



American College of Pediatricians

www.BestforChildren.org

Patient Information Handout

Discipline of the Child Series: MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF PARENTING

By Den A. Trumbull, MD

To discipline a child is to teach and train him or her to possess self-control and traits of high character, such as honesty, respectfulness, obedience, responsibility, sensitivity and morality. Discipline is comprised of three primary components: Instruction, Encouragement, and Correction. A child must first receive instruction in proper and safe behavior. Then the parent must motivate and direct the child toward this proper behavior through encouragement and correction. In the loving rearing of a child, the acts of encouragement should always outnumber the acts of correction, though some correction is always needed. The compliant child will need less correction than the particularly contrary child. Children of all persuasions especially need a parent's love and encouragement.

METHODS OF DISCIPLINE

Always encourage your child's proper behavior with words and actions.

Upon discovery of any misbehavior, first judge your child's intent or motivation:

If *Accidental*: Forgive and teach.

If *Innocent*: Express disapproval and teach.

If *Intentional disobedience*: Express disapproval, teach and impose consequences for correction.

Less than 1 year of age

1. Demonstrate your love and affection for your child with daily hugs, kisses, play, singing, and conversation. Children at all ages need active demonstrations of parental love to build a healthy relationship.
2. Reasonably child-proof the house. Move breakable items from your child's reach, put latches on cabinet doors, hide electrical cords and put safety caps on electrical outlets. If practical, remove items of irresistible temptation.
3. When undesirable actions occur, use distraction and redirection. Brightly colored toys or objects can redirect your child's attention from forbidden objects or areas. Thank your child for cooperating.
4. Repeatedly remove your child from the scene of an undesirable act and say, "no, no." Express your approval when he complies.

12 months to 18 months of age

All of the above, plus

1. Applaud your child with each new developmental achievement.
2. Clearly state the rules and frequently praise good behavior.

3. Express your disapproval when undesirable behavior occurs and firmly state, "NO", with eye-to-eye contact. Give a brief and simple explanation.
4. If your child persists with the undesirable behavior after clear warnings, mildly slap his hand and repeat, "NO."
5. Always be careful to distinguish willful disobedience from childish irresponsibility or innocent curiosity. Only punish clear disobedience.

18 months to 3 1/2 years of age

1. Demonstrate your love toward your child through active play (wrestling, tumbling, and chasing) and by often saying, "I love you". Spend *individual* time together by going on a Saturday breakfast "date," flying a kite or just going on a walk.
2. Generously encourage your child's proper and obedient behavior through verbal praise ("I'm so proud of that big girl") and occasional rewards, such as new privileges or a special activity, such as a trip to the park.
3. Spend time together as a family, especially eating meals together at home. This encourages family conversation, allows parents to demonstrate positive role modeling, and even stimulates good eating habits as your child observes you eating your vegetables.
4. Begin giving your child some age appropriate choices, such as which of two outfits to wear or which of two toys to take in the car. Limit the choices to two or three to avoid frustrating your child and yourself.
5. Begin to use reasoning with your child's misbehavior. Briefly explain that the behavior is wrong and is not to be repeated. Give a short explanation of the misbehavior's unpleasant effects on your child and on others, i.e. biting and hitting.
6. Make certain your rules and expectations of your child fit his level of maturity. For instance, two year olds have difficulty sitting still, walking slowly and remaining quiet for long periods of time.
7. Anticipate difficult settings for your child and remind him of your expectations of him. Example: Before entering a store, inform your child of where you are going and warn him of the consequences of misbehavior or a temper tantrum in the store.
8. Use time-out for disobedient behavior. Escort your child to a chair in a boring, non-stimulating location such as a hallway or living room corner. Set a kitchen timer for a specific period of time (1 minute for each year of age) and require that he sit there until you return. When the time is up, offer her a hug, review the offense and restore the relationship. Always use the same location in the home for time-out. Examples: When a two year old is disruptive at the dinner table, she is removed from her high chair and put in time-out for two minutes or until she can calm down and cooperate. When a three year old is playing selfishly with her sibling, she is sent to time-out for three minutes or until she can calm down. (see Time-out Handout)
9. Ignore mild temper tantrums and whining. Don't be an audience unless the behavior becomes destructive or disrespectful. If a tantrum persists longer than a few minutes, send your child to his room until he can behave appropriately. If the tantrum turns destructive or disrespectful toward the parent, further punishment such as a spanking may be necessary to correct the behavior. Distinguish *frustration* tantrums (assist your child) from *rebellious* tantrums (ignore your child).

Don't reinforce or reward whining by parental indecisiveness or inconsistency. Allowing a whining plea to change your original decision will teach your child to try whining again the next time he disagrees with your decision.

10. Allow natural consequences to correct misbehavior. Examples: A child disobediently climbs on the end table when the parent is not looking and falls to the floor. A child plays roughly with a kitten and is scratched. A child disobediently runs from the parent and skins his knee in a fall. No punishment is needed following these events; the unpleasant result of the

mischievous action will usually correct the behavior. Use this opportunity to teach the principle of safety with obedience.

11. Spank for persistent disobedience and for noncompliance with milder punishments, such as time-out. When your child has a clear understanding of the rules and consequences of disobedience, and milder forms of punishment have failed, a spanking on the buttocks may be necessary (see *Disciplinary Spanking* handout). Always follow a planned procedure with all spanking. For examples, see *Disciplinary Spanking*.

3 1/2 years to 6 years of age

1. Be a good parental example. Walk your talk. Practice honesty in your words and actions. Spend *individual* quality time with your child. Plan breakfast dates, go to the park or zoo, and take your child on errands with you. At bedtime, read a story, briefly review highlights of the day and pray together.
2. Begin assigning household chores that are age-appropriate to develop responsibility and industriousness. Consider an allowance system after 5 years of age.
3. With each new act of misbehavior, explain the reason for your correction.
4. Restrict privileges or remove toys for disobedient behavior. Examples: When a child disobediently leaves the yard to play with a neighbor, he is not allowed to visit the friend for two days. When a child refuses to get ready for bed at night,

television privileges are denied for the next day.

5. Allow natural consequences to teach. See previous age group for examples.
6. Use logical consequences of disobedience to teach proper behavior. Examples: When a child's gum is stuck on the car seat or in the child's hair, gum chewing is denied for the next two days. When a child refuses to pick up toys after playing, the toys are put away for the next two days.
7. Use time-out for misbehavior. See previous age group for examples.
8. Spank for persistent disobedience or defiant disrespectfulness. See *Disciplinary Spanking* for examples.
9. Be consistent with your correction and punishment!

6 years to 10 years of age

1. Be a good parental example. Encourage good behavior. Spend *individual* time with your child (as above). Be involved with your child in organized activities, such as sports, gym, and ballet. Remember: Rules

without a *relationship* leads to rebellion. Grant new responsibilities and privileges as your trust is earned through your child's obedience and demonstrations of maturing judgment. Seize every opportunity to

discuss with your child your values and convictions about daily living and spiritual matters.

2. Restrict privileges for disobedience. Give a reason for your corrective actions.
3. Allow natural and logical consequences to teach proper behavior. Example: When a dawdling child is slow to dress in the morning, he is allowed to be tardy for school. When a child fails to finish her homework due to procrastination, she is sent to bed on time and turns in the incomplete work to be penalized the next day. When a child irresponsibly breaks a household item or toy, she is required to pay for it with her allowance money.
4. Use time-out for misbehavior such as disruptive behavior or selfish play. At these

ages, it should be framed as a time of contemplation of the misbehavior.

5. For particularly difficult and recurring behaviors, choose two or three offenses and draw up an agreement between parents and child:
List the rule and responsibilities.
Then, list the consequences.
Decide together which consequences are appropriate for which misbehaviors.
Parents and child should sign it, post it and parents enforce it.
A written agreement clarifies the issues for the child and takes the guess work out of correction for the parent.
6. Spanking should be used (and needed) infrequently and only when milder measures have failed to change your child's behavior or attitude.

10 years and up

1. Continue to enrich your *relationship* with your child. Be available for conversation and discussion. Be involved in your child's activities when possible. Grant new privileges as responsibility is demonstrated and earned.
2. Compliment and commend right, responsible behavior. When disobedience

occurs, restrict privileges and penalize creatively, such as with monetary fines or additional chores.

3. Counsel your child about making healthy and right decisions in the areas of integrity, morality and sexual behavior.

SUGGESTED READING:

Shepherding a Child's Heart, Shepherd Press
by Tedd Tripp

The Strong Willed Child, Tyndale House Publishers
by James Dobson, PhD

The New Dare to Discipline, Tyndale House Publishers
by James Dobson, PhD

Preparation For Adolescence, Regal Books
by James Dobson, PhD

Six-point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children, Andrews McMeel Publishing
by John Rosemond

Passport 2 Purity, Family Life Publishing (www.passport2purity.com)
by Dennis Rainey

Age of Opportunity, P & R Publishing
by Paul David Tripp