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Before you hit a child - stop and think

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
website: <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>
e-mail: mhcs@doh.health.nsw.gov.au
phone: (02) 9382 8111

NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Before you hit a child - stop and think

Children of all ages do things that make parents feel angry and frustrated –even a small baby’s crying can be enough to make a tired, stressed parent lose his or her temper sometimes.

But it’s important to make sure this anger doesn’t result in hurting a child in some way - each year many children are injured, often seriously by their parents. Actions such as shaking a baby or small child - which many people might think is harmless -can cause serious and irreversible brain damage or even death. That’s why doctors stress the importance of *never* shaking children (especially those under the age of two). Shaking a baby makes its soft, fragile brain bang against its hard bony skull - this can result in anything from death or paralysis to delayed development or learning difficulties. Even playfully shaking a baby or throwing it up in the air can have the same effect.

Parents who injure their children aren’t necessarily bad people - they are often stressed people who lose control. Parenting, after all, isn’t an easy job and extra pressures such as lack of money or having no family living close by for instance, make it even harder. That’s why it’s a good idea for all parents to know how to control their anger when they’re dealing with children. The next time you feel tempted to hit out at a child, try these alternatives first:

- Stop. Think before you act
- Put the child in a safe place (eg a cot, a room) and leave them while you calm down.
- Take some deep breaths - breathe in and out slowly until you begin to feel better.
- Go outside or into a quiet room until you feel calm.
- Phone a friend or a relative .

- Sit down with a cup of tea or coffee, or relax in a bath, or listen to your favourite music.
- If you still feel angry, try hugging or punching a pillow.
- Think about why your child might be misbehaving and try and work out how you can prevent the behaviour without hurting the child.

When you think about it, smacking children doesn’t teach them anything very useful - children who are hit by angry parents simply learn to hit out when they’re angry themselves. Better ways to deal with bad behaviour include taking away something they enjoy for a time - a toy or a favourite television program, for instance., or sending them to their room for a while. Practice ignoring their bad behaviour.If you don’t give them any attention they’re less likely to keep doing it - but don’t forget to give them praise when they’re being good.

Use rewards to change their behaviour - eg “if you pack up your toys without being reminded, you can choose the next T.V. program.”

Parents should remember that -like anyone else who is doing a difficult, demanding job - they need time for themselves to relax and do what they enjoy..

Parents who are feeling stressed and would like advice can contact:

The Arabic Family Support Service (02) 9709 4333
Child Abuse Prevention Service (02) 9716 8000
Family Support Services Association (02) 9743 6565
The Child Protection & Family Crisis Service on 1800 06 6777 (24 hours)
The Parent Line 132055.
The Granville Multicultural Centre Family Support Scheme (02) 9637 7600