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'A lot of what I say isn't ... new'

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Staff

Child psychologist **Erik Fisher** doesn't use a couch to get kids to open up. In fact, he's more likely to take his therapy sessions outdoors and counsel youngsters while they're climbing trees or shooting hoops.

Fisher, who has been featured on CNN, is known for using an innovative approach to therapy which weaves sports, trees and exercise into traditional counseling.

These days, the Dunwoody psychologist (who also has an office in Lawrenceville) is crisscrossing metro Atlanta promoting his new book, titled, "The Art of Empowered Parenting."

But unlike his offbeat therapy techniques, the parenting book is more of a revisiting of time-proven wisdom that often does not get practiced.

(He co-authored the book with Diane Wichman, a parenting consultant, and Steven Sharp, a writer.)

"A lot of what I say isn't anything new," **Fisher** said. "It's a matter of being more mindful and being aware of your shortcomings as a parent."

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution recently interviewed **Fisher**, 41 and father to a 2-year-old daughter, to talk to him about pressing parenting issues -- everything from time outs to why saying, "Because I told you so," may be a sign the parent needs to cool it.

Q: A lot of parents say time out doesn't work. What do you think?

A: The biggest issue with time out is parents are inconsistent and they explain with demands and threats.

The child has to know you mean it.

And time out is not just for the home. You can do a time out at Target. Just don't do it in the toy section.

How long for a time out? For kids 2 and under, one minute is sufficient. For kids older than 2, I suggest a time out of five minutes.

Q: Give us some tips for empowered parenting.

A: Yelling and screaming and abuse is a short-term solution that creates long-term problems.

Another tip is we have to allow our children the space to succeed and fail. If we always swoop in and come to their rescue, we don't let them learn how to get out of jams. For example, with the issue of sharing, if a parent . . . takes the toy away it doesn't let them work through the conflict. If a child throws a tantrum, if you come running to the rescue every time, you don't let them work it out themselves.

Q: We see it all the time. The mom or dad who wants their child to stop doing something and after the child asks why, the parent will say, "Because I told you so." You say this is sign of parental frustration. Please explain.

A: A parent will say, "Because I said so" out of frustration and because a parent doesn't want to take the time to reason through it. It's a quick answer. Parents want their jobs to be quick and easy. We need to take the time to help our kids understand life. If not, we will teach our kids this same bad habit.

Q: You are known for using the outdoors for therapy sessions with kids. How can parents use this technique with their kids?

A: A lecture is the last thing kids want. Suggest shooting baskets or going for a walk or climb a tree.

And they will really open up. They will not be so focused on telling you things that are uncomfortable and it takes the pressure off of them feeling that they are in trouble or shamed.

Q: A new parent asks you for one big piece of advice. What is it?

A: To step back and check their emotions.

Maybe your parents didn't respond well and weren't prepared or didn't know how to deal with their impatience or frustrations. Ask yourself. What age are you behaving? Don't blame your kids for your bad mood. Parents need to understand their own emotions and attitudes toward parenting.

CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff

Psychologist **Erik Fisher** uses outdoor therapy techniques, so he has rollerblades at his office.

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