

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE:

Strategies to Help Your Child Behave



The word “discipline” means to teach or guide. It does not mean to punish or harm. Effective discipline is not just about responding when your child does something wrong, it is also about reinforcing when he does something right and teaching him self-discipline so he avoids future misbehavior.

Spanking and other forms of physical discipline can lead to shame, embarrassment, fear, or low self-esteem. It teaches your child that aggression is an okay response, but it does not help your child learn to correct his behavior. Children who are physically disciplined may feel a loss of control because adults have all of the power.

Discipline should be about teaching children that they DO have control. They learn control when they understand that they earn privileges with good, responsible behavior, and lose them when they misbehave or do not act safely or responsibly.

This pamphlet offers you a brief introduction to proven discipline strategies.



1. POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

- **Praise your child’s positive behaviors like taking turns, sharing, or being helpful.**
 - > Tell your 2-year-old, “*Thanks for picking up your socks and putting them in the basket.*”
 - > Tell your 9-year-old, “*I really like how you let Mia have a turn with your jump rope.*”
 - > Tell your 15-year-old, “*Thanks for getting off the phone and helping set the table for dinner tonight.*”
- **Show your child that you appreciate what they are doing with a smile, hug, or two thumbs up.**
- **Actively ignore undesirable behaviors like whining or pouting.**

2. REDIRECT YOUR CHILD TO A MORE ACCEPTABLE (OR SAFER) BEHAVIOR

- **Suggest an alternative game or activity to redirect your child.**
 - > If your toddler gets upset about not having a turn with a certain toy, redirect him to another activity, “*Can you show Daddy how you can build a big sand castle?*”
 - > If your 8-year-old is teasing her cousin, first tell her that it is unacceptable and then suggest, “*Why don’t you and your cousin play catch with the baseballs we brought?*”
- **Ask your child to sit on your lap, take a water break, or cuddle with you, until he calms down.**
 - > To your 3-year-old, “*Come give Mommy a hug.*”
 - > To your 10-year-old, “*I see how upset you are about losing the game. Let’s go get some water and cool off a bit.*”

3. TIME-OUT*

Time-out involves removing a child from a problem situation and placing him in a quiet spot for a brief period of time. It works because your child gets no attention when his behavior is unacceptable. If children get a lot of attention from their parents when they misbehave, children learn to act out just to get all of that attention! The principle behind time-out is to give very little attention when behavior is inappropriate. Time-out works best with children 18 months to 5 years of age.

It also works because it gives you that much-needed “time-out” to catch your own breath when your child is trying your patience!



- **Make sure to explain how time-out works beforehand.**
- **If your child does not respond to warnings, put her in time-out; 1 minute per year of age.**
- **Put your child in a distraction free, safe, time-out spot to calm down.**
- **Use time-out the 1-2-3- Magic way:**
 - > At the first sign of misbehavior, say “*That’s 1.*” Wait 15 seconds.
 - > If the behavior continues, say “*That’s 2.*” Wait 15 seconds more.
 - > If the behavior continues, say “*That’s 3. You’re in time-out.*”
- **After time-out is over, remind your child that his behavior was not okay and that it required a time-out.** Tell him that you love him and give him a chance to talk about his feelings and possible solutions. How much you choose to talk really depends on your child’s age and development.

4. VERBAL EXPLANATION AND INSTRUCTION

- **Explain to your child why you are making a request/demand.**
 - > *“I asked you to put away your shoes because I don’t want anyone to trip over them, fall down and get hurt.”*
- **Tell your child what you expect of her before you punish her.**
 - > *“I expect you to keep your room clean, which means your bed will be made and your clothes will be put away before you go to school.”*
- **Tell your child what to do instead of what not to do.**
 - > **Don’t say,** *“Don’t leave the door wide open!”*
 - **Instead, say,** *“Please close the door behind you so we don’t let any bugs in.”*
 - > In the case of teens, **don’t just say,** *“Don’t do drugs!”*
 - **Instead,** teach them about all of the healthy ways to manage stress.

5. ESTABLISHING RULES

- **Remind your child that rules are in place to keep her safe.**
 - > *“You can’t use your cell phone while you drive and that rule is not negotiable because I need to make sure you are safe.”*
- **It is key to be consistent with rules.**
 - > *“You can’t ride your bike in the street. I know that Grandma does not live on a busy street like we do, but it’s still not safe to ride your bike on her street.”*

- **Be flexible with rules and modify them as your child gets older and demonstrates responsibility.**
 - > “You’ve really shown us how responsible you are by coming home by your curfew over the last year. Now that you are 15, we can talk about allowing you to stay out later.”

6. WITHHOLDING PRIVILEGES

- **Make consequences immediate.**
 - > If your child throws her food to the ground during a tantrum, don’t send her to her room without dinner. Instead, have her pick up the food and clean the floor as a consequence, even if it seems easier to clean up the mess yourself.
- **Tie the consequences to the behavior.**
 - > The lesson will be best learned if the privilege lost was related to the behavior. For example, if a child does not wake up in time for school, it makes sense to tighten curfew to make sure she gets enough sleep. It will make less sense to her if you tighten curfew because she did not clean her dishes.
- **Never withhold something that your child needs.**
 - > Never use time with you as a consequence. Children need to know that they can count on having alone/special time with you no matter what.
 - > Don’t take away a meal or shelter. It is okay to withhold dessert if you choose.
- **Teach your child that she can earn back her privileges by being responsible.**
 - > “If you can prove to me that you can finish your homework before dinner time then we can talk about giving you extra time to play outside with your friends.”

This chart tells you which discipline strategy works for different aged children.

DISCIPLINE STRATEGY	TODDLER	SCHOOL-AGE	ADOLESCENT
Positive reinforcement	•	•	•
Redirecting	•	•	
Time-out	•	•	
Verbal explanation and instruction		•	•
Establishment of rules		•	•
Withholding privileges		•	•

Discipline really means to teach or to guide; it does not mean to punish or control. Aim to develop, communicate and enforce both clear rules and associated consequences that match your child’s age and stage of development. Teach your child about good, responsible behavior and give him the chance to earn back privileges lost for misbehaviors or unsafe, irresponsible behaviors. Always remind him how much you love him and remember that through consistent discipline you are teaching your child a really good skill... how to control his behavior.

Thank YOU

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SOURCES:

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The 1-2-3 Magic Program, Parent Magic Inc. (<http://www.parentmagic.com/>)

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