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 doing 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.

Copyright © 1996 by Aletha Solter. This article is reprinted with permission from the Aware Parenting Institute web site (www.awareparenting.com). Free distribution to parents is permitted. For more information, please see Aletha Solter's books: ***The Aware Baby, Cooperative and Connected, Tears and Tantrums, Raising Drug-Free Kids, Attachment Play,*** and ***Healing Your Traumatized Child.***