

Dear Dr Hartman

*Dr Hartman welcomes your problems.
Please send all correspondence to her
secretary Julie McCrossin, at the
following address: ALR, PO Box 247, Syd-
ney South, NSW 2000.
All enquiries will, of course, be treated in
the strictest confidence.*

Dear Dr Hartman,

Can you help us with our Billy?

Billy is blonde, bright and nearly two years old. He is a much-loved only child born to me unexpectedly at the age of 41. Although his arrival was not part of our life and career plans, my husband and I welcomed him with joy and we love him very much.

However, in recent months, our joy has turned sour.

Billy has turned into a monster. My life has become a bad dream. When he eats with us at the table it's like watching an old Roman feasting scene in a B-Grade movie. There's food everywhere, even in his hair. It turns me off my dinner.

My once tidy house has been turned into a pigsty. All the floors are covered in itty-bitty pieces of coloured plastic which get impregnated in visitors' feet and have to be surgically removed.

From five each afternoon he turns into a whingeing and whining wretch, answering every simple request in a high-pitched tone which sets my teeth on edge and makes the hair rise on the back of my neck.

And then, last Thursday morning he went missing for nearly an hour. I was so worried I became frantic. I finally found him hiding under my bed smearing poo all over his teddy. (That teddy used

to be my teddy when I was a child. It was awful to see it ruined.)

Half-mad with anxiety, I snapped. I dragged him out from under the bed and slapped him so hard he flew across the room and cried inconsolably for over half an hour.

Doctor, I feel so guilty. I've always considered myself a humane and progressive person, opposed to corporal punishment. But Billy is driving me to distraction. I'm too ashamed to tell my husband what happened. What should I do?

(Signed) Desperate,
Burnie, Tasmania.



Dear Desperate,

What on earth are you worrying about? You've done just the right thing. Next time you get a chance, give that little blighter Billy a good hard slap from me.

I've seen this kind of psychotic anxiety over the question of discipline in so many of my leftwing inner-city patients.

You remind me of a young couple who came into my clinic the other day. This laddie and lassie had been active campaigners against prisons and police brutality for years. But they'd recently had a frightening experience.

Father had been up all night pasting up posters on inner-city walls. It was mother's job to keep their toddler quiet

the next morning so that father could sleep.

But the toddler wanted to blow his trumpet. He wanted to blow it very much.

Mother explained in a calm and rational way, in a normal voice, that playing the trumpet at 5 am is unreasonable. Two seconds later, toddler blows the trumpet.

Mother explained that, for the welfare of the community as a whole, the freedom of the individual may have to be curtailed. She advocated self-discipline.

Child blows trumpet.

Mother removes trumpet.

Child screams, making more noise than trumpet ever did.

Mother puts child in bedroom and says "Don't come out until you can behave."

Child runs out of room, jumps into toy fire engine and turns on the siren.

Mother grabs child, puts him in room and shuts the door.

Child pushes on door to get out. Mother pushes back. Child and mother fight over door until, finally, mother wails in despair and locks the door with the child inside. And she screams "You're staying in that room and you're never coming out."

Then mother turns and sees father looking on in horror. Suddenly it hits her that she has recreated Katingal and Jika Jika within her own home.

Psychosis soon followed. She's been an in-patient at my clinic ever since.

Desperate of Tasmania, I urge you to adopt a straightforward authoritarian approach to controlling your child or else you may suffer a similar fate to this woolly-minded anarchist.

Put Billy in some good old-fashioned leather reins and tie him to a tree in the back yard whenever he gives you trouble. As for this messy eating problem, feed him in the laundry with the cat. He'll learn to love Whiskas after a while.

Most important of all. If his little hands wander, as boys' hands will, into the front of his pants, you must write to me immediately. I'll send you a pair of canvas mittens to strap onto his hands which are guaranteed to prevent mind-numbing practices.

See you at my clinic.

