**DFCS DISCIPLINE POLICY**

IMPACT August 2005 Behavior Management Techniques

The Division of Family and Children Services Discipline Policy is that any physical or emotional punishment to a foster or adoptive child is prohibited. Physical punishment is defined as any deliberately inflicted pain to the body of the individual. Caregivers in the State of Georgia are required to know the difference between punishment and discipline.

**Discipline** is instruction - a standard of behavior that is maintained consistently and with authority. Discipline is a learning process for children. Discipline should help a child reach a goal of controlling his or her own behavior, acquiring self-discipline.

**Punishment** is one means of enforcing discipline, usually though the least effective means.

Caregivers may have used some forms of physical and emotional punishment with their own children. We must remember, however, that children raised in an accepting and loving family which is able to meet their needs tolerate punishment in a different way than children removed from their families because of severe neglect and abuse. Children entering foster care usually feel at least one and often all of the following:

• Negative attention is better than no attention at all;

• The natural response to frustration, disappointment, anger, etc., is physical or verbal violence;

• Any form of physical action can lead to severe abuse creating fear and mistrust;

• They are not lovable, which is reinforced by physical pain and verbal demeaning; and

• They are the reason the family is not together and deserve punishment.

***Acceptable Methods of Discipline***

To help you develop acceptable alternatives to punishment, we have listed some guidelines below:

1. **Reinforce Acceptable Behavior**

Examples: Honest praise, special privileges and treats, extra hugs and kisses, additional time spent with the child, and awards such as stars or smiley faces on a door or bulletin board. Reinforcement should be made immediately and frequently when positive changes (no matter how small) are observed.

2. **Use Logical Consequences for the Behavior**

Examples: If you leave your bike out, you can't ride it tomorrow.

If you go in the street, you have to come inside.

If you can't get up on time, you will have to go to bed 30 minutes earlier.

3. **Criticize the Behavior, Not the Child** when talking with your children. It is helpful to think in terms of "you messages" and "I messages." The "you-message" lays blame and conveys criticism of the child. It suggests that the child is at fault. It is simply a verbal attack. In contrast, an "I message" simply describes how the behavior makes you feel. The message focuses on you, not the child. It reports how you feel. It does not assign blame. Example: “I can't hear the television when there is so much noise. I would like to be able to hear it.”

4. **Loss of Privileges**

Example: Television, telephoning friends, playing with a specific toy. Make this time appropriate according to the child's age, i.e., take the TV away for an hour, not a day. It is more important to use a positive reinforcement than punishment to control behavior.

5. **Grounding**

Example: Restricting the child to the house or yard or sending the child out of the room and away from the family activity for a short period of time. Be careful to make the time appropriate. Use the latter restriction judiciously making sure the child realizes the purpose is to help him regain control of his/her behavior.

6. **Helping Children Deal With and Manage Their Own Behavior**

Example: If the child is fighting, have him or her hit a pillow. Explain calmly that to feel angry is ok, but that to hurt others or the property of others is not ok. This requires much repetition and practice.

7. **Re-direct the Child's Activity**

Example: Suggest the child play with a toy instead of a sharp object.

8. **Time-Out from Activities**

Example: With younger children, sit them in a chair for a few minutes and possibly use a timer so that they can understand the time frame. A good rule of thumb is one minute for every year, i.e., 5 years of age: 5 minutes.

***Specific Problem Behaviors***

1. If the child is not being truthful, try to understand the reason and the motivation behind the child's action. Often the child is seeking acceptance, rather than trying to be deceitful.

2. In the case of tantrums, you may need to discuss these particular problems with your caseworker so that you can work together to try to determine why they occur and what can be done to eliminate them. Foster children's tantrums may be more destructive in nature than those of your children.

***Prohibited Disciplinary Practices***

1. Spanking, slapping, switching, or hitting a child with your hand or any object.

2. Shaking, pinching, or biting.

3. Tying a child with a rope or similar item.

4. Withholding of meals.

5. Denying mail, family visits, and telephone contacts with family or activities with the services worker or other Department staff.

6. Criticizing the child's family or the child's experiences with the family.

7. Humiliating or degrading punishment which subjects the child to ridicule, such as:

° Cutting or combing the child's hair for punishment

° Name calling and public scolding

° Forcing any child to wear clothing or accessories usually associated with the other sex

8. Threatening a child with removal from the foster home. This creates fear, anger, and increased anxiety.

9. Locking a child in a room/closet or outside the home.

10. Group punishment for the misbehavior of an individual child.

11. Delegating authority for punishment to or allowing punishment by other children or adults.

12. Destroying the child's property.

**I have read, understand and agree to the DFCS Discipline Policy for Foster/Adoptive Children. I further understand that physically disciplining a child in DFCS custody is grounds for immediate discharge of my services as a foster parent/prospective adoptive parent with the Agency, GFC and a formal report to the State is required to be completed by the Agency.**

Caregiver Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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