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Tip for Kids – Managing a child's behaviour without criticism

by Barbara Burrows

Parents are often encouraged to say, "I like you but I don't like what you are doing". This way of talking to a child doesn't encourage the child to reflect on her own feelings the way talking about what the child might be experiencing does. If parents can understand how difficult it is for children to behave at times, it will be easier to talk about the child's behaviour in a non-judgemental way without criticism. For example, a three year old might get behind the rocking chair her mother is sitting in to nurse the baby and roughly rock it back and forth. Actually, it is likely the child does not feel very good about this impulsive behaviour, but her feelings of envy have become so strong, the child has not managed to control her wishes to upset her mother and baby.

The mother, if feeling patient, might be able to help by asking the child, "Is it hard to share mommy with the baby today?" Quite often young children act before they can even start to figure out what makes them want to do whatever they are doing. The way to help them get control of their behaviour is to help them realize more about the inner feelings and impulses that are urging them to behave in such a way.

If the mother's comment is not enough to help the child regain control, the mother

could add, "Would it help you feel better if I sat on the couch to nurse the baby so there would be room for you as well?"

A child learns to control of impulsive actions when he is able to think about what he wishes to do. When the mother speaks patiently and kindly to the child, it encourages thinking. With the ability to think comes the capacity to gain control. The more parents can help children understand and figure out what to do about their difficult feelings, the better the child will be able to behave. By putting into words what was likely troubling the child, the mother helps the child realize it is hard to share Mommy, and knowing this helps the child manage better.

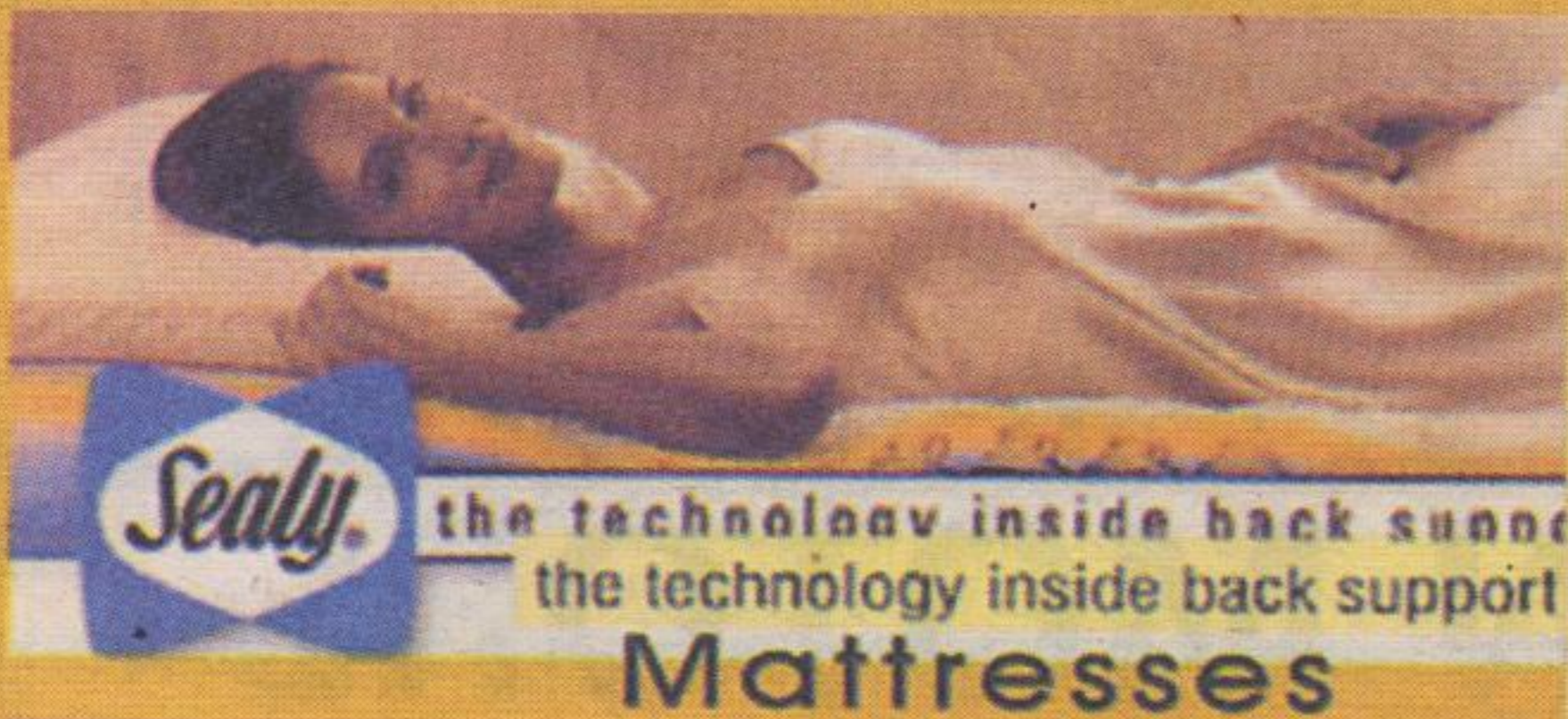
There is much to be gained by talking calmly to children without criticizing to help them gain control of unruly impulses.

**There is much
to be gained
by talking calmly
to children
without criticizing**



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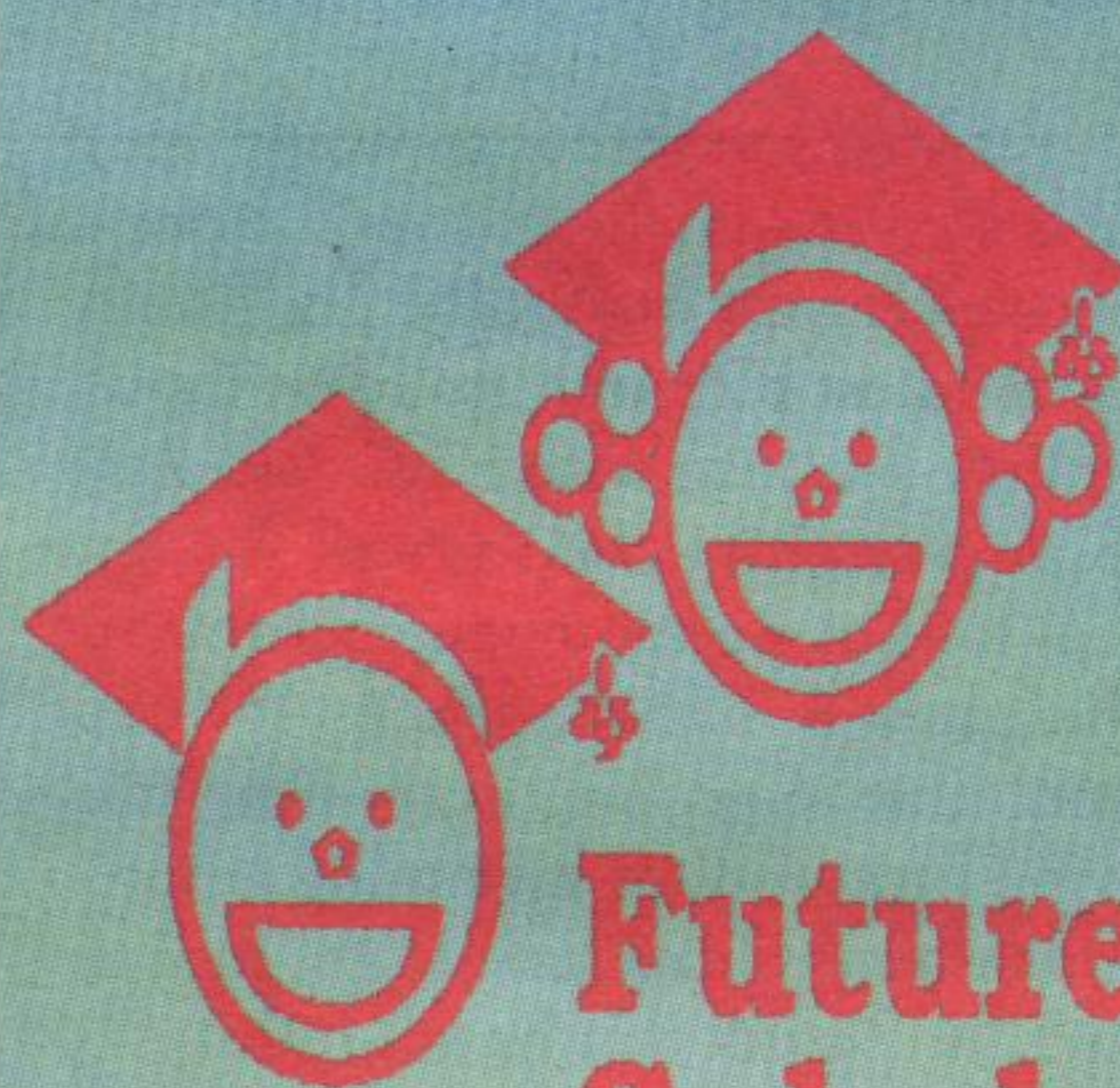
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