

TWU Counseling Center

Parenting Tips for Successful Discipline

To many people, discipline means punishment. But, actually, "to discipline means to teach." Rather than punishment, discipline should be a positive way of helping and guiding children to achieve self-control. Discipline requires parents to recognize the requirements for successful living and then to create or allow experiences that provide guidance. These experiences should include activities within an emotionally bonded relationship and consequences for a child's behavior.

Tips for Successful Discipline

- At the time the child misbehaves, any explanation or warning should be brief; approximately one word for each year of the child's age is a good guideline. Example: "No hitting, time-out," before placing a 3-year-old in time-out for hitting. Time-outs should also be age appropriate. One minute per year of age is also a good guideline. Example: A five-year-old would get a 5-minute time out whereas a 10-year-old would get a 10-minute time out. A time out should remove the child from stimulation. Example: Sit the child in a corner away from other family members or make a small child sit still on your lap for the age appropriate amount of time. Do not give children toys in time out. This is a consequence for an unwanted behavior.
- Long explanations of the reasons for punishment should not occur at the time the child misbehaves. Wait until you and your child are calm to discuss the behavior and why the punishment occurred.
- Never punish your child when angry because your consequence will more likely be more severe than warranted. Small children should receive consequences close to the occurrence of the behavior, but teenagers can receive their consequences several days after the occurrence and after you have had time to think of a consequence appropriate to the unwanted behavior.
- Be consistent in your consequences. Do not give a consequence you are not willing to enforce. Example: Do not ground your child for a week and then let them off of their grounding before that week is out. Your child will learn you are not consistent and will be more likely to push your boundaries.
- If your child does not follow your instructions, the use of consistent consequences for not following instructions will make your instructions more likely to affect the child's behavior in the future.
- Set a good example. You are role models for your children. For example, if you want to teach your child that physical violence is not the way to resolve conflicts or problems, then don't use physical punishment.
- Set limits, but be careful not to impose too many rules. Before making a rule, ask yourself: Is it necessary? Does the rule protect a child's health and safety? Does it protect the rights or property of others? Too many rules are hard, if not impossible, to enforce.

- Keep rules simple and understandable. Explain to older children the reason for the rule.
- Involve children as much as possible in making family rules. They are less likely to break rules that they have helped establish.
- Help your child understand rules and what happens when they are broken. If you and your 4-year-old agree that he shouldn't cross the street alone, and he breaks this rule, be ready to enforce the consequences.
- Be flexible. Some rules may work when a child is young, but as children get older, they need and want more independence. Remember, not all children respond in the same way.
- Help your child develop self-control. Young children do not have the self-control needed to follow all the rules all of the time. A 5-year-old may not have the self-control needed not to take a cookie from the cookie jar before dinner. To help the child resist, a parent can move the cookie jar out of sight or offer a snack that is allowed.
- Tell a child about behavior that is annoying to you, or others.
- Act quickly when a child misbehaves. Don't let a problem build up over time.
- Be consistent with your own rules, actions, and consequences and consistent with other family members. Agree with other family members on methods of discipline. This way a child always knows what will happen if he or she does not follow the rules.
- Praise a child for good behavior and accomplishments. Let the child know you appreciate his or her efforts. Positive reinforcement works better at getting the behavior you want than does punishment. Positive attention works better than negative attention.
- Avoid power struggles with your children. Discipline is not a game in which there is a winner and a loser. You expect co-operation from your child and your child expects you to be fair. Respect your child enough to allow disagreements at times.
- Offer positive suggestions. Avoid criticism and nagging. Criticism and nagging can cause your child to become resentful or angry or develop low self-esteem.
- Encourage independence and responsibility.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Tell your children how much you love them. When they misbehave let them know it is their behavior that you dislike, not them!!!

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Sources: Down to Earth Discipline by Michael G. Conner, Psy.D., and multiple sources from KidsGrowth.com