



www.risemagazine.org

LEADER'S GUIDE:

Hard to Handle by Jeanette Vega

I needed help with my son, not separation.

DISCUSSION FOCUS:

Handling difficult toddler behavior.

ACTIVITY GOAL:

Participants will examine the behaviors they expect of their toddlers and identify useful responses to difficult toddler behaviors.

STORY SUMMARY

When Jeanette's son, Remi, was 1, he began to act less cuddly and more energetic and wild than she expected. Jeanette did not know how to set limits with him and gave in to his demands to avoid his tantrums. Remi's behavior led Jeanette to become more isolated from her family, who had disapproved when she became pregnant as a teen.

One night, when Remi put himself in danger, Jeanette hit him, leaving bruises. Her mother and aunt called child protective services. Remi ended up in foster care for three years. Jeanette now wishes that she had sought more support to help with his behavior. She is also angry that Remi's foster care placement left them both scarred.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GROUP INTRODUCTION: Read Aloud

Today we're going to talk about the behaviors we can expect from toddlers. As cuddly babies become toddlers (1-2 years old), they explore their environment and begin to understand how to use their hands, feet, voices and bodies. They may rip up paper, hit, smash and throw things, pour food and drinks on the floor, and run around acting wild. Parents are more likely to resort to abuse when they do not expect these normal behaviors. Expecting these behaviors, deciding in advance how you would like to respond, and getting support during your child's toddler years can help.

READ AND DISCUSS STORY: 15 + 30 minutes

Read the story out loud as a group. Help participants recognize the writer's emotions and coping mechanisms and their own. Go back over important moments in the story and ask the participants about how they've handled similar experiences:

STORY MOMENT	DISCUSSION QUESTION
Jeanette's 1-year-old son is more energetic and less cuddly than she expected him to be.	How did you expect for toddler to behave? How does your toddler behave that you did not expect?
Jeanette says she encouraged negative behavior by laughing at Remi's actions or giving in to demands to avoid a tantrum.	What challenges have you faced in responding to your toddler's negative behavior?
Jeanette now believes she was too permissive with Remi.	How could Jeanette have helped Remi limit his negative behavior (without screaming or hitting)? How do you set limits with your own children?
In a moment of panic, Jeanette hit Remi.	What do you do—or could you do—to calm down when your emotions are running wild?
Jeanette wishes she had sought out more support when Remi was a toddler.	What support or information might have helped Jeanette? Where can you turn for guidance?

JOURNAL TIME: 15-30 minutes

By writing in their journals, participants can more deeply reflect on their own experiences. Hand out the "Journal Reflections" worksheet and give participants time to write. They can share their responses with the group or in pairs, or after the workshop with a peer, family member, therapist or other important person in their lives.

NAME:

DATE:

JOURNAL REFLECTIONS: Hard to Handle by Jeanette Vega

It's not easy to figure out how to respond to toddlers' negative behaviors. Many young children do not seem to listen to words like "no" or "stop it." Toddlers may repeat the same behaviors—like hitting or throwing things—over and over. Some throw tantrums when they're told no. But by expecting negative behavior, staying calm and setting firm limits again and again, you can help your child learn self-control. Take some time to reflect on your expectations and the ways you could respond in challenging moments.

1. What do your children do that you think of as normal or positive behavior?

2. What do your children do that you fear is not normal or that you find overwhelming?

3. What might be some ways that you're expecting too much of your child, or that you may be responding too harshly to your child's behavior?

OVER 

4. What might be some ways that you're expecting too little of your child, or that you might be responding too permissively to your children's behavior?

ACTION STEPS

Jeanette wished she had gotten more information and support that could've helped her develop reasonable expectations for Remi and set limits in a positive way. Write down 2-3 challenges that you'd like help with and where you might be able to get information and support.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

A SUPPORTIVE CONNECTION

I plan to get support and encouragement by talking about my reflections and action steps with:
