

## Healthy Family Relationships – Child-Centered Parenting in Canada

*The Allies in Action Project educates newcomers to Canada about domestic abuse/family violence and how to maintain healthy family relationships.*

### What is Children’s Misbehaviour?

Misbehavior refers to things that people do that are considered “bad” or “inappropriate” or “undesirable.”

**Understanding some of the reasons behind misbehavior** is an important part of positive parenting. When we understand why our children misbehave, we are more likely to be able to find effective ways to support our children to reduce misbehaviors and develop good behaviors.

Sometimes parents respond to children’s misbehavior with Punishment and sometimes parents respond with Discipline. Think about which approach sounds like your own.

- **Discipline** means to teach with guidance and is regarded as a positive approach to parenting. When we guide our children towards positive behaviours and learnings, we are promoting a healthy attitude. Positive guidance encourages our children to think before they act and promotes self-control. Discipline requires thought, planning, and patience. It helps parents achieve the long-term goal of ensuring children have self-control.
- **Punishment**, on the other hand, is usually harsh and involves scolding, spanking, warning, or any other type of control behavior. Punishment is regarded as a more negative approach to parenting. Punishment only fulfills short-term goals. Children will obey in the moment, but they may still misbehave in the future. Also, punishment can harm a child’s self-esteem and make them feel insecure.

### Parenting in Canada

Parents often slowly change their parenting practices as they spend more time in Canada. Children’s behavior sometimes changes in Canada, and parents may need to change some aspects of their parenting as well. In addition, parents evaluate which ideas they brought with them as good and helpful, and add in what they see is good in Canada. They pick the best from both worlds.

### Child Abuse

Child abuse is an extreme form of punishment. Some parenting practices that are common in other countries are viewed as child abuse in Canada. Canada follows the United Nations Commission which defines the rights of all children. Sometimes parents who are new to Canada may need to adjust their parenting to make sure children are protected.

- **Physical abuse** is any physical force or action that results, or could result, in injury to a child’s body. It’s stronger than what would be considered reasonable discipline. Any punishment that leaves bruises, injuries, marks, or burn marks are not allowed in Canada.

- **Sexual abuse** is when someone (a parent, relative, friend, or stranger) exposes a child to sexual contact, activity, or behavior. It includes any sexual touching, as well as non-touching abuse, such as making a child watch sexual acts.
- **Emotional abuse** is a pattern of verbal attacks on a child's sense of self. It can include rejecting, ignoring, isolating, exploiting, or using extreme threats, insults, or humiliation. Exposing a child to violence or severe conflict in the home can also be considered emotional abuse.
- **Neglect** is any lack of care that causes serious harm to a child's health, development, or safety. Neglect includes not providing for a child's basic needs for food, clothing, adequate shelter, supervision, and medical care.
- **Spanking:** Section 43 of the Criminal Code says that a parent cannot hit a child with the plan to harm them. The law allows a parent to spank a child between the ages of 2 and 12 to correct a behavior (not younger, not older), and the parents may not use belts, rulers, or other objects. Many people in Canada believe this law should be changed, because behavior is changed only for a short time, it teaches child to use force to resolve conflict, it harms child's trust and confidence, and causes embarrassment, anger, and confusion. It is best to not spank children at all.

### Children Seeing Conflict

It is normal for parents to fight sometimes, and the stress of settling in a new country can add to family conflict. What is important is how the conflict is expressed and resolved. Do the parents express disagreement with kind voices or angry voices? Is the disagreement solved, or does the same problem keep coming up? How does the conflict make the child feel? How parents handle conflict can have a big effect on children.

- Conflict that is resolved – when the parents find a good solution that they both agree to – can be good for children to see. By seeing their parents solve problems, children learn to solve problems too. However, conflict that is very angry and that is never solved can be harmful to children. Negative conflict behaviors between adults that can harm children include verbal aggression like name-calling, insults, and threats of abandonment; physical aggression like hitting and pushing; silent tactics like avoidance, walking out, sulking or withdrawing. Children, especially young children, often think that it is their fault that their parents are fighting.
- When parents have negative conflict very often, some children can become distraught, worried, anxious and hopeless. Others may react with anger, becoming aggressive and developing behavior problems at home and at school. Children can develop sleep disturbances and health problems like headaches and stomachaches, or they may get sick frequently. They can feel stressed and have trouble paying attention at school. Children may also have trouble forming good relationships with classmates or other kids.