

Teaching Your Children the Discipline They Need

Being a parent is anything but easy. It takes patience, creativity, and endless amounts of love. Some parenting skills come naturally, but many must be learned. In the same way, being curious comes naturally to children - but discipline must be learned. As parents, teaching discipline to our children is our responsibility. It takes time and practice, but it does get easier as children learn to control their own behavior.

What is discipline?

Discipline is helping children develop self-control. Discipline is setting limits and correcting misbehavior. Discipline also is encouraging children, guiding them, helping them feel good about themselves, and teaching them how to think for themselves.

Is spanking a good form of discipline?

No. Discipline should help children learn how to control their own behavior. Spanking is used to directly control children's behavior. Spanking does not teach children how to change what they do, as good discipline should.

Isn't it just easier to spank?

It may seem easy at the time. But children who are hit often cry louder. Older children who are hit often address conflict by hitting others. Many parents notice that after a spanking children may settle down for awhile, but pretty soon they start misbehaving again.

Won't spanking teach children who's boss?

Kids do need to know that the adult is in charge. Spanking, however, can teach children to be afraid of the adult in charge. Good discipline teaches children to respect the adult in charge. Respect goes both ways - treat children with respect and let them have some control - and they will respect you and listen to you.

Won't spanking make my children afraid to misbehave?

It can. Spanking can make children afraid to misbehave, but probably only when you are watching. Children need to learn to control their own behavior even when you are not around to see them.

Don't children need a good spanking sometimes?

No child "needs" a spanking. Spanking can be dangerous. You can never tell when children will be hurt badly by a spanking if you lose control. Children do not need to be hit in order to learn how to behave.

If I do not spank, then what can I do?

You can do lots of things that will help your child learn self-control. You can help her/him feel good about her/himself. You can model how a person with self-control acts. You can guide; you can set limits. You can correct misbehavior by talking. You can teach how to think for her/himself.

What can I do to help my children feel good about themselves?

Let them know what they are doing right as well as the mistakes they make. Hearing good things makes us feel good and makes us want to do more good things. Say *two nice*

but true things every time you correct your children. When they are changing their behavior, tell them how well they are doing, even if they improve just a little. "Great, you played in the playground all morning without fighting." You are like a mirror for your children. *If you believe in your children's goodness and let them know it, they will look at you and feel good about themselves.*

How do I show my children how a person with self-control acts?

Children do as you do, not as you say. If you want your children to obey rules, to solve their own problems, to control their anger, and to live in peace with others, then you must live that way, too.

What do I need to do to guide them?

Set routines for bedtime, meals, and chores. Routines help children feel safe, because they know what parents expect. Young children have a hard time going from one activity to another. Warning them a few minutes beforehand helps them get ready. You can say, "You have five more minutes before bedtime." Be clear about their choices. "You can have milk or juice, but you can't have soda." Remind them of your rules. Saying "No" is not enough. Children need reminders.

How can I set limits?

Here are some tips for setting limits:

1. **Start with only a few rules.** The more rules you have, the harder it will be for your children to remember them.
2. **Be sure you know why you are saying "No."** As a parent, you must keep your children healthy and safe. You must help your children learn to get along with other people. And you must stick to what you believe in. Explain your reasons for saying "No." Be sure your child understands your reasons. "You cannot play ball in the house. You might break something."
3. **Give kids a voice.** Kids need a voice in setting limits. They need a chance to tell you what they think and feel. Even a child of five or six can talk with you and help you set fair limits. *When kids help you make rules, they are more likely to obey them.* It's important to understand their point of view, but just because you listen to them does not mean that you have to agree with them and change your rules. *You can set many limits together, though some may have to be set by you alone.*
4. **Say what you mean.** Be very clear about your limits. For example, state clearly the hour you want your child to be home. Say "12 o'clock," instead of "Not too late."
5. Will my children still like me when I set limits? Will they think I'm a "meanie"? Setting limits does not make you a "meanie" forever - not if you are fair. When you stick to your limits, your children may not like what you are doing. They may be unhappy. Try not to get upset. It only makes things worse. **Accept their feelings, but stick to your limits.** For example, say, "It's hard to leave when you are having so much fun, but it is time to go." Fair limits show that you care. If you set limits by yourself that are unfair and too

strict, your children will try to get back at you. If you do not set any limits, your children will push and push until *someone* sets a limit for them, maybe even a school principal or a police officer.

What do I do when my children break the rules?

Stay calm. Do what is fair. Sometimes, your children can help you decide what is fair to do when a rule is broken. Do something that makes sense and will help them learn not to make the same mistake again. For example, if they write on the wall, have them help clean it up.

You can use these problem-solving steps to help children think through what happened and figure out how they can help themselves not make the same mistake again:

1. **Have the child say what the problem is.** ("I want to play ball in the house and Mom says I can't")

2. **Have the child come up with as many solutions as possible.** At this point, the number of ideas is more important than how good the ideas are. ("I could play ball outside, I could just roll the ball on the floor. Maybe I could do a puzzle instead.")

3. **Discuss solutions together and have the child choose which solution to try next time.** Be sure it is a solution you can both accept. ("I'll play ball outside.")

4. **Try out the solution.**

5. **Check the results.** If it works, great. If not, start again. Two important messages come across to children when you use this approach. *First, no problem is so great that you cannot solve it. Second, you are responsible for your own behavior.*

Do good parents get so angry that they lose their temper?

All parents get angry at times. But we can learn to control our anger.

What should I do when I am so angry that I think I may lose my temper and all I want to do is hit or scream at my child?

Find a way to help yourself calm down so that you do not do or say something you will be sorry for later.

Listen to music.

Take a few deep breaths.

Count backwards from 10.

Try to do something with your hands to keep them busy. Cook something. Wash a counter. Draw. Write what you are feeling. Just scribble.

Sing.

Put your hand up to your mouth.

Go to another room.

If your children are old enough to be left alone or if there is another adult with your children, take a walk until you calm down. When you come back to your children, calmly explain your feelings.

Remember: What you do always teaches your children what to do. If you lash out, your children will learn to do the same. If you do lash out, apologize to your child. "I'm sorry," teaches them what to do if they offend others.

Shouldn't I discipline my children right away before I calm down and forget what they did?

You do not have to be angry to teach self-control. Only when you are calm will you be able to be clear about what you want and do what is fair.

What if my children get angry because I discipline them?

Their anger is no reason to feel as though you're a bad person. Often children get angry when disciplined. As long as you are being fair, it's okay. *Let them be angry but you keep your cool. Children must get their angry feelings out.* Help them take time out. Draw. Build something. Play with clay. Listen to music. Go to a room alone and scream. Most importantly, when they are ready, help them talk about their feelings. Letting children get their feelings out is like taking out a splinter before it gets infected.

Teach them how to talk about their feelings without hurting or attacking other people.

What is fair to expect of my children?

Children are different from one another. Even in the same family, they may have different discipline needs. They also have different discipline needs at different ages.

When is it too late to teach discipline?

It's never too late. Teaching discipline is not just a one-time thing. It may be harder at first if you start when children are older, but you can do it. You have many years to teach your children discipline.

Remember: discipline is how adults teach children to grow to be happy, safe, well-adjusted members of society. Raising children is a tough job, but as children learn to control their own behavior, discipline gets easier and easier. It's well worth the effort as your children become responsible for their actions. And you can feel proud that your loving care guided them on their way!

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