

Discipline And Your Child

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Raising children is no easy task. It takes a lot of patience and love.

Sometimes this love needs to be expressed in the form of discipline. The word discipline is often taken to mean “punishment.” It is better to think of it as “teaching.” Like teaching, it requires patience, repetition, and consistency.

Bad Behavior and Good Behavior

All children misbehave. Even the most good-natured children will occasionally do something they should not do. Sometimes, children will even use “bad behavior” to gain attention from their parents. These are normal ways children test the limits of their world, especially those limits set by parents. Teaching “good” behavior may help children by happier and better behaved. The reduced family stress may avoid some of the excessive punishment that arises from children out of control.

Using nonphysical methods of discipline, parents can help their children deal with their emotions and teach them nonviolent ways to solve problems. The following are some tips you may want to try.

Controlling Tantrums

Tantrums often begin a few months after your child begins to walk. They recognize that they are physically separate from their parents. Having learned to control their legs, they begin to want to control feeding, sleeping and exploring. When frustrated, a toddler may act angrily. Young children don't have the experience to distinguish between good and bad choices. Given a choice between sweet and less sweet foods, they will choose the sweet. They will be attracted to noisy or shiny objects, whether they are toys or appliances. They will be so excited by exploration that they may not know that lack of rest will make them feel bad later. Our job as parents and as adults is to help them make good choices. Sometimes we do this by placing barriers, like gates and safety plugs.



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Sometimes we teach choices by distraction, substituting safe play with a toy for playing with a vacuum. We teach with our tone of voice, with praise for good choices, with removal and with quick “nos” for poor choices. Children crave our attention and our love. It is our best leverage against bad behavior.

If your child becomes restless and you sense a tantrum coming on, try focusing his or her energy to a different, more acceptable activity. If this doesn't

work, remove your child from the situation without discussion or fuss. If the misbehavior is mild, simply ignore it. Each time you react to an outburst, whether with scolding or reasoning, you actually reinforce negative behavior by giving your child more attention.

On the other hand, tantrums which involve biting or hitting cannot be ignored. Immediately and clearly tell your child that his or her behavior is unacceptable. Follow-up by having your child take a short “time out.” A “time out” is a way of withholding attention. A good rule of thumb is one minute per year of age. At the end of the time out you can be friendly and positive. Not being persistently angry is a way of showing that you still love them. Don't be discouraged if a lesson has to be repeated. We didn't learn the ABC's the first time through either.

Finally, if your child continues to display overly aggressive behavior, monitor his or her television viewing. Several studies suggest that preschool children may behave more aggressively if they watch violent television programs, even cartoons.

Golden Rules of Discipline

Discipline involves establishing a set of firm but simple rules your child can understand. When you make rules, always keep your child's age in mind. For example, toddlers are naturally curious and often learn about their world through touching and handling objects. For this reason, it's unrealistic for a parent to expect their 2-year old to refrain from

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Discipline And Your Child continued...

touching store displays if given the opportunity.

When you decide to apply measures of discipline, first get your child's attention. If your child talks back or runs away, wait until he or she settles down. Let your child know you understand the feelings he or she is experiencing. The best time to teach is not in the middle of a tantrum. However, you must also explain that your child must find a new way to handle the situation or problem. For example, teach sharing to children who fight over a toy. Or, help a child talk about his or her anger instead of hitting.

Consistency is needed for learning. If you change the rules or punishments, you will only confuse your child. In addition, be sure that all adults and other care-givers who monitor your child's behavior agree to and understand the limits and punishments used to discipline your child. If you or others are inconsistent, your child will take longer to learn.

Realistically, you may not be able to get all other adults to agree with all of your rules. Amazingly, your child will learn anyway. All children learn to behave differently in the presence of different adults. For minor differences (i.e. how much noise is allowed) it makes no difference. For safety issues (i.e. not playing with electrical cords), all adults need to agree.

As your child grows up, you may need to change the rules and punishments. For example, you may tolerate a 2-year old pulling on your clothes to get your attention, but by the time he or she is 4, there maybe more mature ways for your child to approach you. As you change the rules, explain why and clearly define the new rules and expectations.

Always remember, you are a role model for your child. Children are constantly working at becoming adults. They imitate mom and dad at the same time they assert their independence. If you deal with your own problems in an angry manner, your child will most likely pattern himself or herself after these actions. If your child breaks a rule, spanking or screaming is an outward signal that it is okay to solve problems through violence. If, on the other hand, you remain calm but firm when disciplining your child, your child will learn positive ways of handling problems through your example.

By establishing simple rules your children can

understand and by applying these rules through methods of nonviolent discipline, you can make growth towards maturity easier for you and your children. Not all rules and not all discipline strategies work for all children. There are certainly high-energy children and children with rebellious personalities that are particularly difficult to manage. Often the child whose personalities most like your own is the hardest to understand.

Children are all different. You will learn what works and what doesn't with your own child. Look for new ideas by observing other parents and teachers. One of the reasons that parents talk to other parents about their children is an understandable pride, but it also helps to know that parenting is not perfect. You will sometimes fail and sometimes fail repeatedly. By talking with parents and teachers and Pediatricians hopefully you will learn that you are not alone. If you are doing your best and yet misbehavior is causing unbearable tension between you and your child, please get help. There are many books and counselors available. Ask your Pediatrician or healthcare professional if you are having trouble knowing where to find help.

For more information, call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at www.ah.com.

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