

# STEP BY STEP



## TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW  
ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

By Ruby M. Johnston

## About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

Ruby M. Johnston

President, International Leadership and Development Center

Founder, LAMb International

© LAMb International – 2008 All Rights Reserved

## WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

### THE CYCLE OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is often a cycle in families. In fact, many adults who hurt their children were once abused as children themselves. Adults who become parents often use the exact same parenting methods that their parent used on them. If they were hit as a child, they have learned this as a method of parenting. It is both an emotionally and physically damaging method for young children. Parents who were themselves abused can learn new and more effective ways of parenting their children.

### GOOD PARENTS CAN HURT THEIR CHILDREN

All parents have good days and bad days. Some days can be frustrating and seem overwhelming for a parent. The parent might yell too much, demand too much and even strike out at their child if they are not in control of their own stress and frustration. For parents to be effective in their parenting skills, they first need to know and understand their own stress points, their “buttons that get pushed”, and alternatives to managing these pressures.

### STOPPING THE CYCLE OF ABUSE – FIRST STEP IS TO UNDERSTAND SELF

There are many different ways to vent anger and manage your frustrations. Through our series, STEP BY STEP, you have been learning all sorts of different skills to help you become the parent you want to be. Many men and women have children without a clue of how to parent. You are among many if that is you. However, it is not hopeless. You can learn new and better ways of responding to your child. By reading this booklet, you are indicating your desire to be an effective parent. Keep reading!

The next few pages of this guide contain the following:

- Child Abuse -What It Is
- Factors That Affect the Potential to Abuse
- The Effects of Child Abuse on Children
- Strategies for Preventing Child Abuse
- Additional STEP-BY-STEP topics and titles.



## UNDERSTANDING CHILD ABUSE – WHAT IT IS!

There are different types of child abuse: physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. Different countries define abuse in different ways. In this guide we will use the following definitions from *Prevent Child Abuse America, 2003, Prevent Child Abuse Publications.*

**Physical Abuse:** *Physical Abuse is any physical injury caused by beating, punching, shaking, kicking or biting, or any other physical harm to a child. The injury may or may not be intentional. It may result from over-discipline or punishment.*

*Signs may include:*

- *Bruises or broken bones*
- *Marks in the shape of an object*
- *Unexplained bruises, burns or cuts*
- *Bald spots*
- *Fear of adults, especially parents*
- *Aggression*
- *Fear of physical contact such as normal touching or receiving a hug*

*Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse includes fondling or other touching of a child's genitals, forcing a child to touch the abuser, incest, rape, sodomy or exhibitionism, or the exploitation of a child through prostitution or pornography. Sexual abuse may be the most underreported form of abuse because adults often lure children into secrecy, shame and silence.*

*Signs may include:*

- *Secretiveness*
- *Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual things*
- *Inappropriate displays of attention*
- *Fear of a particular person or family member*
- *Over-compliance*
- *Aggression*
- *Pain during urination*
- *Difficulty walking or sitting*
- *Wetting pants or bed*
- *Genital or anal itching, rashes, bruising, bleeding or pain*

*Emotional Abuse: Emotional Abuse may involve verbal or psychological abuse or mental injury. Emotional abuse can be defined as "acts or omissions by parents or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders." Emotional abuse may also include extreme or bizarre acts of punishment. Sexually or physically abused children are usually emotionally abused as well.*

*Signs may include:*

- *Delay in physical or social development compared to peers*
- *Speech, sleep or eating disorders*
- *Repetitive actions, such as rocking, sucking or biting*
- *Lack of concentration*
- *Lack of emotion or interest*

- *Depression or withdrawal*
- *Aggression*
- *Wetting pants or bed*

*Neglect: While there are several forms of neglect – educational, emotional, environmental, medical, developmental – the best way of describing neglect is to call it physical neglect. Physical neglect is the failure to meet a child’s basic physical needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, and hygiene. Neglect is considered a form of abuse.*

*Signs may include:*

- *Clothing that is dirty, torn, poorly fitting or inappropriate for the weather*
- *Sleepiness*
- *Poor hygiene*
- *Untreated medical or dental problems*
- *Hoarding or stealing food*
- *Apparent lack of supervision*
- *Poor social skills*
- *Low self-esteem*
- *Learning disabilities or lower mental ability than normal for age*



## RISK FACTORS FOR ABUSE TO OCCUR

It is difficult to understand how and why a parent would ever become abusive, and it is hard to imagine that a child under our care could be at the receiving end of abuse. Yet, we know it happens. An adult may not intend to hurt a child, but be unable or unwilling to cope with the different stresses they are experiencing. When this occurs, some adults take their frustration or anger out on their children. There is no specific profile of an abusive adult; however, there are some common risk factors that begin to contribute to abuse. Factors that challenge parents are often the following:

- Poverty
- Social isolation
- Frequent family crisis
- Lack of employment
- Abused as a child
- Substance abuse – alcohol and/or drugs
- Lack of parenting skills
- Unrealistic expectations of children
- Poor impulse control
- Abuse from their spouse



## LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE ON THE CHILD

Child abuse results in both immediate effects and long-term effects. The immediate effects can result in severe physical injury or the death of a child. The long-term effects may not be as obvious, but also threaten a child's life. It is the long term effects that have the potential to hinder the child from becoming a productive and effective adult. Children who suffer any kind of abuse can have lifelong problems, including:

- Learning disorders
- Dropping out of school
- Crime and violence
- Prostitution
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Teenage pregnancy
- Substance abuse
- Unemployment
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Depression or low self-esteem
- Speech defects
- Brain damage
- Suicide





## UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD - SECOND STEP TO PREVENTING ABUSE

Getting to know and understand children is essential. You can do this by reading all you can about child development and behavior, working to know your child and becoming an expert on your child's behavior. Keep the following principles in mind:

- ✓ Like everyone else, children have needs. To get their needs met, they act out or behave.
- ✓ "Behaving" and "misbehaving" are parent talk.
- ✓ Children don't misbehave. They simply behave to get their needs met.
- ✓ Try to think differently about your child's behavior.
- ✓ Be a person, as well as a "parent."
- ✓ Parents cannot accept every behavior of their children.
- ✓ You can change behavior you don't like without using punishment.
- ✓ When infants behave unacceptably, there is a good reason. But you have to try to guess what it is.
- ✓ When you cannot accept one behavior, substitute another you can.
- ✓ Let kids know how you feel even if you can't use words.
- ✓ It's often more efficient to change the child's environment than to change the child.
- ✓ To change unacceptable behavior of your older child, talk about yourself, not your child. Use "I" messages!
- ✓ Parents who use power may well run out of it when their children get older, children need to know they can voice an opinion.
- ✓ Children learn to cope with parental power with undesirables and unhealthy behaviors therefore it is best to help your child know they can discuss difference they have with an adult.

- ✓ If parents are either dictators or doormats, someone is going to lose.
- ✓ When conflicts are resolved so nobody loses, but everyone wins, the relationship deepens.



#### FINAL STEP:

Children are our most important resource and asset. We want to build them up, encourage them and help them to feel CAPABLE, LOVABLE, RESPONSIBLE and WORTHWHILE. As we use many different strategies to do this, understanding child abuse is one of those strategies.

Make a commitment to learn more! Read more STEP BY STEP booklets!

## A CREDO FOR PARENTS – FOR THEIR CHILDREN



Our relationship is important to me

*Still, you and I are separate persons with our own values and needs.*



Let us communicate openly and honestly.

*Then we can better understand what we each value and need.*



I will tell you honestly and without blame how I feel.

*I'll tell you how I am affected whenever my needs are not met because of an action of yours. I will give you a chance to change your behavior out of respect for my needs. And I want you to be just as open when my behavior is unacceptable to you.*



Let us agree to always search for a solution that meets both of our needs.

*That way, when we are in conflict, neither will lose. Both will win.*



I will try to listen with understanding when you have a problem.

*I will help you find your own solutions rather than imposing mine. And I want you to listen to me when I need to find answers to my problems.*



We can be all that we are capable of becoming.

*That's because our relationship will continue to be built on love, concern, caring and respect.*

## **OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS**

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aide – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family
36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different
37. Understanding Attachment
38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child

39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
  - a. How to Talk to Your Child
  - b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
45. Developing Responsibility
46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
51. Dealing with Lying
52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
53. Dealing with Defiance
54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
55. Dealing with Stealing
56. Dealing with Anger
57. Dealing with Fighting
58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
61. Help with Tattling
62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
63. Help with Thumb Sucking
64. Help with Bedtime Problems
65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
66. Understanding Suicide
67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
68. Dealing with Failure
69. Demonstrating Manners
70. Helping Siblings Get Along
71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE