

ARTS & CULTURE



» **Tomorrow:** You better watch where you sit at La Fete.

INTERVIEW

PARENTING WITHOUT PUNISHING

Is it possible to raise children without resorting to spanking or yelling? All it takes, says Dr Joan E Durrant, is Positive Discipline

SAIREE SARANGDHAR
SPECIAL TO THE NATION

Save the Children Sweden recently held a discussion with Dr Joan E Durrant who is the author of "Positive Discipline: What it is and how to do it", a parenting guide that gives parents the option of raising children without employing corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment is an integral part of the process of growing up in Asian society, where the idea of hitting,

yelling at and punishing children is broadly taken for granted.

However, the physical and emotional maltreatment of children is now an issue at a global level.

Dr Durrant is a child clinical psychiatrist and associate professor at the University of Manitoba, Canada. She is also a member of the research committee of the UN's Study on Violence against Children and co-editor of "Eliminating Corporal Punishment: The Way Forward to Construct

Discipline", written for Unesco.

What is the book about and why do you think it will work for Thai parents?

The book is about a way of relating to children that is universal. It is about how we relate to each other as people and family members, fostering behaviour that is respectful toward others and ourselves.

Instead of a recipe book of what to do in different situations it is more like a way of thinking to help parents interact with their children in a positive and constructive way without hitting and yelling.

The book has been introduced in a number of countries in Asia and also in New Zealand and it seems to strike a chord with people wherever they are.

What is Positive Discipline? How can a child's behaviour be controlled without hitting or yelling?

A lot of it is about understanding child development and what kinds of behaviour are normal at different stages.

Positive Discipline allows parents to see themselves as role models, corporal punishment prevents children from growing up to be non-violent problem-solvers.

Parents must think about long-term goals not just moment to moment conflict situations. Long-term goals help parents think about what kind of a person they want to be creating. Then they need to decide how to go about achieving those goals while providing an emotionally and physically secure environment, clear and consistent communication, and learning how children think and feel.

It's really a new and different way of thinking. It is not so much controlling children as teaching them. If we shift our role from being someone like a "police officer", to that of a teacher, coach or mentor we can do a much better job.

Corporal punishment is very common in Southeast Asian culture. How can Positive Discipline be applied here and how can the age-old cycle of corporal punishment be broken?

It's really awareness. It's thinking what you are doing and how it is affecting the child.

When any person is hit, it erodes their confidence and trust and fosters fear as opposed to respect or cooperation. This weakens the parent-child bond.

If we do things that strengthen the bond by making a conscious decision not to hit our children, they will come to us for advice and guidance.

The book highlights children's rights as set out by the United Nations. How can parents be encouraged to see corporal punishment as a violation of their child's rights?

There's a worldwide shift going on, we're learning that children have the same feelings as adults do. They too are

full human beings and that if anything; they merit more protection than adults do because they are so much smaller and easily hurt.

The protections that we take for granted as adults need to be extended to children too. Parents must be a part of this shift.

Many countries, Thailand included, are trying to pass laws where corporal punishment is fully banned. How are such laws put into place and enforced?

There are now 24 countries in the world that prohibit children from being hit.

When such laws are passed, governments tend to also include education and support services for parents. The whole thinking comes from the perspective that parenting is indeed very difficult and stressful.

Who is your target audience?

Everybody! Well, most parents can be included. There are parents who have more significant challenges while trying to raise children with autism or brain injuries, things that would require more intensive intervention. However, for average parents, the book provides a very common-sense approach in a way of just relating to people.

The principals can even be applied to marriages.

What changes can parents expect to see when they apply this approach?

They will be less stressed. They will not respond violently in a moment and then feel horrible afterwards; they know deep down that they've done something terrible.

Usually when you start hitting it is because you are feeling desperate and when the intended hitting does not have the desired result, parents just hit more, which is a frightening feeling. The idea is to think ahead to a situation that would cause a conflict and plan a response that will help you feel not stressed and out of control. Parents will learn to recognise their triggers and see it coming.

Could you share your experience as a mother who applies Positive Discipline to her child with us?

I have one child who is now 12 years old. When he comes across situations he finds unfair he stops and talks about it.

He's learned how to be respectful, be a problem-solver and take responsibility for any mistakes he might make. Because we take things so personally and panic, we react without thinking about what we want for our long-term goal.

I want my son to come to me when he's 16 and someone is trying to influence him. And he does tell me everything. He comes to me for advice, he tells me when there are drugs around and he knows I will not hit him or yell at him. That's exactly what I wanted to create.

ALEXIS STEWART POKES FUN AT MOM, MARTHA



MARTHA STEWART, right is joined by her daughter Alexis, left, and Jennifer Koppelman Hutt, on the set of 'The Martha Stewart Show'.

ALICIA RANCILIO
ASSOCIATED PRESS
New York

Who hasn't rolled her eyes at her mother? Alexis Stewart certainly has.

The 43-year-old daughter of Martha Stewart and her co-host, Jennifer Koppelman Hutt, 39, earn a living by poking fun at the how-to queen both on television and on the radio.

"Whatever, Martha!" airs on the US cable channel Fine Living Network. It was recently picked up for a second season. They also have a daily radio show called "Whatever! With Alexis and Jennifer."

The pair talk about the show, their relationship, and Martha misconceptions.

How did the TV show come about?

Alexis: Martha can't sleep, which I think is common knowledge. So she's up in the middle of the night trying to use a television as a sleeping aid and she was obsessed with "Mystery Science Theater" and she said, "You girls should look at my shows and talk like those little guys."

And that's what happened.

One reason the show is interesting is because it is about Martha Stewart, who has a reputation for perfection, and you're making fun of her. Do you ever have a problem with that?

Alexis: I think at the beginning it was hard to let go. But now we do and we leave it to the editors to take out the stuff that's unacceptable.

Anyone who pretends that they don't make fun of their mother is just not telling the truth.

What are some of your favourite Martha moments from TV?

Hutt: There's one where she does a linen closet and tacks labels in tiny frames on each shelf. It's just so over the top. It was her dream to have this perfect linen closet.

And there's an episode where Martha teaches somebody how to load a dishwasher.

How do you think your mother got her reputation?

I think it's something that started without her.

It started I think as an envy thing and she makes you feel inadequate so it's easy to think that she doesn't have a sense of humour and it has never been her intention to make anyone feel that way.

It's only her intention to teach which can be irritating. But if you're tuning in, that's what you're looking for.



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» **GREAT THINGS TO SEE AND DO**

The sea gypsies' tale

The travelling exhibition "Moken Reflections (1894-2007)" arrives at the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre in Taling Chan, Thon Buri, on Friday for a month's stopover as part of La Fete 2009. The showcase of photos, objects and children's drawings recounts the history of Moken nomads – the marine nomads of the Mergui archipelago. Conceived by Jacques Ivanoff and Akram Mohamed, the exhibition explains this little-known cultural and natural heritage of southern Burma and Thailand. Admission is free. Come by any day except Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

A date with four sexy guys

The Siam Society hosts the Siam Saxophone Quartet from Mahidol University's College of Music on Wednesday night at 7. The group will perform classical compositions, Thai folk songs, pop, jazz and contemporary numbers. Members attend for free, but donations in support of the music programme are welcome. The ensemble – Supat Hanpatanachai on soprano sax, Promwut Sudtakoo on alto, Wisuwat Pruksavanich on tenor and Anond Fuangfoo on baritone – is regarded as the country's top professional saxophone quartet. They'll represent the host nation at the World Saxophone Congress next month in Bangkok.

E-mail information on your interesting upcoming events to artsandculture@nationgroup.com.