

Maar Nahi Pyaar

A RESOURCE FOR POSITIVE CAREGIVING

Parenting or caregiving is never easy, and has been particularly challenging in COVID-19 times. The pandemic has disrupted life in countless ways for both adults and children with some families being impacted more than others. For some, it has brought the trauma of loss and separation; for others, it has meant economic distress or descent into poverty, a breakdown of support networks and the experience of isolation. For nearly everyone, it has brought a pervasive cloud of fear, anxiety and uncertainty.

The rise in parenting and caregiving responsibilities due to extended periods of lockdown and school closures have placed additional stress on the family unit, increasing the risks of violence within the home. The rise in protection risks for children across the world has come along with a breakdown in services.



Childhood is a precious time to learn, grow and explore - to test boundaries and stretch limits. Given freedom within boundaries, children can surprise you with their skills - but won't always get things "right" the first time.

About half the world's children experience corporal punishment at home, with about 3 in 4 children between the ages of 2 and 4 receiving violent discipline from parents and other primary caregivers (UNICEF 2020).

At Cities for Children, we believe that every child has the right to feel safe. Most of all, that the home and the school should represent protective orbs in the hands of the trusted adults.

We understand the challenges caregivers face, and wish to explore and present solutions. There is value for every member of the family in considering alternative – and positive – approaches to discipline.



THE CASE FOR LOVE (PYAAR)

The science shows that being able to depend on the support and care of an adult can offset the effects of negative childhood experiences, and help build the foundations for healthy physical, cognitive and emotional development.

LOVE MATTERS BECAUSE

It defines who we are.

Early experiences function as “schema” – patterns which the child can use to predicts future events and encounters. Love and care are essential in terms of shaping a tender, sympathetic understanding of the self, the world and future relationships.

It affects how we learn

Happy, well-adjusted children can concentrate and learn better. From infancy onwards, a stable and close emotional relationship with a communicative caregiver matters and can lay the foundation for a child’s language development. Whether it is at school or at home, love and a sense of security support better learning.

Children learn what they live.

Where children are exposed to love, care and respect they learn to respond in the same manner – and also to demonstrate empathy towards others. Alternatively, a child who experiences neglect does not expect positive attitudes from others – and those experiencing violence are more likely to perpetuate it.

Love builds resilience.

All children experience some degree of stress in life, but have innate resilience that helps them “bounce back” and cope. However, if a young child is exposed to stress that is overwhelming, or happens over a long time, it can impact resilience. Studies show that toddlers having secure, trusting relationships with parents or caregivers respond more calmly when frightened by a strange event, while those with insecure relationships experience a significant activation of stress hormones. Our responses to stress continue to be shaped through childhood, and influence how we cope as adults.

IF THAT'S NOT ENOUGH,

It makes our jobs easier.

Children who have learned that their parents can be trusted are more likely to turn to them for guidance and listen to their advice.

Sometimes, corporal punishment or violent discipline can come out of a sense of love, with the intention to teach children. However, what it teaches children is that people who love them hurt them – or those with authority can abuse it.



POSITIVE CAREGIVING - A HELPFUL APPROACH

Every single day, there are countless moments of decision about how to respond to children, and it's often hard for parents and caregivers to know what's "right." While responses to children are of course very individualised, based on the child, the caregiver, and their world, there are some helpful ways to consciously think about how to choose to respond.

Positive parenting/caregiving is an approach that guides children's behaviour, while promoting healthy development, protection from violence and participation in their learning and care. It features relationships based on cooperation, respect, empathy, tolerance and affirmation of a child's strengths and abilities.

SOME CENTRAL FEATURES

SENSITIVITY

Recognising a child's emotional and physical needs, according to how old they are.

RESPONSIVENESS

Giving attention and what is needed in terms of comfort, connection and stimulation.

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Recognising, rewarding and reinforcing positive behaviour, and creating an environment that makes it easier for children to behave cooperatively and constructively.

It's NOT about "spoiling" children or giving them what they want all the time.

It's about making sure they know what the rules are so they can stay within them. If they break something, you can tell them what the danger is and what they can do to avoid it in future. You can also encourage problem-solving - discuss with them how to do things differently, or give them the tools to fix the situation.



TIPS FOR POSITIVE DISCIPLINE - FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

1. REMEMBER YOUR LONG TERM GOALS.

By keeping your long-term goals in mind, such as teaching respect and non-violence by modelling it yourself, you can avoid short-term reactions, like hitting and yelling. By reminding yourself of what you actually hope to teach your child, you can evolve effective strategies to do so while maintaining a secure relationship. Both parents should discuss!

2. TAKE A WALK IN SMALLER SHOES.

How would your child describe the situation? Taking the time to understand what's really going on can help. For small children, it could just be that they are tired, overwhelmed – or hungry. For older children and adolescents, there could be emotional and physical changes as well as a growing sense of independence. For every stage, it is important for children to know that they can depend on their trusted adults, who will also have guidance for them.

3. COMMUNICATE LIMITS CLEARLY AND CONSISTENTLY.

It's important for children to know what behaviour is okay by you, and what is not. At best children would be included in establishing boundaries, and at least they would be informed of the norms and the consequences.

4. CATCH CHILDREN BEING "GOOD."

Praise is a powerful tool. Praising strengths will help children to flourish, and rewarding good behaviour can provide important encouragement and establish how you would like children to behave. For instance, noticing helpfulness and kindness, or reinforcing the desirability of specific actions will make a child more likely to repeat and do more e.g. I like it when you help me! Some ideas for rewards: hugs, kisses, stickers, small gifts, outings.

5. IGNORE SOME BAD BEHAVIOUR.

Make sure the majority of your interactions are positive ones, even if that means sometimes ignoring misdemeanors. One suggestion is to have a quota – considering priority misbehaviors to call out, and others to ignore.

QUICK TIPS FOR TODDLER TANTRUMS

- Distraction. Diverting attention to a toy/snack/ordinary object with humour and enthusiasm can help avoid a situation where both of you are upset.
- Breathing to calm down. If already at the tantrum stage, calmly telling a toddler to "Smell the flowers" (deep breath in), and "blow the candle" (deep breath out) can help stop the tears.

Of course, each child is different and will respond to circumstances differently. Who we are is determined by so many different things, including nature, nurture and external factors in the environment beyond our control. But positive and supportive caregiving can help provide the foundations for children to go forth into the world with confidence, happiness, and a store of resilience that helps them cope with difficult circumstances.

Results won't show overnight and will take consistent effort - but it's worth it!

6. CRITICISE BEHAVIOURS, NOT THE CHILD.

This distinction is important – no child is inherently “bad,” but sometimes they can behave in undesirable ways. So make sure you are clear about the specific action that is undesirable so that your child knows to avoid it in future.

7. HAVE APPROPRIATE "CONSEQUENCES."

Without humiliation or violence, think of ways to demonstrate that some kinds of behaviour will have consequences. This may include a short “time-out” to think (for small children), or the taking away of a privilege for a certain amount of time - and then reflecting together on why a behaviour was wrong. The consequence must be linked logically to the incident, should be given respectfully, be age appropriate and the child should know of it in advance e.g. if a child draws on the walls/table, the child erases it - or if for broken items, helps clean up.

8. REMEMBER TO SHOW AFFECTION AND ATTENTION.

Build your ability to recognise and respond to children’s “signals” and requests for attention, which can differ at different stages of childhood and adolescence.

9. HAVE FUN TOGETHER.

Take some time in the day to play, laugh and connect. This will help strengthen your bond while also promoting positive mental health for mothers, fathers and children alike.

10. REMEMBER THAT PARENTS NEED LOVE TOO.

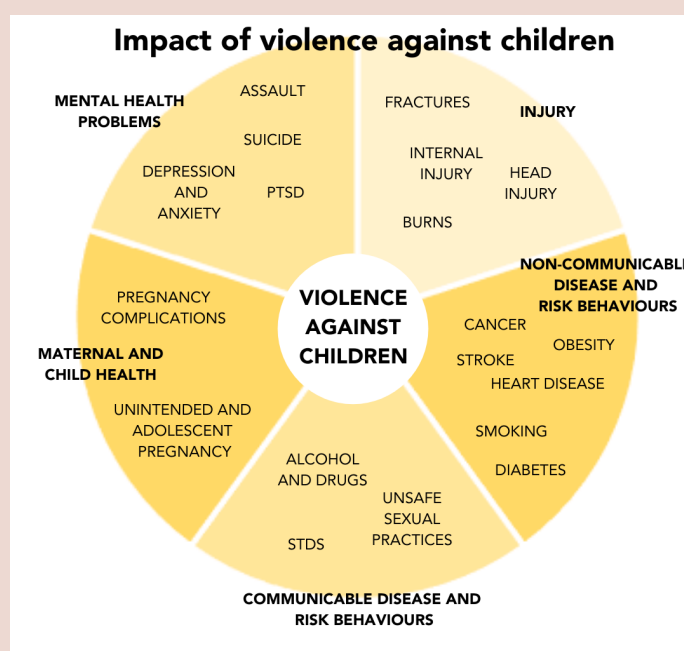
Caring for caregivers is hugely important – their state of mind determines how they are able to respond to children and their needs. Some things to help you create a positive home environment are:

- Take a break. Give yourself the time you need to have that cup of tea in peace, or talk to a friend and restore your energy.
- Introduce structure in the day. Creating a routine helps set expectations for what will happen, with fewer battles.
- Create a community of care. Both men and women can be great at caregiving. Especially in stressful times such as the pandemic, sharing the responsibility for children can help create a happier, healthier environment for all.
- Congratulate yourself. Celebrate small achievements, stay positive!

QUICK TIP FOR ADULT RESPONDING

Breathe. Before you react, take ten seconds to breathe deeply in and out five times, and calm yourself. Many parents say it can really be a gamechanger!

APPENDIX: IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



Adapted from: INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children

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