Better Discipline
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CHILD REARING

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Nonviolent methods require patience and a firm belief, "It's never right to hit a child"

Once parents resolve to never hit their children, what are they to do? There are many specific methods, but first there's the matter of time. If parents won't devote the necessary time to the massive job of raising children, all the best methods are sure to fail. There's also the matter of the past, of how to change from hitting your children to not hitting them. The recommended method is to talk to them, apologize for hitting them in the past and promise not to do it again. Ask for their forgiveness, and encourage them to do the flower penance [See Publisher's Desk,] to help them forgive you. Nonviolent parenting is based on the concept of discipline, which means "to train," rather than punishment, which means inflicting pain.

Modern nonviolent methods follow proven principles. Many are common sense, others are more subtle and based on the specific mental and emotional development of the child at each age. Dr. Katharine C. Kersey of the Child Study Center, Old Dominion University in Virginia, has assembled one list which is excerpted and expanded here.

Positive reinforcement means to make a big deal over responsible, considerate and appropriate behavior. "Catch your child being good and praise her for it." The flip side is to ignore minor misbehavior that is not dangerous, destructive or embarrassing. Children want your attention, and if the only way they can get it is by being mischievous, they will do so. You must reverse this so that they learn doing good is the most successful way to earn your attention.

You can't expect a child to conform to the best standards of behavior immediately, especially if you have already been beating him. You must accept successive approximations and acknowledge each small step in the right direction. Children will also correct themselves, if given a chance. One mother was making notes on her kitchen wall of how many times her daughter did a certain wrong thing, with the aim of slowly extinguishing that behavior. The curious girl read the notes, realized the problem and stopped.

Children should, within obvious limits of safety, face the logical consequences of their actions. If he leaves for school and forgets his coat, he gets cold. If she doesn't do her homework, the teacher is displeased. There is no need to also punish--the child will get it. Parents should enforce household rules as part of the logical consequences. They have to clearly state the rules in advance, and not make them up or modify them on a daily basis. Parents need to be consistent and not let their children talk them out of their rules or decisions once made.

Control of the environment is obvious, but frequently ignored. If you don't want your toddler to break your expensive vase,

don't put it on the table where she can reach it. When children are older, control may require substantial change. If your teenager is in a school known for violence or drugs, move to another school district.

A misbehaving child can be told to take a "time out," go to a quiet place until he is ready to come back and behave appropriately. Some parents use a timer--one minute for each year of age--to enforce time out.

"Grounding" teenagers has proven to be the best method of discipline. When there is misbehavior, the teen is not allowed to leave the house except for school. He can't see his friends, play sports, go to movies, nothing but stay home. This can be for a weekend for minor offenses, or a month or more for major ones.

Have fun with your children, spend your time with them. They love to know that they bring you light and joy. Don't be so busy with job, friends, adult relatives, television, etc. that you aren't there for your children as they grow up.

Hindu parents who just won't stop hitting their children should realize that even the pro-spanking advocates in the West only allow for hitting with the open hand on the buttocks, just enough to make the child cry, a maximum of four strikes, and rarely--not daily or weekly. Even Manu Dharma Shastra forbids hitting a child on the head, and in the US slapping a child in the face can be a criminal offense. Swami Satchidananda of Integral Yoga Institute in Virginia, who endorses corporal

punishment, warns, "You should not get angry and do it. When you have no control over yourself, you have no right to touch the child." Were these simple guidelines followed, the amount and ferocity of beating would drop precipitously.

Vast resources are available to the Hindu parent who wants to end the cycle of physical punishment of children. Especially the new generation of parents appear willing to make this landmark change.

The very best resource is Epoch, 77 holloway Road, London n7 8jz, United Kingdom, who produce pamphlets, some in Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, and Gujurati, to educate parents and run a campaign against corporal punishment. For a list of web sites see http://www.nurturing.ca/aappoclinks.htm

Two Outstanding Books on Nonviolent Parenting are:"The Case Against Spanking," Jossey-Bass Inc., 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, California 94104 USA and "Don't Take it Out on Your Kids!" The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Ave., New York, New York 10016 USA