



# Teaching Your Child To Do the Right Thing

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"Next to love, a sense of discipline is a parent's second most important gift to a child." ~ T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.

## The goals of parenting center around:

1. Teaching our children how to behave well
2. Teaching them how to be responsible for themselves
3. Helping them develop a sense of themselves as competent people

## All children misbehave at some time.

- Parents are often faced with how to deal with a child's misbehavior.
- Children are not born knowing how to behave. They make many mistakes along the way.

## Children need limits.

- teach children how to behave well, and
- give children a sense of security

## Discipline means to teach.

- When we discipline our children, we are teaching them how to behave.
- We need to focus on how we want them to behave -- rather than just focusing on what we don't want them to do.
- From this viewpoint, children's misbehaviors become opportunities to teach them how to behave well.
- The ultimate goal of discipline is to teach our children self-discipline so that they can make good choices throughout their lives.

## Punishment focuses on negative consequences.

- When we punish children, we are focusing on what we do not want them to do.

- The goal of punishment is to make the consequences that follow the behavior so aversive that the child will not want to do it any longer.
- Problems can arise when punishment is used to hurt a child -- either physically or emotionally. Punishment used in this way is abuse.
- Punishment doesn't work if you use it all the time. The more you punish, the less effective it becomes. (When you ground a child for a year, it becomes meaningless.) The less you punish, the more powerful the punishment is when you need to use it.
- Punishment should never be abusive and should never be used alone.
- IF punishment is used, it needs to be followed by discipline—where the child is taught how to behave and what is expected of her.

## Setting Limits

When you set limits with your child, you are telling him what the rules are and what behaviors you expect from him.

- Setting limits is a way of expressing love for your child.
- Children who know what their limits are—and who know that their parents will enforce limits—feel more secure and have fewer behavior problems.

## Here are the basics of limit setting.

Decide what the important rules are for your family. There should only be five or fewer main rules. For example,

- We treat each other with respect.

- Everyone picks up after themselves.

Be clear what behaviors go with each rule.

- For the rule “we treat each other with respect,” you may expect that people listen to each other, that no one hits anyone else, that people share with one another, etc.

Praise your child when you see him following a rule.

“I like the way you shared your candy with your brother. That’s the way we do it in this family.”

Remind your child about the rule when he is not following it.

“Remember that we listen to each other in this family. Now I would like you to hear what your sister is trying to tell you.”

Remove your child when it is clear he cannot follow a rule.

“I see you are too angry to listen right now. Go to your room and cool off. Come back when you are ready to hear what I have to say.”

Help your child make amends when he has broken a rule.

“I think you owe your brother an apology. You know we do not hit in this family. How would you like to apologize to him?”

Use punishments sparingly.

If your child does not respond to the above methods, you may choose to use a punishment, such as taking away a privilege or restricting his freedom.

Remember: to be effective, discipline needs to follow any punishment.

- Remind your child of the rule and expected behaviors.
- Praise him whenever you see him making an effort to do the right thing.

## Teach Your Child to Make Good Choices

- An important aspect of discipline is teaching your child to think for herself.
- A child who can think for herself is on her way to being a competent, responsible adult.

1. Begin early, allowing your child to make appropriate choices.

- Young children can choose between two different shirts.
- Older children can choose if they want to have their snack first or do their homework first.

2. Help your child think through choices.

- If your older child is deciding between snack and homework, you could help her think out loud which order seems right to her.
- Help her explain her choice and thinking to you.

3. Include children in family decisions, when appropriate.

- If the family is planning an outing, ask the children for ideas.

4. When your child is not following a family rule, talk with him about the choice he is making.

- What are the consequences of his choice?
- How will it affect him and other family members?

5. Praise your child when she solves her own problems.

- Focus on her solution and how it worked for her.
- “What a good idea! Now both you and your sister can have a chance to use the bike.”

## Lying, Stealing, and Other Problem Behaviors

All children—at some point—behave badly.

If your child has stolen, lied, hit, or disobeyed in some way, he is no different from other children. Although these behaviors can be distressing, they do not mean that you have a bad, naughty, or hopeless child.

What these behaviors do mean is that we have an opportunity to teach our child how we want him to behave and why these types of behaviors are not OK.

- It is important to think of your child as different from his behaviors.

- Your child can be a good kid and still do bad things.

Stay calm when dealing with a child who has misbehaved.

When a parent is able to stay calm, the child is better able to hear what is said. If you do yell, be sure to repeat your message later when you are calm.

Deal with the behavior and do not get distracted by why your child did it.

Children, like adults, do things for many reasons. Your child may never be able to tell you “why” he lied, stole, or disobeyed.

Focusing on this will likely only frustrate you further because it will feel as if the child is being even more defiant.

Remember that love builds the foundation for effective discipline.

If you want your children to obey family rules, regularly let them know how much you love and appreciate them.

Instead, focus on the behavior and what it is you want to teach your child. If your child took something that was not his, you may want to consider having him return it to the person or store.

This will teach your child how to make amends and will send a strong message about not taking things from others.

Remember, it often takes many failures to learn a lesson.

- You will likely have to teach your children many times what you want them to do. What is important is that you teach the lesson each time, and hold them responsible for making amends.
- Failing is just another chance to learn. In the US, we tend to think that failing is bad — but it is probably the best way we learn anything. Be a role model for picking yourself up, dusting yourself off and starting all over again.

Remember to praise your child when he makes an effort to behave appropriately. If your child has been lying and then tells you the truth, make sure to point this out.

- “I know it was hard for you to tell me that you broke the chair. I am really proud of you

for being honest. Now what do you think we should do?”

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your child’s behavior, seek help.

Some good places to start looking for help are with your family doctor, school counselor, church leader, or a reputable family service program.

## References

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