

Helping Parents with Parenting

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At times, you may see parents parenting in ways that aren't effective or nurturing for their child. It's not abuse, but it is poor parenting. How do providers deal with those situations in a respectful and tactful way that will help the parent learn better ways? Here are a couple of examples of what you might observe:

- A parent yelling or shouting at a child
- A parent losing control
- A parent pulling or dragging a child in frustration

It can be confusing and hard to know what to do and whether you should get involved. There are two things to think about. First, parents may be struggling with difficulties in their life. There may be family, financial or personal problems. Parents become stressed out and tired. In turn, their child may suffer. Second, they may not know better ways to parent. Either way, there are things you can do.

- *Model appropriate behavior to the parent.* When a tired and stressed parent is treating a child roughly, you can offer to help. For example- if the parent is getting angry with the child because she is slow at putting on her shoes, you could say in a kind manner, "Is there anything I can do to help? I'll help Marie get her shoes on." This will help the parent realize that s/he is being unreasonable. It is possible that the parent may refuse your help. But, the offer may help the parent view the situation differently.

- *Say something positive about the child.* You could share with the parent something positive about the child. For example you might say, "Rick was a very good helper today. He helped me set up snack so nicely." You could also try sharing with the parent something that the child worked on or did that day. For example, "Jose' worked very hard with the blocks today and built a big stable for the horses." This takes the parent mind off the stress. It also focuses on the positive side of the child.

- *Divert the child's attention if s/he is misbehaving.* If the child is acting out and creating a stressful situation for the parent, you can try distracting her. You could remind the child about some fun activity or event that s/he participated in that day. You could ask her to tell her parent about it. You could also divert her attention to something else. This will help to distract the child from her tantrum and help her focus on something else.

- *Sympathize with the parent and child.* You could say something kind such as, "It looks like you have both had a long and hard day." This helps the parent understand the real reason for their stress. It will help them realize that the child is not the cause for their tiredness or tension.

You can help change a situation where there is a possibility for a child to be treated roughly by his parents. But, you can do it in a way that helps the parent learn new ways to deal interact with their child.

Adapted from: *Helping Parents and Children in Difficult Situations*, Provider-Parent Partnerships. Purdue University. <http://www.ces.purdue.edu/providerparent/>