

Fast chat Jo Frost

She has made catchphrases of "the naughty spot" and "you've been very naughty," but fear naught — Jo Frost, despite that burlesque-show name, doesn't appear on Playboy TV. Quite the opposite: As the star of "Supernanny" — both the original reality program on the U.K.'s Channel Four and the ABC American version, which just returned for season three — she's helped to re-establish the parenting notion of a middle ground between out-of-control permissiveness and heavy-handed smacks and yelling. Dennis the Menace sitting in the corner suddenly seems modern; one company even sells "Naughty Spot Time-Out Mats."

Frost, whose hit show appears in 47 territories worldwide and has sparked debate over whether it raises unrealistic expectations of mere mortal nannies, got into the baby-sitting business about 20 years ago as a teenager in West London. She showed a knack for the job, and left Kingsway College (now Westminster Kingsway) after three years of double-majoring in English literature and drama.

Despite having no degree in child psychology, she's proven herself to be a Dr. Spock with bumper-

shoot, floating in like Mary Poppins to spend a couple of weeks with problem families and, at least as seen on "Supernanny" and in parent testimonials you find on the Web, really does teach effective techniques of consistency, communication, boundaries and loving discipline. The sad part is that she has to teach these things at all.

Regular contributor Frank Lovece caught up with Frost backstage at "Good Morning America," where she'd just finished a live segment — complete with clip of a harried mother casually slapping her toddlers and dragging one to make him eat soap for some minor infraction.

That clip of the lady smacking her kids around over nothing was horrifying.

Well, you can see in this particular episode how this lady got herself into a cycle that she didn't know how to

break. [She] had been brought up a certain way by her family, and she'd had children very young, and that cycle had followed. It's what I call auto-parenting — she just really hadn't adopted any particular parenting style herself. For me the important thing was to be able to sit down with [her] and really talk to her about that process, and recognize what she wanted to change and what she didn't like.

"Breaking the cycle" is what therapists always talk about in working with child abusers. Do you find that what you're observing some of the time is basically low-level child abuse?

I think I'm experiencing parents who have lost control and

have resorted to venting physically with their children as a result of not knowing how to change the situation. Observation days are very hard for me. Observation is about me going in and observing a family and how they interact, and that day it was very hard for me to stand back. I recognize that I need to step back to see exactly how parents deal with their children and how they were raising them, in order to be able to just stop that immediately. Chris [Cuomo, the "GMA" segment host] said it was an extreme case, but it's not an extreme case.

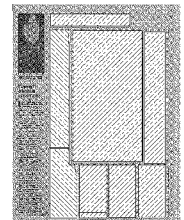
Ever have to call a social worker on a parent?

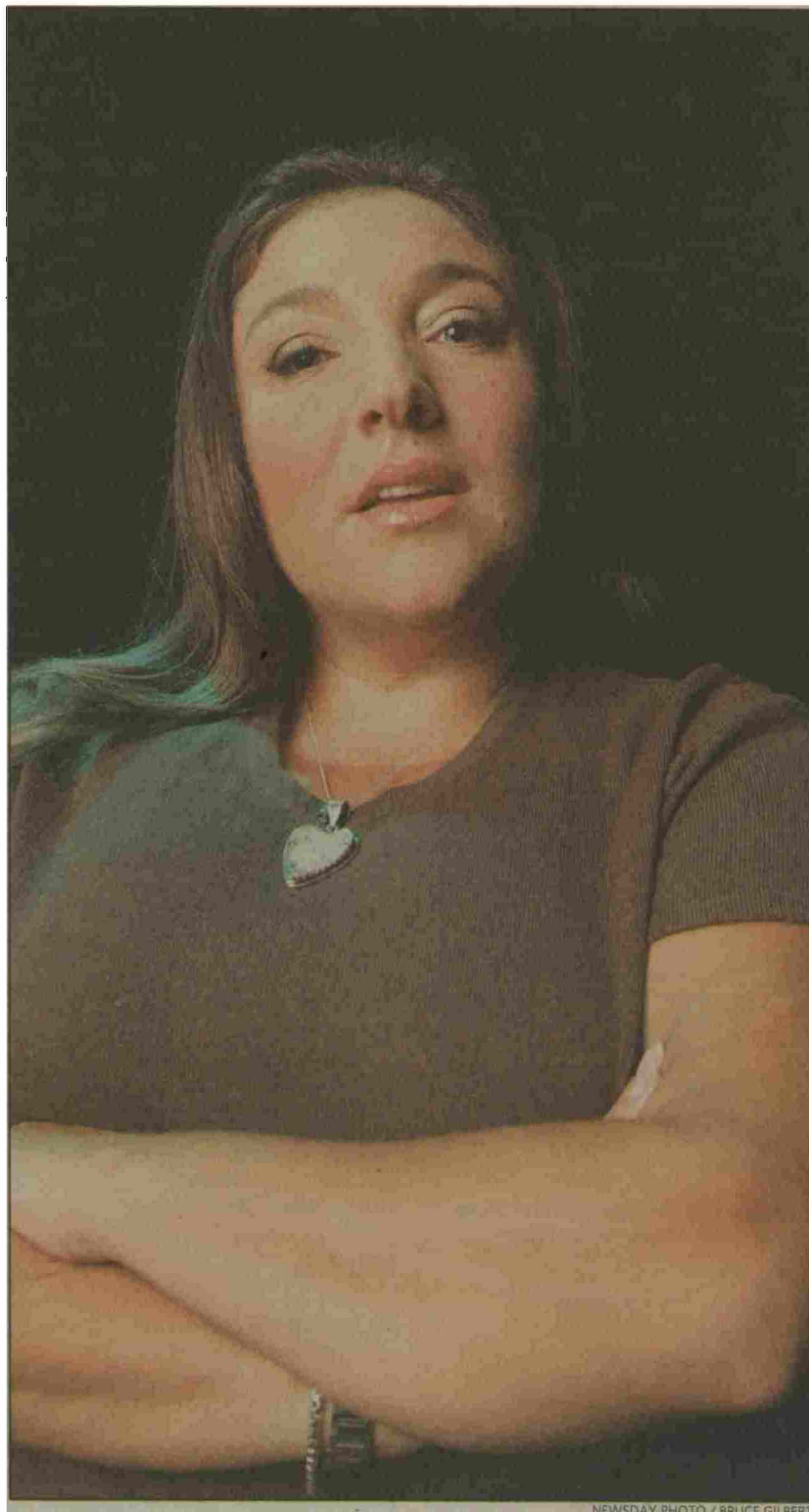
No, but I wouldn't hesitate to do so.

So when you're on a date, do you ever get very naughty?

Well, I guess it all depends on how you want to use the word naughty! What do you mean by that? (Chuckles.) When I first came over to America, there was a real bit of hype about whether I would use the word "naughty," because Americans saw the word "naughty" as being quite [pause] "saucy," is that right? So I was like, "Well, that's what we say, y'know? 'You've been naughty.'" It really has kinda sunk in now. You can use it in both ways.

OK, then, now that we've got that word translated: When you're on a date, do you ever get very naughty?
No, chirpy!





My Aunt Rhoda in Baldwin Harbor always used to say about being a parent, "You can't give yourself too much credit, and you can't give yourself too much blame." What do you think of that philosophy?

Sensible. Parents do need to give themselves credit for what they are doing well . . . but also to be accountable and to be responsible. And not to blame.

The producers say you won the role over hundreds of other applicants. How does one audition to be Supernanny?

I rang the production company and left my name and number, and they asked me to come down and asked me a few Q&As about certain scenarios, so I suppose, hey, that was the audition, really. And I got asked to help a young lady who had four children, and within an afternoon was able to help that lady, which was absolutely fantastic, and the production company filmed the time that I spent with the lady. Now I know that was the pilot!

The British show's Web site calls you "a chirpy Cockney child carer." It's hard to picture you hanging out at the pub eating bangers and mash with the local lager-louts.

No! (Laughs.) But I do like to go for a pub drink and a Sunday meal. Good old shepherd's pie.

NEWSDAY PHOTO / BRUCE GILBERT