



Disciplining the Young Child

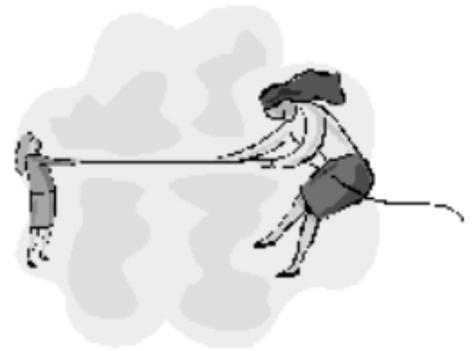
Discipline is helping a child learn to get along with adults and other children. It also means teaching a child to do what is right, even when adults aren't around. It takes patience for parents to discipline children with love and concern.

Listed below are some effective discipline techniques. They will help you and your children live with less stress.

Understanding misbehavior

Before deciding your child has misbehaved, ask yourself:

- Is my child aware of the rule? For example, eating food only at the table? Is he aware a rule's been broken? Sometimes a gentle reminder – “Remember, Andy, sit at the table when you eat” – is enough.
- Is my child so involved in an interesting activity she doesn't hear my request? For example, is she playing or watching a favorite television show?
- Is my child old enough to follow the rule?
- Has my child simply forgotten the rule?
- Is the misbehavior a result of my child having a bad day? Ask her if she's upset about events of the day.



Children misbehave for many reasons. They may want attention or revenge. They may be sick or under emotional stress. They may be feeling inadequate or worthless. They may be worried or afraid. You can help meet your child's special needs. For example, ask your child to help you with certain tasks so she feels valued and competent. Increase the number of hugs and positive statements you give to him. Spend extra time with your child so she knows she is loved.

Planned discipline

One way you can avoid misbehavior is to plan for good behavior.

Arrange the Environment. The home environment allows children to behave in certain ways. Add a booster seat to the dining room chair to help your child reach his glass of milk without spilling it. Remove breakable items from your toddler's reach to prevent accidents. You can add to the environment by providing play materials such as crayons, dress-up clothes, toy cars or play dough. You can also take away from the environment. If you want your child to eat nutritious foods at snack time don't buy cookies and soda.

Childproof your home. Keep treasured and dangerous objects out of your child's reach. Keep medicine and cleaners in a locked cupboard.

Provide Choices. You can replace one activity or material with another. Your child might want to play with the dough while you are making a pie. Make extra dough so he can have his own to play with, or let him play with play dough, a toy rolling pin and a metal pie plate.

It's important to give children positive choices. "You can either ride your tricycle outside or stay inside and paint. What do you want to do?"

Whenever possible, keep routines consistent. Children gain a sense of security and trust by knowing the order of daily events. They can get upset when their daily routine suddenly changes.

Give children notice. Let children know what to expect when changes will take place. If you cancel a trip to Grandma's house, explain why. Ask them to suggest other days for the trip and let them call Grandma to set up a new date.

Make statements simple and give one instruction at a time. Children can complete a simple, small task more easily than a large task. For example, help young children clean their room by stating one request at a time: 1. Put the three books back on the shelf. 2. Put your toy trucks in this bucket. 3. Put your toy animals in this basket. 4. Put your clothes on these two hooks.

Set rules your child can follow. Make sure your child has the physical skills (bladder control, ability to put away toys), mental skills (attention span, memory), and social skills (ability to help and share) to carry out rules. The expectations and rules you set for your toddler will differ from those you set for older children.

Be sure there's a good reason for the rule. Make rules for three reasons: to protect children, adults, and animals from harm; to protect belongings; and to help children learn positive ways to get along with others.

Model appropriate behavior. Children are quick to imitate or act like adults. It's important for parents to model actions such as sharing, helping, cooperating, and taking care of their belongings. Children will copy these behaviors. Likewise, parents who respond to frustration with aggression and profanity are likely to see these behaviors in their children.

Focus on do's, not don'ts. Children told only *don't* ("don't throw your clothes on the bedroom floor") never learn what they should be *doing*. The result may be that one misbehavior is replaced by another (children begin throwing their clothes on the bed). A more effective approach is to tell children clearly what to do. "Please hang up your clothes on the hooks in your closet."

Responding to misbehavior

Most children misbehave at one time or another. When your child misbehaves, consider the following strategies:

Redirect the child. Young children can't understand more than a few basic rules. Talking to them about their behavior often doesn't help. For this reason, it's easier to redirect the infant or toddler to another activity.

Ignore misbehavior. Children at times will swear or act in disruptive ways as a means of getting attention or to shock you. Ignoring the behavior is a good strategy.

Teach your children to handle their anger. An angry outburst can be an opportunity to teach appropriate ways to act. For example, you might respond to name calling by saying, “He likes his right name, which is Billy.” If two children are fighting over a toy, separate them. Help them to think of ways to share the toy or redirect them to another activity.

Remove children who are out of control. If your child’s anger is out of control, you must take immediate safety steps. Lovingly, but firmly, holding your child is sometimes effective. You may need to remove the child from the room.

Respond to the misbehavior, not the child. Say, “I feel angry when I see food all over the floor. We eat food; we don’t play with it. I’d like you to help me clean it up. Would you like to pick up the pieces of food, or hold the dust pan while I sweep?” This approach is likely to be more effective than “I’m angry at you for spilling food on the floor.” or “You’re such a slob.”

Hitting children

Most parents don’t like to hit their children. They often feel like failures when they do. Sometimes, however, parents use physical punishment to express their own anger and frustrations with their children’s behavior.

A spanking may stop a young child for the moment but it won’t stop the child from doing the same thing later on. He hasn’t been taught what to do instead.

When children are hit they are overwhelmed by feelings of hurt, anger and humiliation. They can’t remember why they’re being punished.

Research also shows physical punishment leads to increased aggressive behavior. Adults who received a lot of physical punishment as children show more problems than adults who weren’t hit. These problems include aggression, depression, and anxiety.

Most parents don’t want their children to learn the lessons of hitting. Hitting tells children that people who love you are likely to hit you, and that it’s OK to hit people smaller than you. Although most parents who spank their children don’t go to the extreme of physically abusing them, research shows most physical abuse of children begins as ordinary physical punishment. Parents lose control and children are badly hurt.

Remember to use effective discipline techniques to help you raise responsible, confident and happy children.

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