

# TWENTY ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT

## by Aletha Solter, Ph.D.

1. **LOOK FOR UNDERLYING NEEDS.** Ex: Give your child something to play with while waiting in line.
2. **GIVE INFORMATION AND REASONS.** Ex: If your child colors on the wall, explain why we color on paper only.
3. **LOOK FOR UNDERLYING FEELINGS.** Acknowledge, accept, and listen to feelings. Ex: If your child hits his baby sister, encourage him to express his anger and jealousy in harmless ways. He may need to cry or rage.
4. **CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT.** This is sometimes easier than trying to change the child. Ex: If your child repeatedly takes things out of the kitchen cupboards, put a childproof lock on them.
5. **FIND ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVES.** Redirect your child's behavior. Ex: If you do not want your child to build a fort in the dining room, don't just say no. Tell her where she *can* build one.
6. **DEMONSTRATE HOW YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BEHAVE.** Ex: If your child pulls a cat's tail, *show* her how to pet a cat. Do not rely on words alone.
7. **GIVE CHOICES RATHER THAN COMMANDS.** Decision-making empowers children; commands invite a power struggle. Ex: "Would you like to brush your teeth before or after putting your pajamas on?"
8. **MAKE SMALL CONCESSIONS.** Ex: "I'll let you skip brushing your teeth tonight because you are so tired."
9. **PROVIDE FOR A PERIOD OF PREPARATION.** Ex: If you are counting on company for dinner, tell your child how you expect him to behave. Be specific. Role-playing can help prepare children for potentially difficult situations.
10. **LET NATURAL CONSEQUENCES OCCUR** (when appropriate). Don't rescue too much. Ex: A child who does not hang up her bathing suit and towel may find them still wet the next day. (But don't create artificial consequences.)
11. **COMMUNICATE YOUR OWN FEELINGS.** Let children know how their behavior affects you. Ex: "I get so tired of cleaning up these crumbs in the living room."
12. **USE ACTIONS WHEN NECESSARY.** Ex: If your child insists on running across streets on your walks together, hold his hand tightly (while explaining the dangers).
13. **HOLD YOUR CHILD.** Children who are acting aggressively or obnoxiously can benefit from holding, in a loving and supportive way, which allows them to channel their pent-up feelings into healing tears.
14. **REMOVE YOUR CHILD FROM THE SITUATION, AND STAY WITH HER.** Use the time for listening, sharing feelings, holding, and conflict-resolution.
15. **DO IT TOGETHER, BE PLAYFUL.** Many conflict situations can be turned into games. Ex: "Let's pretend we're the seven dwarfs while we clean up," "Let's take turns brushing each other's teeth."
16. **DEFUSE THE SITUATION WITH LAUGHTER.** Ex: If your child is mad at you, invite him to have a playful pillow fight with you. Play your part by surrendering dramatically. Laughter helps resolve anger & feelings of powerlessness.
17. **MAKE A DEAL, NEGOTIATE.** Ex: If you are ready to leave the playground and your child is having fun, reach an agreement on the number of times she may go down the slide before leaving.
18. **DO MUTUAL CONFLICT-RESOLUTION.** Discuss ongoing conflicts with your children, state your own needs, and ask for their help in finding solutions. Determine rules together. Hold family meetings.
19. **REVISE YOUR EXPECTATIONS.** Young children have intense feelings and needs, and are naturally loud, curious, messy, willful, impatient, demanding, forgetful, self-centered, and full of energy. Try to accept them as they are.
20. **TAKE A PARENTAL TIME-OUT.** Leave the room and do whatever is needed to regain your sense of composure and good judgment. Ex: call a friend, cry, meditate, or take a shower.