

Children In Shelter

When you enter the shelter, your child(ren) is also in a state of crisis. Children don't always understand what has happened and, just like you, they may also have their own fears and anxieties about the future. They usually haven't had a chance to say good-bye to their other parent and don't know if they'll see him/her again. Children may feel lost, sad, angry, guilty and/or distrusting.

During times of crisis, children may act out their feelings and misbehave more than usual. This may also be a time you are not emotionally or physically able to help your child. You may be exhausted and recovering from your own physical and emotional pain. It might be difficult for you to respond to the emotional and, even physical, needs of your child(ren). This is not unusual. Please ask for the help and support you need and deserve.

Advocates are here to assist you with your child(ren), and we want you to feel free to call upon us for help. [add specific supports your program can provide, such as childcare, art therapy, referrals for counseling, parenting classes, mentoring programs, tutoring, supervised play time, etc.]

The following are some tips for helping our child(ren) cope with the crisis and guidelines for helping to keep your children, yourself, and others more comfortable and safe during your stay at the shelter.

1. Make clear to the child(ren) where they are and why.
2. Discuss with the child(ren) the importance of NOT answering the door or the phone.
3. Explain to your child(ren) that s/he is responsible for cleaning up the play area and putting away toys before lunch, dinner, and bedtime.
4. We suggest that you establish a regular meal schedule and daily routine. We also encourage you to lay child(ren) under 10 down for a nap (or quiet time) and establish a regular bedtime for all of your children. This will allow your children to get the rest they need and will also give you some time for yourself.
5. Corporal punishment (hitting), name-calling/cussing at children or the threat of violence is not allowed.
6. You are responsible for the care of your child(ren). It is OK for you to ask other women in the house to babysit for you if that is necessary. Please be aware that other women have the right to say NO. Other women may also be asking you to babysit for them.

Parenting can be challenging even under good circumstances. When you are dealing with domestic violence, moving into shelter, and coping with the unknown, it can be overwhelming. Parenting while dealing with trauma, depression, and often lack of sleep, can be extremely difficult. Making changes to routines or schedules as suggested here, in the midst of adjusting to living in shelter with other families that are also in crisis, may not be possible or helpful. Do the best you can. Our goal is to create safety and a healing environment, not judge your parenting. As Native people, we know we are all related, we are relatives. It takes many relatives to raise children in a good way. Please ask for help and support when you need it.

Crisis Coping

1. Be honest. Tell the child what has happened and why s/he is here. "It's not safe at our house. Daddy hits me (us) and it's scary at our house right now. This is a place where we can be safe until Mommy figures out what to do."
2. Non-critically accept the child's feelings – listen. Don't tell the child s/he is wrong to feel the way s/he does. Instead, acknowledge the child's feelings. "I know. Daddy/Mommy/name of abusive partner hurt me (us) and that's wrong and it doesn't make us feel good."
3. Emphasize the positive things about being here. "We don't get hit here and we'll make new friends."

4. Encourage and restore coping skills. "You don't have to be afraid to play. Nobody's going to hurt us."

Positive Parenting

1. Listen to, acknowledge, respect, and accept your child's feelings.
2. Focus on the good things about your child(ren) rather than finding fault.
3. Be kind. Be firm. Showing respect for your child shows respect for yourself.
4. Provide appropriate rules and guidelines for your child(ren). Be consistent in enforcing these guidelines.
5. Criticize the behavior, not the child. "It's not OK for you to play on top of the refrigerator. You could fall and get hurt."
6. Avoid using labels or calling your child(ren) names that put your child down, (Don't say – "You little @!#!").
7. Praise your child(ren). "It's so nice that you're sharing toys. I really like it when you share with your friends."
8. Find age-appropriate, positive activities for your child(ren) to do by themselves, with other children, or with you.
9. Be a good role model for your child(ren). Let your child know that you have a right to get your needs met, too. "Mommy is playing cards right now but when I'm done, I'll read the book to you." Treat yourself and others with respect and your child will learn to find balance in getting their own needs met and to also be respectful of other's needs.

If I Can't Spank, How Do I Discipline My Child?

Discipline V. Punishment

Discipline means to teach. That is our responsibility as parents- to teach our children how to live in balance. Balance with the self, others, nature, and the universe. Punishment will stop a behavior that we don't like but it does nothing except teach pain, loss and fear. It does teach that if someone is bigger, they can make another person do what they want.

Ways to Discipline

1. PRAISE
This is one of the most effective tools available. Praise those behaviors which you wish to see repeated.
2. IGNORE THE BEHAVIOR
This is useful with minor negative behavior. Lack of attention to behaviors will cause them to stop.
3. DISTRACTION AND REDIRECTION
These are especially useful with very young children. Substitute a preferred activity/object for unwanted ones. Interest the child in an acceptable behavior or activity.
4. NATURAL CONSEQUENCES
You must determine if natural consequences are safe. Letting a child run in front of a car is not safe but going without books at school because the child is not taking responsibility for taking the books, is a safe consequence. This allows the child to see the consequences of their behavior without adult intervention.

5. LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

When it is not feasible to use natural consequences, the consequences should still be tied to the behavior. The child needs to see the connections between the two. If the child runs into the street, s/he must then go into the house because s/he is not using good judgment.

6. TIME OUT

“Time out” is an alternative to corporal (physical) punishment that allows a person to intervene and stop, unacceptable behavior without threats, hitting, slapping, etc., or pain. It’s a little like standing in the corner with some added features. Time Out give you the opportunity to immediately stop the unacceptable behavior without using violence. However, remember that Time Out is your last alternative. It is what you do when everything else you’ve tried has not worked.

To use Time Out: Select a boring place. Pick a chair or small rug for children under seven years of age that is within your visual range. For older children, select a chair or room that is free of anything interesting or dangerous to the child. It should be lighted and not scary. Avoid using the child’s own bedroom since it’s usually full of interesting things.

Keep the Time Out Short.

1. One minute for each year up to age seven.
2. Age 7-10 is 15-minute time out or loss of something they like to do for 30 minutes.
3. Age 11 and up is a 30-minute time out or loss of something the child likes to do for an hour.

The idea is to place the child in Time Out, stopping the unacceptable behavior and then to release the child after a few minutes, (depending upon the age of the child) of quiet and calm.

The child should be told exactly what behavior is unacceptable and then told to go to time Out. If s/he refuses, quietly and firmly take the child there. Once in Time Out, the child is told that after the time of quiet (however many minutes), Time Out will be over.

The first few times, your child may not go quietly to Time Out. The child may scream or cry. The child should not be allowed to leave Time Out until s/he is quiet. The child only needs to stop crying for a brief moment and then should be allowed to leave Time Out. This way the child learns that quiet will be rewarded.

Do not talk to the child while they are in Time Out. The child is placed on the chair or in the room without any verbal exchange between adult and child. If the child opens the door, that means another minute of Time Out. The adult decides when the time is up. Do not argue or debate. Do not spank.

When Time Out is over, say what behavior/ activity is acceptable.

Sometimes Parents Need Time Outs

It is normal for parents to have times when they are exhausted, overcome by emotions or feel like they are at the end of their rope. In those times, parenting in a good way may not be possible. Ask for help with your children from an advocate or other willing woman in shelter while you take care of yourself. This also shows the children the importance of balancing taking care of yourself, relationships and handling responsibilities.

If you feel you need support or help in learning to teach your child without using violence, please feel free to talk to us and we will work with you in developing non-violent parenting skills.