

Practical TCS

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 10 August, 2003 - 11:28

Annette Abma

Though many parents may be convinced of **TCS** *in theory*, they often want *practical* advice on how to resolve real problems; yet, as TCS parents come to learn, there is no *one* solution to any given problem just as there is no *one* kind of child or parent. Unlike most approaches to parenting, TCS does not and cannot offer formulas or methods for dealing with specific problems. This is because finding common preferences involves discovering what is most preferred by the very unique individuals involved.

That's a hard truth for new TCS parents. When I first learned about TCS, I remember how uncertain I was and how desperately I sought helpful advice both on and off the [list](#) (and got plenty, thanks to all the wonderful contributors there!). Sometimes I didn't even know if something was an actual problem to be resolved or not. For this reason, I have put together three scenarios which offer examples of explicitly coercive and implicitly coercive approaches, and TCS approaches to sample problems. Each scenario is also followed by a list of possible common preferences or solutions as well as some suggestions on how one might prepare for solving such problems in the future.

I hope you find them helpful on your path to taking children (and yourselves!) seriously.

Scenario 1: Billy wants to go to the park but his mother wants to stay home and look at her new magazine:

Explicitly Coercive: “No, and that's final.” **Implicitly Coercive** (and not true!): “Oh, Billy, I'm exhausted. You don't want me to be unhappy do you? Why don't you let Mommy rest and we'll go later on when I'm feeling better?” **Self-Sacrificial:** “Okay Billy, whatever you say. I guess I'll read the magazine some other time. ” “Okay, let's go. I never get to do what I want to do anyway!”

TCS Approach: “I want to read my magazine. You want to go to the park. Let's think of a good solution here.” (Actually, we rarely state *that* we are finding a solution, we just *find* one, but you get the idea.)

Possible Solutions:

- Mom takes magazine to the park and reads it while Billy plays.
- Mom asks Dad if he'd like to go to the park with Billy
- Mom asks Billy if he'd like to play in the yard with something really fun.
- Dad asks Billy if he'd like to go with him to the hardware store
- Mom asks Billy if he'd like to look at some books while she reads her magazine.
- Mom remembers that she wanted to get exercise today so decides that a trip to the park is a great idea.
- They decide to go out for ice-cream.

Proactive Considerations:

- Help children become happily occupied on their own for times when parent needs a break.
- Consider if the children get enough time to do the things they love and set up trips to the park, zoo, etc. either with yourself or with some other adult caregiver
- Try to think of some activities that you know the children always love doing and make sure that the supplies are handy (such as painting, sculpture, chemistry set, books, TV, etc.) so that when you want quiet time you can offer a fun activity for them.
- Make sure you are getting sufficient rest and assistance. Ask for help from spouse, friend, family, local youth or teenager, or a hired helper.

Scenario 2: Nancy has a mild throat infection but refuses to take the prescribed antibiotics because she dislikes the taste.

Explicitly Coercive: “You have to take it, Nancy. I'm sorry but we're going to have to hold you down and force you to take it for your own good.”

Implicitly Coercive: “Nancy, if you don't take this medicine you'll die!” “Please, Nancy, do it for me. I hate to see you sick” “Mmmm, this is yummy! (pretends to take some). ”Mommy likes it! Now you try it.“

TCS Approach: “You don't like the taste of this medicine, yet you'll probably get better much faster if you take it. How can we resolve this problem?” (Do keep in mind that we are talking about a mild throat infection here. If her condition was such that medication was vital, the TCS approach would be different.)

Possible Solutions:

- Parent finds a compounding pharmacist and asks to have the antibiotics made more palatable (choose child's favourite flavour)
- Parent asks pharmacist or doctor if the medicine is available in a different form (tablets, capsules, liquid —whichever the child would prefer)
- Parent offers to put the medicine in something more palatable (chocolate milk, pudding, juice, soup, etc.)
- Parent looks into consequences of not taking medicine and shares the information with child so they can make an informed decision together.
- They go out for ice cream (and perhaps offer to put the medicine in a spoonful of child's favourite flavour)

Proactive Considerations:

- Get to know a good compounding pharmacist in your area
- Find opportunities to discuss the role of doctors, medicine, health, etc. with children so they know what to expect and what their options are.
- Become a trusted advisor so that if a rare occasion arises where a child really must do something s/he dislikes for the sake of his health (emergency situation), s/he will trust that you are being honest when you say that it's essential.

Scenario 3: Five-year-old Abby refuses to take a bath.

Explicitly Coercive: “You have to bathe, Abby. I'm putting you in whether you like it or not”

Implicitly Coercive: “You're so dirty, Abby. Do you want people to think of you as a dirty girl who can't take care of herself?” “Abby, if you don't bathe you'll get sick. There are germs all over your body that need to be washed off every day.” “If you bathe now, I'll read you an extra story later.” “No one will want to play with you if you're not clean,

Abby.” (Of course if there really is a bad smell, such as if the child has hit puberty and not changed her frequency of bathing, she will want to know that there is a bad smell, because it could be true that people avoid her because of it, because it could be very embarrassing for her, and because it is unpleasant for those around her.)

TCS Approach: “I respect that it's your body and therefore your choice entirely.”

Possible Solutions:

- Parent respects child's choice and child bathes when s/he wants to.
- If parent has legitimate concerns for the child's happiness or health, s/he offers alternative methods of cleaning such as shower, swimming pool, warm washcloth body tickle (great for toddlers), sprinkler, etc.
- They go have some ice cream.

Proactive Considerations:

- Remember that bodily integrity is vital and that no-one should impose themselves on another's body without their consent.
- Get factual information on hygiene and don't let your own coercive upbringing influence you.
- Have lots of fun bath toys, bath paint, bubbles, etc. so that bath-time is fun time.

[to post comments](#)

Comments

Thank You!

Submitted by surfmom on 11 August, 2003 - 01:19

Thank you for posting this. It has cleared up so much for me. I find it hardest to figure out how to not be so self sacrificing, and your article really has cleared up some things for me and helped me to broaden my thinking.

[to post comments](#)

Clarifying desires

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 18 August, 2003 - 04:08

One general principle that may be helpful is to break down desires into more specific desires. e.g.: Perhaps Billy wants to go to the park specifically to splash in the water. In which case the parent might meet this desire by filling up a play pool at home. Of course the parent can apply this to their own desires as well.

[to post comments](#)

Wonderfull!

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 24 August, 2003 - 04:57

Now if only I can find that much icecream!

[to post comments](#)

medicine

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 10 September, 2003 - 14:34

i found your advice somewhat helpful, but what would you do in an emergency situation? If there were a need for surgery, medicine or physical restraint in a life or death situation how would you maintain respect for the integrity of the child while fulfilling your need to protect?

[to post comments](#)

This sounds familiar...

Submitted by luckyme on 15 October, 2003 - 23:09

Just want to mention that I am a newbie and am finding lots to think about here...

These examples sound very much like the practical solutions offered by Haim Ginott, what are the major differences between the two?

[to post comments](#)

Helpful, but not Universal

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 26 November, 2003 - 02:45

Very intelligent ideas here. However, it seems to me that the advice all over this website does not take into account that as rationally capable as our children are, many times they are completely irrational. I know that I've asked my two year old a million times to do a simple task such as hold my hand when in a crowded place, or stop grabbing the cats (unintentionally doing them harm),

etc; Only to have my request met with the infamous "TANTRUM". Throwing her head back, falling on the floor, crying dramatically (with no tears, and immediatly stopping if she gets her way),

etc. Am I supposed to let her lay on the ground in the middle of say, an intersection, because I don't want to physically force, or "coerce", her into moving her body across the street with me? Or given a different circumstance: If she hits me, am I supposed to do nothing? Okay, maybe from what I read, you all might be okay with me acting hurt from being hit... but that seems to me to imply to her that physical abuse is a good way to subdue a parent's authority. Or is it that a parent has no authority? I understand being against many forms of authoritarianism, but to say that we are never put in a circumstance where we have no choice but to TELL our child to do something is living in a dreamworld. The bath example, I believe was used up there... So if my child

doesn't want to take a bath for a week, because it's her body... not even for ice cream (which come on! bribing your child is good teaching?!),

then I'm supposed to continually send her off to school, OBVIOUSLY getting dirtier everyday, until suddenly DCFS is knock knocking on my door taking custody of my child for neglect?! I'm not saying I disagree with any number of ideas on this site... And I HIGHLY promote the idea that children are equally significant human beings, amazing human beings, who should be respected as much as possible... to a degree. If it is considered disrespectful to send my child to their room for a timeout (yes, actually ORDER them to do it!),

because they told me to "get fucked", then I guess I have no respect for children. Please... SOMEONE clarify... what am I missing here?

to post comments

Just some ideas

Submitted by Rowina on 12 December, 2003 - 00:55

Just to respond to some of your comments:

Please read the sidebar articles "Children are not Born Knowing Right from Wrong" and "The Cognitive Capacity Argument". Adults too are often completely irrational--this is central to TCS theory. No one is completely rational--all the more reason not to force your irrationalities on your children. TCS theory holds that you can't know which of your theories ARE in fact irrational or false, so don't force ANY of them on your children.

Handholding is not the only way to be safe in a crowded place. Explore other options that your child might prefer (piggyback, sling, stroller, wagon). Also, did your child have ANY choice but to be in the street where the tantrum occurred? Perhaps the bad feeling about this outing been building for quite some time before then. Children who are continually, often subtly and implicitly coerced often find it necessary to bring out the big guns (tantrums) just to be heard.

Ice cream, plus all the other good things that parents think kids might want, is always available to children taken seriously, so its effectiveness as a bribe is extremely limited. If parents are truly helpful, IME they can't bribe their kids even if they tried, because the kids know that the parents don't put a price on their help.

If your child hits you, something is wrong. Address that, and not the action she took to get your attention about it. You have plenty of opportunities to offer her your own moral theories, but at moments like these they often fall on deaf ears.

Regarding parental authority, please read the article on the sidebar "Do the Kids Rule?".

To what "degree" do you believe that the people you love deserve your respect? Is your love dependent on their never putting a foot wrong?

If you have a serious concern about **anything** that your child does, you need to think very hard about your theories and discuss them with others, and especially your child. If a child is offered information in a non-threatening, non-implicitly coercive way about possible consequences of not bathing plus helped to have fun bathing as Annette suggested, I find it difficult to believe that the child would not take some minimal action (washing off "the parts that show", maybe some strong deodorant or carrying around some potpourri in her school bag?). Unless of course the parents are so horrible that the child thinks CPS might be a better alternative.

Baths

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 8 January, 2004 - 15:18

First, you should notice that I am writing from Brazil, a warm country where baths are taken at least once a day, and usually more than that in summer.

Your attitude towards bath could seem to be very democratic, but it is not educational. Should TCS avoid teaching an important social and health-related habit, even if not life-threatening, just to avoid being coercitive?

Taking a bath everyday is an important thing in hot weather and, believe it or not, also in cold weather. Just ask for any Brazilian that travels around the world what he thinks of the smell of people in the winter in very advanced countries like France. Also, a parent should understand that although it is true that a missed bath will not kill, the lack of bathing habit will have a big impact on the adult life of a person. The important thing is the habit, not the bath itself!

In Brazil it is common that children do not want to stop whatever they are doing to take a shower/bath and, after being in this refreshing activity, refusing to stop it. Should TCS defend the right for a child to stay hours in bath too, expending water and energy?

Although I have to admit that I am coercitive in lots of ways, and sometimes my patience is just not enough, me and my wife also have some nice ideas about how to bring our 3-years old girl to have a bath. Here are some:

-- Offer to substitute bath for other water-activities, like swimmingpool, sprinkler, etc... This is like you said, but we include a formal bath in the end (I mean SOAP). It is easier to start things by the funny side. This works well in weekends.

-- Invite her to take bath with one of us.

-- Invite her to change her activity and do the bath in between, or after the next activity (for example, do a little snack and the bath).

-- Plan bath hours (always when she wake-up works for us). Do not stop an activity for bathing, use the interruptions. Planning times is a habit-forming thing that should be part of every parent method.

-- Provide positive feedback AFTER each bath (you smell good, etc...) Positive feedback is great as a long run strategy.

-- Discover what she does not like in the bath. In our case, she does not like shampooing. However, she DOES like to shampoo if we do a lot of foam for her to play.

-- Let her play in the bath, for some time.

It is important to note that every skipped bath will be used against you later. How does TCS handle that?

Multiple children

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 29 March, 2004 - 15:22

I've been reading as much about TCS as I can and trying diligently to implement it in my own family.

But...

So many of the scenarios and solutions presented within TCS seem to depend on only **one child** . Negotiating common preferences and having everyone follow through with the common preference seems to become exponentially more difficult with each additional child. TCS parenting of **multiple very young children** often seems like an ideal rather than a practical reality.

I would like to hear about how other TCS parents would negotiate common preferences with multiple children, particularly those under the age of six.

Suppose, for instance, that a family with several young children manage to find a common preference only to have one member change his mind midway through the solution. Does this, then, throw us all back into the negotiation stage?

How does it not undermine the whole process when there is no guarantee of follow-through?

At what point can the parent gently remind the child that he had agreed to spending a certain amount of time doing something for another child in order to ensure that those other children would do something for him immediately after, especially when participation in an organized group event makes the order/ timing non-negotiable?

And what if that gentle reminder does not make a difference? Does everyone pack up and go home without having fulfilled anyone's preference, which seems so punitive to all members?

Sometimes, TCS parenting seems so unattainable when one cannot double or triple oneself (or hire someone to serve that function) and fulfill everyone's needs at the same time.

to post comments

rules with a twist!

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 13 October, 2005 - 07:24

Hi, I am a former nanny (I am now a dorm parent for a school for the blind. I still babysit) Kid need boundaries and rules and certain things should never be a choice like safety rules eg. not hurting others, staying with parent/caregiver on trips, cleaning up toys, much needed bathtime/shampoos but there are positive ways to go about enforcing these rules. I never give in on those rules but I don't act forceful about them. There is no need to. An example is bathtime. I have had many kids who did not want to take a bath or especially wash hair. I tried to find out why and proceeded very slowly. I had one little girl who confided in me that she was scared of going under the water and also getting soap in her eyes. We actually talked about this over dinner when I asked her about having fun in the tub making soap ears with shampoo. I let her know I don't do things that way because I wouldn't

like to go under water or get soap in my eyes either. I worked on trust first. I told her everything I would do and how we would get the soap out (looking up making coyote calls)and a washcloth. I let her know I would keep her safe. I didn't make shampooing a choice but I listened to her fears and responded to them. She was not scared when I washed her hair. She got a little nervous when I needed to run water. I assured her it was not to lay under just to wet my washcloth. She was fine with that: trust was there. You can be very sensitive to a child's feelings/fears and still enforce rules. Bathtime can be a great time if a parent/caregiver takes their time and is sensitive to their fears/feelings. I give choices within the rules. Bath now or after dinner, which towel Lion King or 101 dalmations, which toys and vary the choices. Too many overwhelm kids. Try rules with a twist. It works! This kid asks for soap ears when I come over even when she doesn't need a bath!

to post comments

birthday parties

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 14 April, 2006 - 18:51

Your preteen daughter refuses to have a birthday party and you cannot convince her to have one. She has many friends and really needs to honour them by having a party - what I mean is they have invited her to their party. A friend has stopped speaking to her, something to do with the party although it's not clear what's going on. This child remains excited about her birthday but gets upset with too much talk about the party.

to post comments

child sensitivity toward bathing "rules with a twist"

Submitted by Scherrie (not verified) on 16 June, 2007 - 19:14

nanny, i totally agree with you. the exact same scenario with my boyfriend's daughter...scared of bathing and soap in her eyes. at first i took the "it's time to take a bath and i'm sorry if your upset, but too bad" approach and it never worked. i followed your advice of talking to the child and finding out what they feared. i told her that i would not use of cup of water and pour it on her head to wash her hair. then i decided to reward her if she took a bath and didn't cry. throughout the bathing process i talk to her about how fun it is to bath, and how "cool it is to be able to play with bath toys". i found that this was a much better and happier approach to bathing her. i think sometimes adults forget what it's like to be a young child and we need to be more sensitive to those "silly" fears like water, brushing teeth, and so on.

thanks again

to post comments

bath time for babies

Submitted by Jen (not verified) on 24 October, 2007 - 15:11

Listen, there's no reason for a baby to be afraid of bathtime! The FIRST thing you do is get a bath visor. The soap will NEVER reach the baby's eyes to scare them.

Secondly, get in to a FUN habit of filling the bath tub with only about a half-inch to an inch of water, several times a day just for fun. Let him/her splash around in it. Tell him/her we're going to play like we're in the pool. You are by their side the entire time, smiling, laughing, splashing (being sure NOT to get them wet), just playing right along with them, hopefully not in the tub unless you absolutely have to, because you need to be on the other side, letting them see you smile. If you must get in, make sure that, while you're looking like you're having a great time, you keep a constant eye on their reactions to things.

Like I said, every day, do this several times. The way I'm talking about will not hurt the drought, because you wouldn't be using but about 2 inches of water in a day, and the baby is beginning to learn a life lesson. After they've gotten used to doing this, very gently pick up a MILD bar of soap (hopefully castille), keep it in the palm of your hand, and just rub it on their knee. Tickle them with it or whatever YOUR baby likes. Then take a fun wash cloth to wipe it off. Say nothing more than you need. In a few days, they'll enjoy this time so much they won't want to do much else!

Make certain to follow this time with something else just as pleasant, but slowed down, like holding them warmly in your arms, and telling them a story. At that age, I would never read from a book. I would use stories I knew and tell them to her, making it really fun. By the time they're two, you can print out a picture of their favorite book character, punch a hole on each side (the long side will be going left to right), and tie yarn around it, and put over your child to re-enact the story with you. "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair!" Take a ball of string, and have her roll it off her hair. Or ("Where the Wild Things Are"), "Max, send them off to bed without any dinner!" or let him/her BE the wild thing, depending on their favorite character. "Gnash those terrible teeth!"

If you get in a habit of really PLAYING with your baby, during and after the bath, it will be the funnest part of their day. Good luck!

[to post comments](#)

rules with a twist

Submitted by [A former nanny \(not verified\)](#) on 10 November, 2007 - 17:21

Thank you for letting me know my advice worked for you. I have given it to many parents and it had worked for them also. When I was a child I never liked my hair washed either so it has given me insight into a childs fears of washing hair and other things. Thanks again for sharing.

Former nanny (still babysits)

[to post comments](#)

bathing

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 26 April, 2008 - 22:53

i do not understand why so many people are so uptight about their child's bathing habits! People act as if, if a 5 year old doesnt take a bath every day, then subsequently as a 16 year old or as an adult he'll never take baths.... this logic doesnt make sense. People act as if not learning a "habit" as a child means one can never learn it later but there is no reason to think this. We can always change our minds about our preferences about things. Good habits are not "good" unless they are reached non-coercively, otherwise the real habit is one of obedience and self-

sacrifice, not to mention learning that people who say they love you will hurt you and force you to do things you dont want to do.

and with bathing this seems doubly absurd since, unlike eating macdonalds' for every meal or never exercizing, if one never bathed again one would not grow ill. In reality, eventually a child will want to bathe. it might be in a week, it might be in a month or several months. So what? I know from personal experience that not bathing for 2 months has absolutely no ill health effects and one doesnt even smell that bad after a while. but, speaking of imposing one's own irrationalities onto one's children, who said that HUMAN smell was "bad"? who made that a rule? I would rather smell human than like a bunch of chemicals mixed in a lab and then sold to me.

to post comments

Multiple Children

Submitted by Willow on 15 May, 2008 - 11:39

I would be interested in someone having a go at answering the how to impliment TCS with multiple small children question.

Most of the time we have both parents available when both children are awake and around, but that is not an option for everyone.

"So many of the scenarios and solutions presented within TCS seem to depend on only one child . Negotiating common preferences and having everyone follow through with the common preference seems to become exponentially more difficult with each additional child. TCS parenting of multiple very young children often seems like an ideal rather than a practical reality.

"I would like to hear about how other TCS parents would negotiate common preferences with multiple children, particularly those under the age of six."

And remembering that the smallest cannot negotiate verbally.

to post comments

A scenario for you

Submitted by kmmapete on 12 August, 2008 - 06:12

Billy wants to go to the park. Mom has no money for gas and the park is 10 miles away (yes this is a real scenario)

Mom offers alternatives...

Would you like to play out back? How about you have some TV time? How about you play with this toy? What would you like to do other than go to the park?

Child starts crying "I'll never get to go to the park" Mom explains that when mommy gets the money to put gas in the car, then we will go to the park, but right now, mommy needs the gas to get to school til the end of the week.

What do I do then?? When Billy won't stop crying. I validate his feelings, tell him it sucks and I agree that it isn't fair, but then it's "you're a mean mommy, you're the meanest."

to post comments

Go to a park near the school

Submitted by [emmaagain \(not verified\)](http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com) (http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com) on 17 August, 2008 - 19:09

Go to a park near the school after school?

Take a day off school to go to the park?

Make the most amazing assault course in the house/garden (stepladder? tables? boxes? chairs?)

Invite some good friends over to play ball games in your garden?

Ring up the mum of a friend of your child. Explain you don't have gas money to go to the park. Ask if she'd like you to take both children to the park for the afternoon while she puts her feet up, and she can pay for the gas in return?

to post comments

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