

EXTREME MEASURES FOR EXTREME BEHAVIOR

In extreme cases, children lose all sense of boundaries and wantonly destroy property, defy teachers, assault peers, and even physically attack their parents. They are testing the ability of adults in their lives to provide external controls until they can internalize the ability to govern themselves. Monstrous behavior can happen when children are:¹

- Not bonded with or have lost a bond with an important caretaker.
- In an alliance with another adult against a parent.
- Acting out rage against a parent who has violated or abandoned them.
- Acting out rage against a caretaker with whom they feel safe.

It can be necessary to restrain these children until struggling gives way to crying and deep relaxation. Positions that can be used for physical restraint are shown on page 4.20 of the text. The basic strategy is to create a “strait jacket” for children by crossing their arms and holding their hands from behind. Parents can straddle children without using their full weight or can wrap their legs around children to prevent them from kicking. The relative proportions of parent-child strengths and body builds make some positions more practical than others. If parents have any doubts about their ability to assume or maintain a position, they should wait until another adult is available to assist. When done properly, the parent appears calm, confident, and unemotional.

¹ *High Risk: Children without a Conscience* by Ken Magid and Carole A. McKelvey (Bantam Books, 1987) gives further information about causes and treatment of children with attachment disorders.

Although children can be restrained when they are in the throes of destructive behavior, often it is better to plan a full-fledged, surprise session for a later time:³

- Prepare by making arrangements for other children to be out of the home. Gather supplies for a prolonged session: towels, diapers, mats, snacks, telephone, and reading materials. Explain what you will be doing ahead of time to neighbors or family who might walk in and give them copies of this handout to read so they can understand and even assist you.
- Schedule the session when you will have plenty of time so the child can exhaust himself and realize that it is useless to struggle. This could take one to eight hours.
- Set the tone by explaining to the child that you have arranged an interesting experience so he or she can talk to the angry part that has been tricking him into so much trouble lately.
- Assume control: Grab the child by both hands, turn him inward so arms are crossed, use your leg to unbalance him, and bring him to the floor or sofa.
- Make casual, confusing comments to demands, orders, and pleas to be released—"I haven't finished thinking about ways to change your behavior, but since I don't know any, it will all be up to you."
- Disregard or subtly encourage yelling, crying, and sobbing. This will release deep levels of hurt and promote the exhaustion necessary for capitulation. Remember that hunger and weakness will also aid in causing submission.
- Handle pleas to use the bathroom by offering to place a diaper under the child or use a towel to mop up. When the child's demeanor suggests he is starting to recognize the parent's authority, he can be allowed to use the bathroom with the understanding that the session will resume when he is finished.
- Handle complaints of being hurt or hungry by saying "I hope your hunger (pain) doesn't make it too hard to think of a plan to change your behavior."
- Do not push the child to realize that he is not all-powerful. The longer the time spent in the initial session, the less likely a repeat performance will be needed.
- Terminate the session only when the child's manner suggests he can accept this extreme demonstration of parental authority. This might include polite language and quietly waiting while the parent reads or talks on the phone with friends.
- Read *The Taming of the Shrew* to the child for an interesting touch.⁴ Use of Shakespearean text will test the child's tolerance of an adult whim and make it difficult for him to consciously resist the message of the plot. If the child complains that he doesn't understand, say you don't either and that you hope someday he'll explain it to you.
- Give the child immediate opportunities to demonstrate compliance following the session by suggesting that it might be a good idea for him or her to rest in bed for a couple of hours before eating or playing.

Restraining should only be used when all other techniques to reduce anger and encourage obedience have been ineffective! Bones that are not mending properly must be broken and reset. Likewise, a spirit that has gone awry may also need to be broken to redirect it on a fulfilling course. Seek professional consultation to make sure your child's behavior warrants such intervention. Even when conducted by professionals, restraining may not be appropriate for children 14 or older.

³ This approach to restraining was developed by Milton Erickson and is described in *Advanced Techniques of Hypnosis and Therapy* (Grune & Stratton, 1967), pp. 436–442.

⁴ *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb (Dilithiu Press, 1986) contains a shortened version with enough Shakespearean language to defy the child's conscious mind.