



# MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

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## **POSITIVE PARENTING - ALTERNATIVES TO SPANKING**

DENVER, Colo. Thursday, March 16, 2006 – There are as many parenting techniques in the world as there are children. However, the **Mental Health Association of Colorado** recommends a few simple ideas all parents can use to guide their childrearing choices in their task of raising mentally healthy children.

“In some families, spanking is considered to be an effective form of discipline for children who misbehave,” says **Jeanne M. Rohner, President of the Mental Health Association of Colorado**. “However many parenting professionals agree that there are other more effective ways of disciplining children that do not cause the negative mental — and sometimes physical — impact on children.”

### **Discipline vs. Punishment**

While punishment is a “penalty” for misbehavior, discipline is a method of teaching a child right from wrong. Punishment can be physical, as in spanking; or it can be psychological, as in expressing verbal disapproval, isolating a child in his or her room, or taking away a privilege. Discipline, on the other hand, is a tool that can help children learn self-control and take responsibility for their own behavior. Children who are raised with discipline techniques rather than punishment are more likely to understand their own behavior better, show independence, and respect themselves and others more.

### **Alternatives to Physical Discipline**

While occasional, gentle spankings are not likely to cause children lasting damage, intense, repetitive spankings can lead to mental anguish in children, damage their self-esteem, increase their risk for depression, and leave them feeling bitter, resentful or angry. Intense spanking teaches children that violence is a way to solve problems and can lead to aggressive behavior in the future. Below are some positive and preventative alternatives to spanking:

- **Be a positive role model.** Most children learn behaviors by observing their parents’ actions. So parents must model the ways in which they want their children to behave.
- **Set rules and consequences.** Make rules that are reasonable, fair, realistic and appropriate to a child’s level of development. Explain the rules to children along with the consequences of not following them.
- **Encourage and reward good behavior.** When children are behaving appropriately, tell them so. In addition to giving verbal praise, occasionally reward children with tangible objects, privileges or increased responsibility.

Even the best preventative disciplinary measures aren’t foolproof! Children can reach the “melting point” and discipline becomes a reactive thing. Parents should keep in mind these positive reactive alternatives:

- **Give time outs.** “Time outs” involve removing children from a situation following a negative behavior. This can help children calm down, establish control, end the inappropriate behavior and reenter the situation in a positive way. Make sure to explain what the inappropriate behavior is and why the time out is needed. Tell children when the time out will begin and how long it will last, and have them sit facing a wall away from distractions. Set an appropriate length for the time out based on age and level of development, usually just for a few minutes.



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- **Constructive Criticism.** Once the child's temper and emotions are under control, sit with them and talk together about ways that their feelings might be handled differently in future situations. Offer positive suggestions and alternatives to their choice of actions.
- **Redirect.** Redirecting the attention, particularly of a small child, is a good way to enforce positive behavior without resorting to spanking. This method is a disciplinary action to distract their unfavorable behavior away from someone or something, toward a healthier release.

Every family, and every child, is different, but establishing a basic discipline plan early on helps when the rough spots occur. Consistent, clear messages about boundaries and behavior expectations will go a long way toward raising children into adults with good self-esteem and coping skills.

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## About the Mental Health Association of Colorado

The Mental Health Association of Colorado is the catalyst and voice for the Colorado mental health movement. Through Education, Advocacy and Outreach, we provide resources to Coloradans affected by the entire spectrum of mental health issues.

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