

# TWU Counseling Center

## Discipline and Your Child

Why do kids misbehave??!! Remember that misbehavior often serves a purpose. Train yourself to look at the results of misbehavior rather than just at the misbehavior. Do they need attention? Are they just tired and fussy? Are they feeling overwhelmed by expectations that are beyond their developmental abilities?

Before you can implement effective discipline, you are encouraged to first focus on having a positive relationship with your child:

- Set aside regular time to do something fun with your child. Share as many happy times together as possible. Let him know you enjoy being with him/her. Laugh, play, hug, and cuddle your child. Talk with and read to him/her. Doing these things lets children know that they are important to you and encourages them to want to please you.
- Never give an order, request, or command without being able to enforce it at the time. Threats do not work and they decrease your credibility over time.
- Be consistent, that is, reward or punish the same behavior in the same manner as much as possible.
- For younger children, show that you understand why he/she wants to do what you don't want him/her to do. For example, "I know that you want to stay on the playground longer, but we need to leave now" or "I know that you want me to buy candy for you, but we are going to have dinner soon". You can say no to an action without shaming the child for his/her reasons.
- Make it as clear as possible what the child is to expect if he or she performs an undesirable behavior. The punishment should fit the crime and should be administered immediately. In cases of recurring behavior, consequences should be stated in advance so the child knows what to expect. Harsh punishment is not necessary. Using a simple time out or taking away a privilege/special toy can be effective when it is used consistently every time. If you have more than one child you need to figure out what "works" for each child.

- Make it very clear what the undesirable behavior is. It is not enough to say, “Your room is messy”. Messy should be specified in terms of exactly what is meant: “You’ve left dirty clothes on the floor, dirty plates on your desk, and your bed is not made up.”
- When appropriate offer a solution or an alternative. Even if he/she believes they know better, you can give a reminder. For example, “Sand is not for throwing, try letting it trickle through your fingers or put it in the cup”.
- Once you’ve stated your position and your child starts to talk back or challenge you, do not keep defending yourself. Just calmly restate the position once more and then stop responding to the attacks.
- Let your child know that you believe in his/her ability to do the right thing. Speak respectfully (in tone and word). Consider saying, “I know how you like to help” instead of saying, “Don’t bother me, you’ll make a mess”. Instead of saying, “You always forget to wait your turn”, try saying, “I know you’ll remember to wait your turn next time”.
- Set firm limits and rules children can understand. Use a firm but kind voice and keep directions short. You may need to repeat rules and directions until your small child can remember them. For example, “ You may not watch that TV program. You may turn it off or I will do it.” “When you put your shoes on, we will go outside”. You can ask them to repeat directions back to make sure they clearly understand what you are saying.
- Look for gradual changes in behavior. Don’t expect too much. Your expectations should be developmentally consistent with your child’s age and abilities. Praise behavior that is coming closer to the desired goal. After being punished children should start with a clean slate. Parents should not remind or nag their children about their prior misbehavior.
- Reward desirable behavior as much as possible by verbal praise, touch, or something tangible like a toy or token reward system (stickers, etc.). Compliment good efforts even if the result isn’t perfect. Work at “catching them being good”.
- Help your child learn to express how he/she feels (vs. acting out feelings in an inappropriate manner). Say things like “You seem frustrated” or “You look like you are angry” or “It’s ok to feel that way”.
- Be a good listener. Use good eye contact. Physically get down to the level of smaller children. Don’t interrupt. Ask open-ended questions with older children vs. questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no.

- Remember that your behavior serves as a model for your children's behavior. Set a good example for your children. For example, if parents handle frustrations well, their children will probably learn to handle their own frustrations well. If parents swear and become upset when things don't go well, their children may learn to act the same way.
- Never disagree about discipline with your significant other in front of your children.
- Make your discipline tactics consistent with the developmental abilities of your child!

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**TWU**  
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**Locations:**

*Denton*  
*West Jones Hall*  
*940-898-3801*

*Dallas-Parkland*  
*FPH 120*  
*214-689-6655*

*Dallas-Presbyterian*  
*DPB 16*  
*214-706-2416*

*Houston*  
*Suite 2250*  
*713-794-2059*

Adapted by Melinda Haley, M.S. 07/25/07

Sources: The National Children's Advocacy Center, [www.nationalcac.org](http://www.nationalcac.org)  
The National Association for the Education of Young Children, [www.naeyc.org/resources](http://www.naeyc.org/resources)  
Kids Growth, [www.kidsgrowth.com](http://www.kidsgrowth.com)