaviours?

How does this rule help in the development of these children?



The key question in this situation is, **"Am I reacting (to something on my own) or am I responding (to what the child is displaying)?"** Only then can we identify our role in the relationship ("I find her friendly because she reminds me of my sister," "I find her quite irritating because she reminds me a lot of one troubled girl we used to have," "I get really angry because I hate being disrespected") and their role ("She tries to please everyone because she fears that she will be left alone so I do not know how she actually feels," "He reacts like that because he feels insecure," "He may need to see that, despite being disrespectful, I will continue to show him respect while making the rules clear").

Our emotions, reactions, feelings and intuitions when it comes to children can be very insightful: insights into children and into what happens to us. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between these two types of insight –even if they take place simultaneously. Special attention should be paid to when we set and enforce rules.

Rules are to set boundaries for and give structure to children (and the rules for us adults are to give us structure in our life too). Structure is important because it provides security and makes the environment safe and predictable: we know what is (likely) going to happen later. Many children in the care of SOS Children's Villages come from risk situations (lack of safety) and lack of protective structures. Rules should be primarily concerned with improving lives. For this reason, in team meetings, conversations with teachers, technical staff, families and other responsible adults, the focus should be on **"How does this rule help in the development of these children?"**

It is very useful for adults (first) and children (second) to go through house rules from time to time to check what we want to achieve with them. Good rules are intended to provide security ("We all treat each other with respect," "Nobody hits"), help in the development ("At this age, we do household chores," "At that age, you can take a shower unsupervised") and develop autonomy ("In study time, you are supposed to study even if unsupervised by an adult at all times," "After school, you go straight back home even if you go walking")... Rules cannot be followed with blind obedience ("Do it because this is how it is, because we say so"). We need to pay special attention to obedience as a goal: if they learn to be "obedient" as children, they will continue to be "obedient" as adolescents but not to us (they will be "obedient" to friends, partners or bad influences). How do we want them to be as adults? Probably responsible, kind, autonomous and critical... And we do not want to be labelled as "obedient." Do we ("You are so obedient in your job!" "Your partner is very obedient!"). The main goal cannot be obedience but autonomy and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, we need to discuss and give reasons for these rules to children.

It is important to remember that rules are a child's right (intended to help them grow) and not an adult's right. They are neither to make our lives easier nor to avoid trouble. Although if appropriate and well-thought-out, rules also facilitate our work as added effect. Rules are a way to ensure the

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rights of all children in the household: the right to health (eat a variety of foods and sleep well); the right to education (go to school or learn to do household chores); the right to a decent and violence-free life (no acts of violence inside or outside the house); and the right to play (we may find ourselves saying, "Despite being so little, we need to figure out how Billy can play a while with all of you, who are rather older").

To discuss rules with children, especially when they display harmful behaviours, we need to look beyond behaviours. As mentioned in chapter 2, **behaviours of children (and adults) always have a purpose**. All human beings have similar deep motivations, including children:

Behaviours of children (and adults) always have a purpose.

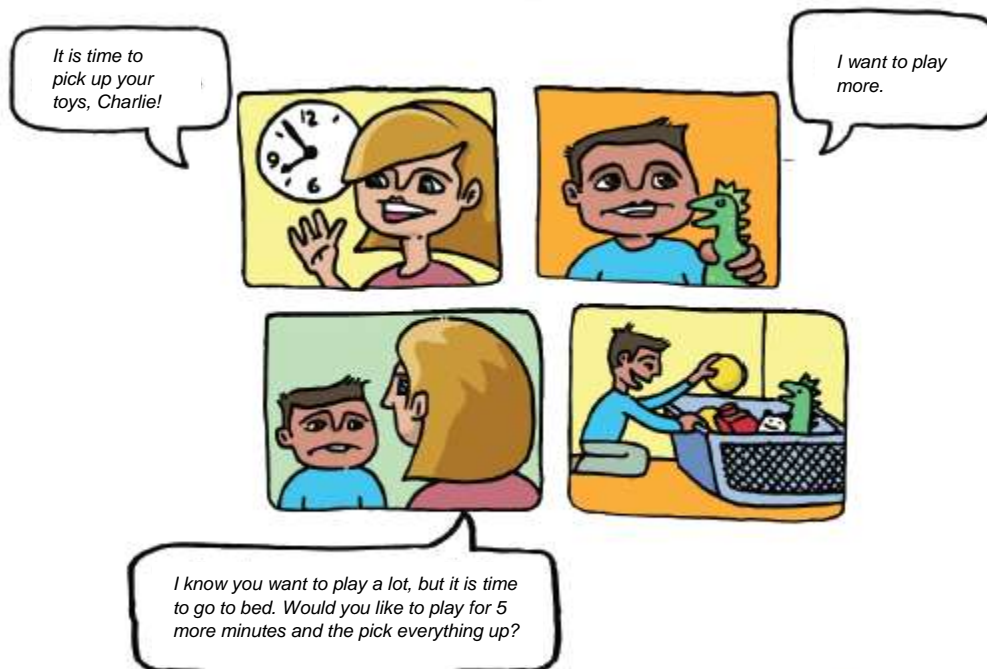
- We need to meet our biological needs (food, sleep...) and if unmet, we become irritable. Therefore, in certain situations it is more appropriate to feed or put children to bed and talk to them later when they are calm.
- We somehow need to feel safe, explore and test our limits to see how far we can go.
- We need connection and a sense of belonging but also autonomy and a sense of making our own decisions.
- We need to find a new meaning to our life and to what we do (and some actions –despite how awkward they seem to us– have a long-term meaning).
- We need to express ourselves and show who we are. We also need alone time for retreat and self-care (positive time-out).

4.2. Empathy as a key principle of positive discipline

Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, trying to find out how the situation is for that person with curiosity and respect. The following questions can be helpful:

- How is the child living that situation from his point of view?
- The child says he wants "A" (a specific thing or action), but what can be the reason behind it?

Tom says he wants to keep on playing when it is time to pick up the toys. Perhaps he wants to have fun (reason to be in a pleasant situation), make their own decisions (reason for autonomy) and know if he is allowed to keep on playing (reason for respect and a sense of belonging). If this is our approach, we can better understand the situation and provide options within the rules: "Of course, Tom, I know that you love to play with toys and that you want to let me know when you are ready to pick them up, but it is time to go to bed. Would you like to play for five more minutes and then pick it up? How would you like to pick up the toys: figurines first and cars second or the other way around?"



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- How can we both validate their existence (it makes total sense for children) and provide safety (through rules) at the same time? For example, when a boy is crying, we can say, "I understand you are sad about what you have gone through and you do not feel like doing anything [we validate his existence]. Can you tell me about it and then we can set the table?" or we can tell an upset girl, "It is okay that you are really upset. We all like to be respected, but one way to show respect is to listen to us and move on. How about telling me what has happened to you to see if we can come up with something to fix it?"
- If we do not have the time or availability, we can move forward with planned activities and go back to it with the child or other adults (technical staff, other caregivers...).

Empathy is especially useful when children say "No" to something. The key is to find out what the child says "yes" to when they say "No" to us. If we really listen to their deep motivations, we are more likely to find a solution that works for everyone (within the rules).



Louise says that she does not want to do homework because she thinks "it is a waste of time." She is sad and upset. What is her experience? Is she probably trying to protect herself from making mistakes because she knows she makes a lot of mistakes? Then we could suggest reading the homework to her to see if there is something "very difficult" and how to better understand it. Or is she upset about something that took place in school that had probably nothing to do with her homework? In this case, it would be better to listen to her for a couple of minutes (if she argued with her friend or if her teacher said something to her) and once she is clam, she might start doing her homework. Or maybe she is thinking "I was told I was going to be taken care for in this house, but is it true or as I reveal myself they are going to treat me badly or something like that?" It would be a good idea to explain to her how we want to take care of her and for her to do well... that homework is useful for her, that we want to listen to her and get to know her to better help her.

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The case is similar to physical ailments: if we see Mary vomit, we check all symptoms (fever? stomach ache? diarrhoea?) and try to determine the root causes (What has she eaten today? Has she tried a suspicious beverage? Was she nervous?) And probably go to the doctor to treat the causes (we want her to be cured of gastritis) and not only to relieve the symptoms (we may also need to give her some medicine to destroy bacteria, stop the vomit, ease the pain and be hydrated). And if Mary vomits several times in a row, we may think of a more serious intervention until she is better and recovered. Similarly, if we see Mary venting her anger by hitting her roommate, we check all the symptoms (Has she hit someone else? Has she talked about her roommate these days?) And determine the root causes (Was her bad relationship with her roommate caused by insecurity, jealousy, competitiveness? Or was Mary mad for other reasons and took it out on her roommate because she happened to be around or because she was weaker or because of something else?). It will also be good to check with the other adults (her teachers, technical staff and acquaintances) and find solutions for both the symptoms (the fight with her roommate, the bad environment at home) and the root causes (she may need to talk about something that worries her, to vent or to get some help...).

The key is to address symptoms with a scientific approach (Where is Mary's behaviour coming from?)

To find solutions, we do not have to take it personal (even if we are challenged, we are likely to be attacked by our role as teachers or family members rather than by ourselves). If Mary continues to vent her anger, that means we are not solving the root of the problem. She may need a special intervention (learning to solve conflicts, individual or group therapy...) so we should keep looking until we find the key to easing her pain.

Finally, empathy helps us understand that the most damaging behaviours are a symptom of the damage caused and that we should treat them as such. Often children admitted to SOS Children's Villages have been greatly damaged (violence, abandonment, mistreatment...). Sometimes, if they have been damaged, they may cause damage because this is the only way they know to relate to other people. This is how they express their pain. They feel so isolated that they do not care about other people. Observing the most damaging behaviours as symptoms helps us understand the child with a broader perspective and find more healing solutions for everyone.

We should keep looking until we find the key to easing the pain.

Chapter 5

Emotional support to children: How to be kind and firm at the same time?

It is essential to involve conscious, kind and firm adults.

Positive discipline is possible with emotional support to the child. It is the emotional relationship we establish and the safe environment we provide what makes this form of education possible. This is important for any child, especially for children in SOS Children's Villages. These children often have a background of emotional damage and if families and caregivers cannot understand and emotionally contain it, this will lead to more serious conflicts in coexistence than those arising under normal circumstances. Besides, the families we work with in communities often lack personal resources, consciousness of their own emotional damage and training to provide a safe environment and ensure the full development of children.

But to build that relationship and environment, it is essential to involve conscious, kind and firm adults. Such involvement is only possible if:

We take care of ourselves and raise consciousness about our personal story.

1. **We take care of ourselves.** Talking care of ourselves is not being selfish but taking care of the children in our care. How can we take care of ourselves? Let us look into some ideas:
 - Take care of our physical health.
 - Take time off. No one can solve complex situations when exhausted. The major conflicts in families or at home always take place late in the evening.
 - Build a network of people –especially if they are families or caregivers who can take on responsibilities similar to ours and put in our shoes– we can meet and talk with.
 - Express our emotions. What we keep to ourselves makes it more difficult to manage emotions. Learning to vent our anger without attacking is a lesson not only for children but also for us too.
 - Go dancing. Dancing promotes emotional adjustment through the body.
 - Looking for help when feeling overloaded: support from family and friends, supervision and therapy. One of the keys to protection is to ask for help.
2. **We work and raise in a network.** We need support from those who take care of us when we feel sick, sad, bewildered, simply exhausted or when we do not know how to solve a situation. It is crucial to have someone to turn to for help or to discuss what is happening with.
3. **We raise consciousness about our personal story.** Many of us (adults) have been raised with and are accustomed to violence. We may view violence as normal and even necessary for a child in many cases. If we cannot look into the fear and sadness we experienced as children –still within us–, we will not be able to look into the fear of the children in our care.
4. We show **FLEXIBILITY** –a key element for democratic and responsible education:

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Being flexible is essential to educate.

- To put ourselves in the child's shoes
- To adapt ourselves to each situation: Being at home is not the same as being outside; being on holidays is not the same as being in school; being exhausted in the morning is not the same as being exhausted at night...
- To act differently based on the needs of each child
- To accept that we are not always right and acknowledge that there are different ways to see things and that the child's may be as valid as ours: This does not mean doing what they say or want but respecting their view as valid.
- To respect space and time: We might want a child to do something, but it does not have to be here and now.
- To let them experience their reasoning, try things, face natural consequences, make mistakes and learn from them

Flexibility excludes two forms of damaging education:

Authoritarianism, where education is imposed without taking children into account. It uses violent patterns and prevents children from leading their own life and learning from their personal resources, as this leads to fear and submission. The order is set and freedom is taken away –a key element for the full development of autonomy.

Overprotection and permissiveness, where boundaries –crucial for the development children– disappear. Children are free to do what they want to avoid tantrums, for convenience or neglect. We allow freedom but take away the order necessary for child protection. In essence, overprotection is a veiled form of authoritarianism. To calm down and manage their insecurities, adults provide unnecessary overprotection to children (they are not allowed to play, relate to others or make mistakes).

There are specific resources and tools we as teachers and families may incorporate once the emotional relationship is built –a safe environment and guidelines for consciousness. The resources described below will help us face difficult situations encountered during child education. But these resources are not exhaustive. These and many others can be used by adults as we get to know the child and be aware of what we do.

Let us take a look at these resources from a positive discipline approach:

a. How to approach at all times...

Connection before correction: Before correcting behaviours, we need children to understand that we have understood their emotions, how they feel.

Listen actively and validate feelings: It is important not to judge or discredit the feelings of children, regardless of what they are. No emotion is wrong; what is wrong is not to handle emotions well. They are entitled to feel how they feel.

Ask: Be accustomed to asking children their views on what has happened. Sometimes we are missing data to understand before acting.

Sometimes taking your little brother to school with you is tiring and annoying because he walks slower, keeps you from talking to your friends and may even embarrass you sometimes, right? But if you yell at him or push him ahead, he will walk even slower.



b. Always look at the long-term process

Involve children:

A process will involve a lesson learned when actively lived. If coming to us as observers or passive recipients, the result will not be integrated. What we want children to learn requires them to be actively involved.

Picking up the toys is easier and faster if we do it ourselves, but the lesson is learned if we pick them up together. They will actively integrate this task into their daily routine as they have been involved from the beginning. It will not be regarded as an external command.

Encouraging rather than praising:

Encouraging is not praising what they do right but prompting them to improve what they have not achieved yet, to strive and never give up. It is about reinforcing the process and not the final outcome. Reinforce what the child has done to achieve the result, whatever that result is.

It is not about giving rewards for good grades but for work hours at home. It is not about telling the child that her drawing is beautiful but encouraging her to try new figures and mixtures of colours. It is not about praising him for winning the match but making him realise how he played in a team passing the ball to his mates and how that has brought good results and was not the case a couple of months ago...

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Empowering rather than rescuing:

Often we adults are likely to solve children's issues, coming to the rescue with a solution to their problems. But the key is to always try to make children find a solution themselves.

"I do not know how to assemble this toy, dad." "Give me that. I will do it" versus "Let us figure it out together. Shall we?" You will surely come up with a way to fit in this piece if you look at the shape."



Supervision:

We should be able to go over these processes with children, helping them focus and support them along the way, rather than expecting the final outcome to judge it right or wrong. It is important to be present along the way.

"Mary, I stopped by your room a while ago and saw you hanging clean clothes in your closet. Can you show me how it looks like?"

Allow children to experience the natural consequences of their decisions:

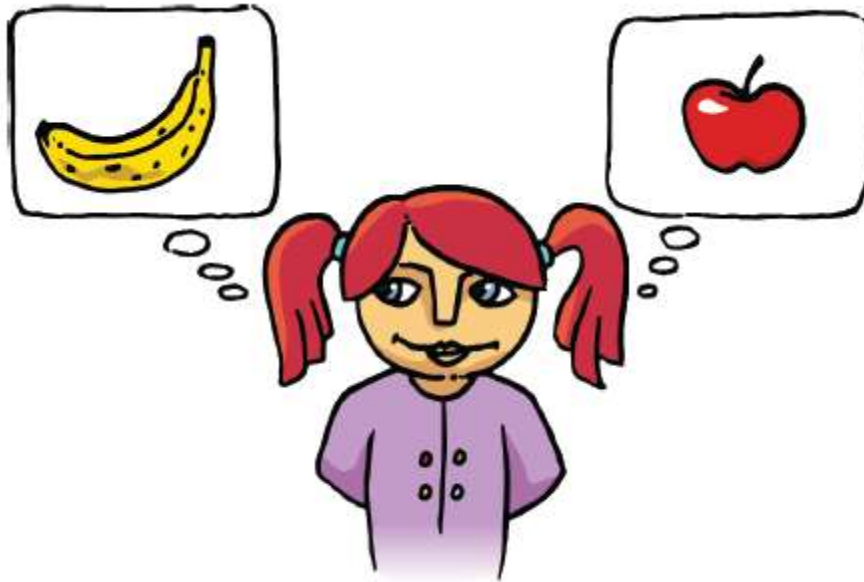
Every action in life has natural consequences. If we try to avoid those consequences –most of the time with the best of intentions to keep children from having a bad time, favour home life and make things easier and faster–, we prevent positive learning from the good and the bad and its consequences. If failing to acquire this learning, they will make more mistakes, with more serious consequences.

"I am late for the training! Why did not you tell me what time it was?" "You are 14 years old, and you know how long it takes you from home to the field. We have gone together for a couple of times, but you said you wanted to go just with your friends. I thought it was okay. You will for sure remember what happened today and be on time next week."

What would you like for dessert? A banana or an apple?" Several options are given for children to feel taken into consideration, be accustomed to connecting with their needs and emotions and participate in the process, but they are not given a multiple choice because they may get lost and feel overwhelmed.

Provide limited options

Throughout this process, it is not about letting the child choose what they want to do in general but about providing limited options.



c. And when it is time to set boundaries or correct behaviours

Be firm and kind at the same time and focus on the positive, always on the solutions.

Use the **four "R's"** of recovery from mistakes:

When facing a mistake, the process is as follows:

- **Retire:** Look for the right place to talk and allow for emotional connection of children.
- **Recognise:** Tell what happened and express how it makes you feel.
- **Reconcile:** Rebuild the bond and always maintain the relationship.
- **Resolve and repair:** Look for a solution or way to repair the damage together, taking responsibility for what happened.

Act more and talk less:

It is not easy to talk in conflicting situations, for it may lead to misunderstandings if adults and children are not calm. Therefore, there is a time to act, tackle and get out of the situation to talk about it later.

"Come here, sweetie. Let us cook dinner together. I will give you the plates, and you will be putting them on the table. Or would you like to put the glasses first?"

If the time were positive:

To solve a situation, it is essential to find the right time and place to do it. Therefore, the first strategy to solve a conflict is to wait and give time to every person –child and adult– to think about what happened.

To solve a situation, it is essential to find the right time and place to do it.

But this is not a time to think as punishment (the "time-out chair") when children have to think about what they did wrong but a time for everyone –them and us– to connect with what we feel and what has hurt us in order to calm down from the positive (a song, a blanket or something soothing) and meet again –after some time– to come up with a solution.

Time-out is better taught by example (conveying the attitude to be accountable for personal behaviour) than by words (although needed as well). We can introduce the concept gradually, first explaining what happens to us as adults ("Argh!!! Right now I am very upset, but as I want to take good care of you and treat you well, I am going outside and we will talk about this when I am calmed down") and then suggesting it to children ("Do you recall when I went outside first so that I could talk to you with love and respect despite being upset?

I think you are very nervous. How about you calm down so we can talk about it? Would you try going outside with me? Or would you prefer sitting quietly on the coach to calm down? We need to make sure that the time-out is a time for self-care and self-connection to return to the situation clear-minded and ready to solve the problem.

d. **And in family life and at home in general...**

Plan a special time for each family member or household:

Everyone living in a household –adults and children– need time to be together and alone. Adults should have time for themselves (without children), and children need time for themselves or with friends (without adults). Personal time are used to nurture personal growth.

Use family gatherings:

Gathering together only to discuss problems is easy, but it is important for families to gather around home to make important decisions together and express their feelings. It is a time to **give and receive compliments and thank** the others for what they gave us. Adults should teach children how to do it by giving thanks first. Thus, we provide a positive environment where telling each other important valuable things and making important decisions together **arriving at agreements and negotiating** what is going to affect a whole family or household. We are not talking about gatherings to solve conflicts but other sort of reunions.

Decide what we are going to do and not what we are forcing the child to do

We as adults always have to decide what children are going to do and how they are going to do it. From a positive discipline approach, it is essential to speak in the first person. We adults should talk about "what I am going to do, how I feel and what I am going to bring to solving the problem." "I" statements involve expressing emotions that we feel, validating communication and encouraging children to express their feelings surely in a different but complementary manner.

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For all of our actions in life, we need to ask ourselves the following **three questions** to help us to maintain that consciousness:

From a positive discipline approach, it is essential to speak in the first person.

- What am I doing this for?
- Where am I doing it?
- How am I doing it?

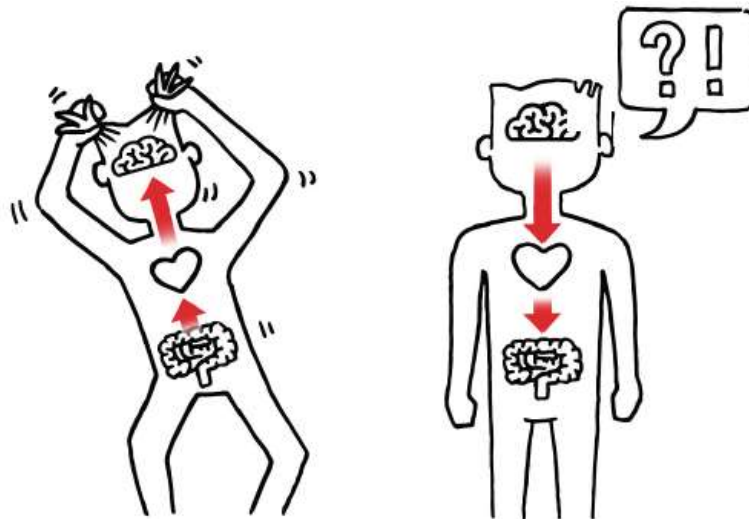
Chapter 6

Tips to face everyday situations

Even applying our resources, sometimes situations get out of our hands and we do not know how to handle, especially working for SOS Children's Villages, where –as we mentioned in the introduction– we work with severely damaged children who are going to express their pain, fear and anger through their behaviour.

We should never forget the following three key tips:

- Always see children's behaviours, whatever they are, as manifestations of such damage and not as intentional aggressive behaviours towards us.
- We should always remember that **emotions are infectious**. When we are dealing with angry or scared children, it is really easy to be infected with their emotions and end up yelling when someone else is yelling, for example, just as we laugh or when we see someone cry, it makes our hearts shrink and our eyes tear up. **Handling a child's complex behaviour involves FIRST AND FOREMOST handling our own emotions.**
- **When a child bursts into anger**, it is crucial to understand the following: We all have three levels of processing: the rational brain (or superior brain) for reasoning, thinking and planning, associated with the head; the emotional brain for regulating our emotions, associated with the heart; and the instinctive brain for protection and survival and triggered when in fear, associated with the guts. Then, there are two types of anger: from head to guts and from guts to head. Head anger can be stopped and has a purpose. We may wait to show it. Guts anger rises when in fear but take the form of anger. It cannot be stopped, and we lose control. There, the only thing the person in front may and should do is to wait because we will not be able to talk, reason or listen. And this happens to both children and adults. But the more damaged people (children or adults) are, the more fear they have experienced in their childhood, the more difficult it will be to control their guts anger.



What to do with guts anger?

- Keep calm and be aware of potential emotional infection. Their fear can infect with fear and make us be on the defensive.
- If possible, move to a new place and wait. Choose the time and create the situation to talk about it.
- Handle situations with a sense of humour without mocking the child's feelings. Whenever possible, try to see the positive side to what is happening, but never make a joke about what children feel or their anger despite your intention to make it more manageable. Do not underestimate or tell the child "it is a child's thing" or "that is nothing." The safest thing to do is to create humour about ourselves, coming up with ideas to solve the current situation (for example: "Argh!!! You are really upset!!! Remember that time when the toilet tank broke? I was very upset too, although that was no one's fault. You all noticed I was so bad that you came with towels to help me remove the water. Water was running and running. You brought more towels, while I was carrying the bucket...")
- Be present and provide physical contact. Not taking part in children's tantrum does not mean quitting. It is about staying there and waiting to protect them properly.
- Wait for them to calm down by moving around. Moving around helps to regulate the gut brain. It will help children to better regulate their state of mind and lower the level of anger. On the contrary, do not lock them in a room or force them to be still.
- Neither try to reason with children at this time nor blame them for their behaviour, make fun of or fight with them.
- Beware of over stimulation or fatigue. Most of the anger occurs at the end of the day or when we push a lot on timing.
- Get to know children and how they handle situations.
- Always ask ourselves: What happened before? Was there a connection with their background? Do not make a connection with ourselves but with them, their needs, frustrations or their background.
- But if we still fail to do it, if we do not know how to handle the situation at that moment and end up yelling or punishing, we need to calm down and try again. Education is not defined by what we do in one day but most of our time.

Now let us take a look at some questions we need to ask ourselves in specific situations. For every situation, we ask questions to help us to maintain consciousness and find a solution... and some guidelines for action.

Questions we need to ask ourselves in specific situations: for every situation, we ask questions to help us to maintain consciousness and find a solution... and some guidelines for action.

a. What to do when they refuse to take personal and do household chores?

Given their background, they may see household chores as humiliation or control they are not capable of expressing.

Questions:

What responsibilities have we given children? Are these appropriate for individual children and their particular circumstances and the stage of their process?

How can we measure compliance with their responsibilities? Are our expectations of them adjusted to their reality?

Guidelines for action:

- Ensure we clearly understand their point of view and situation. Given their background, they may see household chores as humiliation or control they are not capable of expressing. Or they may refuse to take responsibilities unrelated to tasks themselves –it may be a manifestation of anger, discouragement or something else. Forcing them to do tasks without understanding why they are not doing them is not going to work in the long run.
- Go over the responsibilities with them to understand the reason behind them.
- Do tasks with them at the beginning to make sure they know how to do them and do not see them as imposition, humiliation or criticism but as part of living together at home with tasks assigned to everyone.



Let them face the natural consequences if they refuse to take responsibility: do not clean their rooms if they leave them dirty; do not do their laundry if they do not leave the dirty clothes in the baskets... Until they realise the consequences of their actions. Very often we adults have such a bad time that we avoid the logical consequences. For example, children wearing dirty clothes or their friends not wanting to go to their rooms because these smell bad without causing health problems or humiliation... We need to let all this happen to naturally learn the consequences of their actions.

Let children suggest responsibilities they want to or feel capable of taking. Once accomplished, they can take the next ones. Do not try to do it all at once.

If children have not taken responsibility yet, it may be useful to involve a friend or sibling, or even raising the issue of gatherings to solve the problem and obtain input from other children and adolescents –more similar to their own.

b. How to act when challenged by adolescents?

Questions:

Who is the adolescent confronting? Us as figures of authority? Someone whose boundaries are set by us? Us given our special relationship with the adolescent (tuning-in or regular confrontation)? What is the role of the confrontation group for the adolescent? Does he/she want to prove something to his/her peers? Does he/she want to obtain support and engage in a group confrontation? Or is the group irrelevant and there are other issues at stake?

What may be the adolescent's point of view? What may be the reason behind this confrontation?

Guidelines for action:

- Seek an emotional connection. Find out how the adolescent feels and why he/she may be acting like that.

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Do not get into the game of threatening and blaming.



- Validate their experience: we all dislike for important things to us be disregarded.
- Insist that we want to look for a solution for everyone where the adolescent and we (and the rest of the group) win.
- Remember that at this age it is not right to yell or disrespect: their motivation may be valid, and we can explore it together in collaboration.
- Do not get into the game of threatening and blaming.
- We can reduce the tension of many adolescents by using some humour, many times seeing the funny side to the situation but making sure they do not see it as mocking or disregarding their emotions.
- We may find it useful to know we are being role models for them: if they were attacked like that in school, on the streets or with their friends, can we act as we would like for them to act in these situations?
 - Most direct confrontations between adolescents and adults have to do with the issue of autonomy: empowering them by suggesting alternatives, encouraging them to explore possible solutions with actual decision-making scope. We may even suggest that they develop a well-argued formal proposal in writing for discussion with all the group to show they are seriously taken into account.
- We need to clearly identify our weaknesses and strengths: adolescents are developing their social intelligence at all times and will find out if we are consistent and will use that against us.
- When we are adolescents, we go through a volatile time when the key question is, "Despite all the changes I am going through, am I still being loved and accepted?" The answer should be clear: we love and accept them as individuals but we are also going to set boundaries for their behaviour.

c. How to act when children use physical, emotional and verbal violence against their parents or caregivers?

Questions:

Where does violence come from? Does it come from a relationship between two very close children who love each other?

What happened before violence erupted? What about the days before? Was there a family visit? Did they have a problem that explains their behaviour? Was it a one-time, regular or intentional occurrence against a specific child? Was it planned or caused by an outburst?

Guidelines for action:

- Keep calm not to be infected with violence and involved in the conflict. Pull children apart and wait.
- A key phrase in situation of violence is: "Not with that attitude!" Whatever children are asking, we have to send a clear message: it is not going to happen if they use violence. Their need or desire is not discredited but the violence they use to try to make it happen.

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- Engage in a private conversation with children so that they can express their fear or pain that made them angry and connect with and understand the pain they have caused.
- Look for strategies to repair the damage. For actual repair, it is necessary for the child to listen to and acknowledge the damage caused to the other person so that all stakeholders can look for a solution together. For example, if a child has hit another child, first he needs to acknowledge the damage he has caused and then he has to listen to how uncomfortable it has been for other family members (young and old alike) and from there they can find a solution that works for everyone (sometimes adolescents suggest quite harsh punishments for themselves, and that is when those who educate them need to be there to tell them that it does not work for us and that they need to keep on finding new ideas). The key to a repair process is that the person who has been attacked feels listened to and taken into consideration. Therefore, there is no recipe: the process is unique every time.
- If this is somehow systematic between two children, we can suggest doing a joint task, giving a reward only if done together, or shared care activities.
- Self-injurious behaviour should never be punished, for it is a reflection of the damage the child keeps inside. Therapy and self-care activities should be promoted, never punishment.

Upon coming back, welcome them with a hot meal for them to feel "you are safe here."



d. How to act when children run away from home?

Questions:

Why do children run away? To smoke, use drugs or alcohol? To visit their family? Because they cannot stay in a house with minimum order?

What is important to us? That they are running away or coming back? If we punish them when they come back, they will not return because of fear.

Guidelines for action:

- Report when finding out they ran away.
- Look where they could have run away: with their family, friends or other people, and if we suspect of drug abuse, where they usually go, etc.
- Explain to the other children what happened out of concern and not blaming on the child.
- When children are back:
 - Thank them for coming back. When children come back after running away –although they do not say it–, they are afraid of rejection, knowing well that they broke the rules. Such fear will make them be on the defensive. Talking to them is not advisable at that time. It is better to wait. We will ask them the day after. By giving thanks, we are showing that for us the most important thing is that they are safe and back because they might as well never come back. They choose us again, and that gives a new opportunity to us and them.
 - Cook a hot meal regardless of the time they come back. It is not a reward but basic care in a safe environment. The message is "you are safe here."

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- If they come back under the effects of alcohol or other drugs or in poor condition, stay with them until they recover to a minimum to come into the house. Never leave them alone.
-
- After they sleep and rest well, ask them what they did when they ran away. We are interested to know what happened not why it happened.
-
- If necessary, we can take them for medical check-ups.
-
- Running away should not be punished. If we punish them when they come back, they will not return because of fear. Running away should not be punished. What we want is for them to come back, and what should be our concern is that they need to run away. Running away is a reflection of children's emotional state and their damage. This should be worked out as part of their educational project in both the family and alternative care home.

e. How to act when children steal?

Questions:

What have they stolen and to whom? Is it instrumental stealing, i.e., money to buy something, something for sale to buy drugs, etc.? Or is it emotional stealing, i.e., stealing something that has to do with their story or stealing from someone they had a confrontation with a couple of days before or someone they are close to and have argued with? Are we sure that the stolen item has not been found yet, accusing someone when actually innocent out of fear or malicious intent from the person who actually stole it

Guidelines for action:

- Define our position on stealing: "We know you have taken Ben's toy without permission. For us, it is very important that you all feel calm safe home without having to worry about someone stealing things from you. What has happened?" [We may as well ignore who took the toy and say, "We know Ben left his toy in the closet, and it is not there anymore"].
- Stolen items must be compensated. There should be a way to restore the value of the stolen item. It does not necessarily have to be money. There may be mediation between the victim and the person who stole the item to reach a satisfactory agreement for both. If a six-year-old boy eats his roommate's candy, he may give the other child candy for three days, for example. If an eleven-year-old girl steals money her neighbour has saved to buy some clothes, the girl may help her hang out clothes three times a week for one month. If a teenager sells his teacher's watch, he may save some (not all) money to buy her a new watch or may ask for his birthday to give his teacher a new watch.
- Emotional stealing is different from instrumental stealing. For instrumental stealing, we need to address the ultimate goal of stealing. For emotional stealing, it is an expression of the emotional value of the stolen item for the child, and other people living in the house need to realise that.

Stolen items
must be
compensated.

Find out more:

- Nelsen, Jane (2007). *Kind and Firm Parenting. Positive discipline*. Barcelona: Medici.
- Gordon, Thomas (2006). *Parent Effectiveness Training*. Barcelona: Medici.
- Horno, Pepa (2017). *Educando la alegría [Educating Joy]*. Bilbao: Desclée De Brouwer.

Chapter 7

Important questions to ask ourselves after reading this guide

The information contained in this guide involves not only a consciousness process for families and caregivers but also a series of organisational responsibilities. To attain that level of consciousness, it is necessary to have a nurturing organisational environment in place. A physical and emotional safety environment is required for us adults to raise children with a positive discipline approach because it enables our self-care and consciousness.

In the case of SOS Children's Villages, the organisation **is responsible for creating a safe environment for technical staff and caregivers working in programmes, as well as for creating a safe environment in community-based programmes to include care settings for children and families of origin too.**

Positive discipline and parenting takes place at the end of an **organisational change** process that involves asking ourselves key questions such as:

Are
organisational
settings a safe
physical and
emotional
environment?

1. Are organisational settings **a safe physical and emotional environment**? Let us think of offices, programme and houses.
2. Has **conscious kindness** built in as a key principle in the organisation? Let us think of line managers up to core care co-workers.
3. Have **human resources** processes (training, promotion or selection) been developed using this approach?
4. Have **technical staff and caregivers networked** to deliver quality work and a care setting for them? It is necessary for many caregivers to stop working in isolation and promote an emotional support network for themselves, and for technical staff to monitor daily home routines.
5. Has the organisation promoted **consciousness-raising processes (therapy and experience-based training) for caregivers** on their emotional baggage and emotions triggered by such stories and the behaviours of the children they work with? Otherwise, the organisation runs the risk that these co-workers reproduce part of their emotional baggage in their work, often including violent parenting techniques.
6. Has the organisation considered in community-based programmes **care activities for families of origin** (therapy, relaxation and gatherings) and not just for children?
7. Has SOS Children's Villages introduced different **experience-based methodologies and bodywork sessions** for children, families of origin, caregivers and technical staff to raise consciousness?

