

Making Discipline Positive

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- ◆ You're being really bad today!
- ◆ You ought to be ashamed of yourself!
- ◆ You better stop that noise or else!
- ◆ You're driving me crazy!

How many times have you heard yourself or a parent say these words to a child? How many times did you hear these words when you were a child? As you know, the way you and the parents behave with the children affects the children's behavior. It sometimes seems like discipline is about yelling and negative things. But it doesn't have to be like that.

The word "discipline" often brings thoughts of punishment and scolding. The original Latin word related to discipline, though, means to "educate", especially in matters of conduct. Childcare providers and parents are children's first teachers. This means that discipline is a basic skill in childcare and parenting.

The type of discipline also changes the way children feel about themselves. Sometimes people think that the purpose of discipline is to get children to do the right thing right now. Sometimes that is important. In the long run, though, the purpose of discipline is to raise responsible, confident children. Adults want children to grow up to think for themselves. They want children to learn acceptable behaviors. They also want them to make wise decisions when they deal with problems.

To reach these goals, a child needs to learn. He does not need to be afraid or feel pain. Studies have shown that physical punishment, such as hitting or slapping, and verbal abuse, do not work well. Children might learn what they should not do, but they won't always learn what they should do instead. Children need help learning good behavior. This basic idea is central to effective childrearing. As childcare providers, you can share this idea with parents. How do you know if a discipline method has worked? One way to judge is by how well a child has learned. If a child is doing more of the right things and fewer of the wrong things, it is working!

When to Talk to Parents About Discipline

- ◆ The parents complain that their child is out of control.
- ◆ You see the parents and children struggling with each other.
- ◆ You or the parents threaten the child all the time, but it does not work.
- ◆ You feel that the child does not listen to you or to his/her parents.
- ◆ You feel that the child continually gets his or her own way.

Positive Ways of Guiding Children

There are several ways to use positive discipline. Several of those are described in this section

- ♦ One is to understand children and what to expect.
- ♦ Another is to try to prevent the behavior you do not want.
- ♦ A third is to show the children the right behavior by doing it yourself.
- ♦ Using rewards with children is also a positive discipline method.
- ♦ Look for the cause of the misbehavior and try to solve the problem.
- ♦ Finally, if it is necessary to take action, so that the child learns to stop doing something, natural and logical consequences can be very effective.

Understanding What to Expect of Children

Research says that "sensitive" parenting is possible only when parents know what their children can do and what they are learning. So, it is important for you to know and provide parents with information about child development and what to expect of their children. Know what is normal. This will help parents to provide for their children's needs. It also could help to prevent abuse. For example, it is important to know that preschoolers (3 to 5 years old) like to get attention. They may try to do this by shocking you by using bad words. This is normal for children at that age. Try to find positive ways to give them attention instead, and teach them other words to use. Another example related to children and quiet. It is not realistic to expect a young child to sit quietly for long periods of time. They need to be active and explore. Expect them to set still for only short times.

Prevention

Most of the time, it is better to stop a problem before it starts, rather than to fix it later. Make it easier for the children to do the right thing than the wrong thing. Parents can do that by arranging their day to meet their children's needs and their own needs. They can also arrange their house to help the children behave. Have the parents think about the setup of their house. Share information with parents about childproofing their homes. Are important, dangerous or breakable things within reach? Are there things that the child may play with? Are there enough toys for the children? Are there good places to store toys and hang up coats? Parents can make the home a friendly place for children.

Modeling

Have you heard a parent say, "Do as I say, not as I do"? Many adults say that, but children are more likely to do what adults do, not what they say. Children learn a lot by watching how adults behave. So, it is important to watch yourself and what you do. If the adults do not eat vegetables, it will be hard to get the children to eat them. If the adults smoke, the children might try to smoke. If the adults throw things when they are angry, the children will learn to act that way. Discuss with parent show they wish their children to behave. Share with them how to model appropriate behavior and encourage them to act the way they want their children to act.

Rewards

Another thing that parents and caregivers can do to help children do the right thing is to give them rewards. We talk about "catching the child being bad", but parents can "catch them being good", too. Children need to know when they're doing the right thing. Parents can say something nice, like, "I like the way you did that," or, "I am proud of you." Parents can also spend special time with their child, give a hug or a smile or praise their child in front of others to reward him. A reward does not need to be a present.

Many parents are afraid of using rewards. They think it is the same as bribes. It is important for parents to learn the difference between rewards and bribes. A bribe is something bigger than it should be. It is promised before the behavior is completed. It is not something that the child would usually get. A reward does not need to be a present. It is something that fits the behavior. It is given after the behavior and often without the child knowing that it is coming. It can be a hug, a gold star on a chart, a time alone with a parent or a compliment. Share information about ways to reward children and the difference between rewards and bribes with parents.

Find the Cause of Misbehavior

Sometimes it is hard to know why children do what they do. Sometimes, it seems like they want to be bad. That is not true most of the time, though. Understanding why children misbehave is important. This will help you and the parents to respond more effectively to them and their behavior. There may be several reasons why a child is misbehaving. For example, he might not be feeling well, he might be trying to get attention, he might be curious or upset. It is not bad to be sick, to want attention or to be curious. It is not good to hurt others or to do something dangerous, though. You can help parents figure out the reason for their child's misbehavior by asking them to look for patterns in their child's behavior. They can talk to their children about the children's feelings. They could also suggest solutions and see if they sound good to the child. Discipline is more effective when it matches they needs of the child.

Logical and Natural Consequences

Sometimes parents cannot prevent wrong behavior. Sometimes, they need to do something to teach the child what is wrong and what is right. It helps if they teach their children the connection between their actions and the results of their misbehavior. They can use logical and natural consequences to do that.

Natural consequences are results that naturally happen after a child's behavior. The adult does not need to do anything. The situation will take care of itself. For example, if a child does not eat at mealtime, she will get hungry later. If she does not play carefully with a toy, she may break it. Natural consequences work well if the child will care about the consequence and if the child is not in danger.

Logical consequences are things that the adult manages, but they are related to the behavior. For example, if the child uses a toy to hit another child, the adult takes away that toy or makes the child sit on a chair instead of playing. If the child leaves her bicycle in the driveway, the adult puts the bike away for a day.

Try some positive methods of discipline. It can make both the adult and the child feel better. Read more about general strategies for positive discipline with young children, difference between negative and positive guidance, and positive methods and language to use with children. Share these strategies with other parents.

What Is Good Discipline?

The word "discipline" actually means "to teach". The discipline you use to get your child to behave teaches her about herself and about her relationships to others. Good discipline sets limits and rules and helps a child focus on how to follow the rules. Good discipline doesn't punish a child for making mistakes. It teaches her what to do instead.

Some people think discipline means spanking or yelling unkind words to make children suffer enough so that they will never do wrong again. Unfortunately, this kind of discipline teaches a young child the wrong things. It teaches him that the world is unpredictable and unsafe. This kind of discipline teaches a child that if no one is watching, he can get away with "bad" behavior. It also teaches a child that threatening and hurting people is how to get them to do what you want.

Wise parents understand that good discipline teaches a child to behave even when parents are not around. They know that a child will be better behaved in the long run if parents act like caring teachers rather angry "bosses". They know that a child does not need to be taught "who is the boss". Instead, a child needs to know how to get along with other people. Your child will work very hard to please you when you treat her with love and respect while setting fair and firm limits on her behavior.

Discipline for Babies and Toddlers

It is important to know what kinds of behaviors to expect from your child at different ages. Knowing what your child can and cannot do will help you be more understanding of some of the things you see your child doing. For example, small babies do not cry to control you or make you angry. Babies cry to tell you they need something. They do not need to be disciplined. Instead, they may need to be fed or changed or held.

The most important thing for you to remember is that the best way to help your young child be good is to make it easy. Here are some things you can do to make it easy for your child to be good:

- ♦ *Know what is reasonable to expect of her at her age.* The crawling or walking toddler needs much more supervision than she did before she could move around. She does not know or understand what is safe and unsafe. Help her stay safe by making the house a safe place. It is not reasonable to expect a young child to stay away from electrical outlets, cleaning supplies or breakable dishes just because you have told her "don't touch". A child this age does not remember instructions very long. If she touches, she is not disobeying you to make you mad. She is just curious. Yelling or slapping a child this age may stop her for a little while, but these actions don't teach her what is safe or unsafe. Instead, they teach her to be afraid and to expect you to hurt her.

- ♦ *Make your home "childproof".* One of the best steps parents of crawlers and toddlers can take to keep children safe and out of trouble is to childproof their homes. Childproofing helps prevent battles over things children can't yet understand. Very young children are going to actively explore their surroundings. They are going to touch things and put them in their mouths. Help your child behave by removing forbidden objects. Cover electrical outlets. Put a gate in front of stairs. Keep breakable and dangerous things out of reach of your child.
- ♦ *Avoid trouble before it happens.* Be aware of what your child is doing and how he might get into trouble. For example, if you see your child moving toward an area you don't want him to go in, step in his path and offer him a different activity. Another way to avoid trouble is to distract your child from doing what you don't want him to do. Show him an alternative behavior or activity. For example, if you find your child putting something dirty in his mouth, give him a cracker or a teething ring or a toy instead. Using prevention and distraction will allow you to save the word, "No!", for really important times when your toddler is in danger of hurting himself or others.
- ♦ *Let your child know when she is doing things you like.* Parents who take the time to notice when a child is behaving well will have fewer discipline problems. These parents give their young children plenty of positive attention so that children won't have to misbehave to be noticed. They say positive and encouraging things to their children. They take time to enjoy their children. Some people worry that too much positive attention will spoil children. This isn't true. Positive attention makes children want to be good.

Discipline for Preschool-Aged Children

Children young the three do not understand rules very well. Wise parents know that it is important to explain and enforce important rules anyway. They also know that young children may not always follow them.

Children who are 3, 4 and 5 are better able to follow simple rules that you set. At this age, children's skills at using and understanding language are better. Their ability to remember things has improved. They can understand that there are consequences for breaking rules. Still, they are not very sure of why it is important to follow rules, other than to please you. In time, your child will learn why good behavior is important if you take the time to explain calmly what the child has done wrong and what is the right way to act.

You can help your preschool-aged child behave and follow rules by doing these things:

- ♦ Make simple rules and follow through on them.
- ♦ Offer simple reasons why misbehavior is not acceptable.
- ♦ Give children limited choices.
- ♦ Be a good example yourself.

Although children's speech and memory have improved, remember that your child will understand better if you use simple words and sentences. State rules clearly, "No hurting others," "Please put away your toys," "Bedtime is at 7 p.m." Stating rules ahead of time and being consistent will help you enforce the rules better. You do not have to say things like, "Because I said so!" Instead, be firm and simply say, "The rule is that bedtime is at 7 p.m. Do you want to put on your pajamas yourself or do you want me to help you?"

Try to figure out which rules you care most about and stand up for them firmly. Have just a few important rules--there is no point to having many rules if you don't have the energy to follow through on them. Having rules that you do not consistently follow is confusing to a young child. It teaches her to ignore rules and to ignore you. However, when she is sick or hungry, or very tired, or is put in an unfamiliar environment, it is much harder for a young child to behave. Be more flexible and creative to help your child do what is expected.

When your child misbehaves, match your response to the behavior. For example, if children are fighting over a toy, remove the toy. If a child spills a drink, he is more likely to learn by having to help clean up the mess than from being yelled at. These are responses to unwanted behaviors that make sense. They help children see the connections between actions and their consequences. Fighting about a toy leads to not having one to play with. Spilled juice takes time and effort to clean up.

Pointing out the consequences of a preschooler's behavior for others and for himself is also a helpful lesson, for example: "When you hit Charles, it hurts him a lot. He doesn't want to play with children who hurt him. Instead, tell Charles in words that you are angry." This kind of response gives your child important information. It teaches him how his actions affect others and how to be responsible and get along in the world.

Sometimes young children misbehave because they need to feel like they have some control over the things they do. Parents who understand this let their children make some choices. They know that children will be more willing to let parents have control over some things if they have a say in other things.

Before giving your child a choice, be sure the choices she makes are ones you can live with. "Would you like to wear your green pants or your blue pants?" and, "Would you like peanut butter and jelly for lunch or a hot dog?" are good choices for you to give your young child, unless you really want the child to wear the green pants or you just ran out of peanut butter. When you offer your child choices, it helps her feel that she has some say in her own life. Choices also give a child practice in making decisions for herself.

Finally, children learn from watching the people around them, especially their parents. You need to act the way that you want your child to act. A child will pick up on the language, the actions, and the attitudes of their parents and imitate them. If you want your children to behave politely and to respect others, then you must behave politely and respect others, especially your children.

Parents are Partners in Helping Children Behave

In a few short years, children grow from babies who are entirely dependent on their parents for their every need into talking, running, independent preschoolers. In spite of all this rapid growth, young children are only beginning to develop the skills to control their behavior. They have a lot to learn about how to control themselves. You need to be your child's partner in this process, patiently guiding and teaching as your child practices and develops the skills to control their behavior. They have a lot to learn about how to control themselves. You need to be your child's partner in this process, patiently guiding and teaching as your child practices and develops these skills. Teaching young children how to behave is hard work. But the work you do now will pay off later in the form of youngsters who are responsible and caring people.

Use Positives for Disciplining Children

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If you find yourself using words like "don't", "stop", and "no" to discipline your child, try using positive words instead. Children need to be taught how to behave in socially and morally acceptable ways. To discipline means to teach, especially in matters of conduct. To teach effectively, we need to tell our children clearly what we want them to do. The word "don't" seems to come easily to our lips, so it takes practice to learn to rephrase our limits and rules. The rewards of guiding children rather than commanding them won't necessarily come right away. But in the long run, it helps children learn to be morally well-developed, socially appropriate, self-directed and happy kids.

Positive Discipline or Child Guidance

Positive discipline is based on understanding child development—what it is like to be in your child's shoes. Parents also must have a firm idea of the kind of person they want their children to become and be willing to follow a plan of action.

Telling children what we want over and over again supplies them with the information they need to learn. Eventually, this knowledge will become second nature to them. Recognizing that it is natural for children to behave in socially inappropriate ways, the child guidance approach helps children develop self-discipline. Guidance addresses the child's behavior rather than judging the child. Listen to the following example. Instead of chiding a child who isn't ready to leave in the morning with, "You always make me late for work!" you might say, "Taking time to decide what to wear makes us late every day. Tomorrow, we can either get up earlier or put out clothes before we go to bed. You decide."

Restate Limits and Rules Positively

Instead of constantly using "don't: commands (although sometimes they are necessary), learn to rephrase in a positive way while clearly stating the desired behavior. Instead of saying, "Don't run in the house," for example, try saying, "Walk in the house." This states clearly how you want your child to act. Sometimes, you may want to give reasons for the rule—especially when you state it for the first time. Explaining a rule might sound like this: "Walk in the house. When you run, you may break something or hurt yourself by running into something."

Negative Versus Positive Guidance

Think about what you want your children to do instead of what you don't want them to do. In the following examples, the positive guidance follows the "don't" command.

- ♦ "Don't go into the street," versus, "Play in the yard. You could get hurt if you go into the street."
- ♦ "Don't stay out too late," versus, "you need to be home by 11 p.m."
- ♦ "Don't throw the ball in the house," versus, "Roll the ball in the house," or, "Balls are for outside play."

Limits

Limits are specific expectations parents set for their children. They are guidelines or rules, such as staying in the backyard when playing outside, staying out of a sister's bedroom, keeping car tools in the garage, and asking permission before borrowing clothes. Setting limits tells a child, "I care about you. I want you to be safe. I want you to be considerate. By acting responsibly, you will learn to get along with others."

Four Types of Limits

1. Prevent physical harm, as in, "Be gentle with your baby sister."
2. Protect property, as in, "Play with the ball outside, not in the house."
3. Prevent psychological harm, as in, "When your sister makes a mistake, give her some help. Laughing at her would make her very sad."
4. Respect for others, as in, "Ask Jamie before you play with his toys."

Keys to Effective Limits

- ♦ Keep your limits to important matters. Too many limits can be a burden to children and parents. Limits should be based on your highest priorities.
- ♦ Set reasonable limits. Can the child do what is expected of him or her? Consider his or her age and developmental stage.
- ♦ Teach self-discipline with clear, positive limits.
- ♦ Be consistent with limits you set. If limits are not consistently enforced, the child will be confused.
- ♦ Change limits to adapt to changes in the child's age. A child's ring of freedom should grow larger as he or she ages. However, limits involving respect are reasonable for all ages.

- ♦ Involve children in setting some of their limits. Asking children to give their opinions about limits boosts self-confidence and self-control.
- ♦ Help children understand the reasons for limits. Children are more likely to cooperate with parents if they understand the reason for the limits.
- ♦ Set enforceable limits. Parents must enforce limits their child deliberately defies. Can a parent enforce a rule that their children always wear a hat and coat when it is cold? Can you see them at school or at a friend's house? When you aren't where you can watch your child's actions, it is difficult to enforce a limit. Sometimes, you can set up a consequence if you find out they have broken a limit. When setting limits, think about whether you can enforce them. For example, can you enforce a rule that your child always eats their vegetables at school lunch?

Parents should expect their children to occasionally try to test their parents' commitment by breaking the rule. Children test parental limits to assert their own independence and to see if their parents are willing to stand behind what they say is important.

Too few or too many limits create fear, anxiety, or anger. Limits that are clear, positive, and consistently enforced, are an important step toward responsive discipline. Limits are values translated into guidelines for children's behavior. Children want to know what their parents value. Children also want their parents to love them enough to stand up for their deepest beliefs.

Foster Parents and Discipline

Children in care have the right to know what standards of behavior you expect of them and the consequences or not meeting those standards.

The more that children are involved in discussing and setting the rules, limits and consequences that affect them, the sooner they will understand and accept the foster family's routines and expectations. Children who are able to establish a relationship of trust and respect (rather than follow rules through fear of punishment) are less likely to misbehave.

Discipline Versus Punishment

For your part, you should know and model the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline teaches children how to develop self-control and be responsible for their own actions. Punishment, on the other hand, tells children in a painful way—and after the fact—that a bigger, stronger person doesn't like something they did. Punishment is a means of control.

Children in care need secure, stable and loving environments. Those who have been abused tend to regard physical punishment as a sign of rejection as well as anger. A great deal of research indicates that physical punishment of children is related to their later aggression toward others.

Corporal punishment is forbidden for any child in care. Corporal punishment means using physical force that may inflict pain, such as spanking, slapping or hitting. Other inappropriate punishments include but are not limited to:

- ♦ Depriving a child of basic rights or needs, like food, clothing, shelter, bedding or access to their parents or guardians.
- ♦ Denying visits, or phone or mail contacts, with family members not identified in the child's plan of care.
- ♦ Threats of removal from the foster home.
- ♦ Assignment of inappropriate or excessive exercise or work.
- ♦ Undue influence over the child's religious or personal beliefs.
- ♦ Physical punishment, including shaking or forcefully pushing the child.
- ♦ Degrading actions, including humiliation, ridicule or abuse.
- ♦ Being punished by another child.
- ♦ Physical restraint, seclusion or confinements, other than for the immediate safety of the child or another person, or as specified in the child's plan of care.

Restraint is the act of intentionally restricting a child's ability to move. Foster parents shall not restrain foster children.

Appropriate discipline techniques include:

- ♦ Talking through issues.
- ♦ Praising and encouraging.
- ♦ Modeling rules.
- ♦ Establishing clear and consistent expectations.
- ♦ Removing issue-related privileges.
- ♦ Allowing children to experience the logical consequences of their actions.

You are always encouraged to talk to your team, team leaders, team coordinators and agency personnel regarding discipline techniques, training needs or any other issues relating to the care of the children in your home.

