



# PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

...in Your Child

**Effective discipline is essential to raising children who have self-control, behave well with peers and adults, and choose to avoid risky behaviors.**

As we consider how best to discipline our children, an important starting point is to understand the meaning of the word “discipline.” Discipline means “to teach” or “to guide.” It does not mean to punish or control. Discipline is about teaching our children how to behave by recognizing and reinforcing positive behaviors.

We discipline our children most effectively when we:

- Praise desired behaviors
- Pay less attention to undesired behaviors
- Use criticism sparingly and thoughtfully
- Model appropriate behavior ourselves



## THE YOUNG CHILD

Children want their parents’ attention and approval more than anything else. That means that they pay very close attention to their parents’ reactions to their behavior. When you “catch your child being good” and offer praise, your child will learn what pleases you and will repeat that behavior.

In other words, your child will be motivated to get your positive attention.

### > Praise your child

- Timing is important when praising your younger child. Give praise and rewards for good behavior in the moment, immediately following the behavior.
- Use specific praise when noticing your child’s good behavior so that he understands what it is you are noticing and giving him credit for.
  - > **Don’t say**, “You are a fantastic artist!”
  - > **Instead say**, “Look at the great colors you used in that painting, they really make the birds come alive!”

### > Provide positive physical attention to your child

- When your child wants to show you something, try to stop what you are doing and look at him. If it’s not possible, tell him that you want to pay attention and will do so just as soon as you can.
  - > **You might say**, “I can’t wait to see how many baskets you can make. I’ll come out as soon as I finish loading the dishwasher.”
- Give your child lots of physical affection. Hugs and holding hands offer positive attention and make your child feel loved and secure.
  - > Don’t focus on how hard it was to leave your work, how angry your boss was, or how you will have to stay late tomorrow to make up your missed time at work.
  - > **Instead say**, “It was great to be able to see you at the Halloween Parade.”

> **Pay less attention to undesired behaviors**

- Many parents get caught in the trap of focusing their energies on misbehaviors. When we do this, children learn to act out. Remember that children want parents' attention more than anything else. Negative attention is still attention! If your child thinks that "being bad" is the way to get you to pay attention to him, he will behave badly.
- Don't think of this as ignoring your child. Think of this as the best way to focus the attention you give your child on positive, wonderful behaviors that your child is doing every day.

> **Set up a reward system for good behavior with your young child**

- Make a chart to praise and reinforce good behaviors. Separate charts can be made for each of your children.
  - > Talk with your child about which behaviors you want to include in the chart and how they can earn rewards.
  - > Make sure to keep track of your child's behaviors on a daily basis.
  - > Involve your child in choosing his reward ahead of time so he can feel excited about what he is working towards.
  - > Stickers can be used to help track your child's progress. If your child earns 7 stickers (one for every day that he makes his bed) he may then get his reward of watching a favorite show.
- The chart approach makes it easier for the deployed parent to be involved in discipline.
  - > It provides a concrete way of communicating how good your child is being and helps the deployed parent know which behaviors to reinforce.
  - > It can make your child look forward to calls so he can show off his progress.
  - > The at home parent might say, "Lucas has been so helpful with his chores that he has already filled up his row with really cool stickers!"
  - > The deployed parent might say, "Mommy told me that you have been so good helping around the house that you have earned three stickers this week. Way to go, I am so proud of you!"

## THE SCHOOL AGE CHILD

> **Learn how to give effective praise**

- As your child enters the school-age years, giving approval and support can help him grow into a confident and competent young adult. Praise needs to be specific and be focused on EFFORT, not on the child's grade or score.

> **Research\* shows that children** who are praised for how well they perform or for their final results or grades, end up:

- Feeling that they will only be acceptable if they perform well.
- Worrying when their effort does not pay off.
- Becoming afraid to take on healthy risks or challenges.
  - > On the other hand, children who are praised for their effort end up gaining confidence and enjoying challenges.



## Follow the Guidelines below for Using Praise Effectively:

### 1. FOCUS ON LEARNING, TRYING HARD, AND HAVING FUN, NOT ON GRADES

- **Don't say**, "Did you get an "A" on your report?"
  - > **Instead say**, "What did you learn in school today?"
- **Don't say** "What was your grade?"
  - > **Instead say**, "You put in a lot of hard work to prepare for your test. Do you think it paid off?"
- **Don't say**, "How many goals did you get?"
  - > **Instead say**, "How was the game today? Did you have fun? Learn anything about how to sharpen your game?"

### 2. FOCUS ON WHEN YOUR CHILD TRIES SOMETHING NEW

- **Don't say**: "I can't believe you joined the math club. Your math grade wasn't great last quarter."
  - > **Instead say**, "It's great that you are joining the math club."

### 3. FOCUS ON THE EFFORT OF STICKING WITH SOMETHING DIFFICULT

- The fact that your child tried something new or challenging deserves praise! The end result is not as important.
- **Don't say** "I guess it is good you finished football even if you never played."
  - > **Instead say**, "I know football ended up not being your favorite sport, but you did a great job sticking with it this season."

### 4. FOCUS ON THE PROCESS, NOT THE FINAL RESULT

- **Don't say** "You must be the best artist in the class. I'll bet you'll get the ribbon."
  - > **Instead say**, "I really like how you put your feelings into your art."

### 5. FOCUS ON THE EFFORT

- Do not compare to older or more skilled siblings
- **Don't say** "When your sister does the dishes they are always spotless."
  - > **Instead say**, "I really appreciate your help with the dishes. Let me show you how to get all of the grease off."

### 6. FOCUS ON RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIORS

- Let your child know how much you appreciate it when he acts respectfully and honestly
- **Don't say**, "I can't believe you disobeyed me and went out during your sleepover!"
  - > **Instead say**, "I appreciate that you were honest with me and told me you went out to the store from the sleepover."

## THE TEEN YEARS

### > More independence, low expectations, and the need for redirection

- As your child grows into a teen you may have less time to spend with him. He will no longer need you to fuss at him about day-to-day tasks like brushing his teeth. But teens still crave your attention; sometimes they will do things just to get your attention. That's right, even though your teenager may be pushing you away he still wants and needs your attention!



- If your style as a parent is to give most of your attention by fussing or correcting your teen, he will learn that the best way to get your attention is to do something that makes you correct him. If your style is to notice and praise positive behaviors, he will learn the best way to get your attention is to do something to get your praise.
- As children become teens, lots of adults will assume they will be trouble. Adolescents pick up on these low expectations and learn that they should misbehave because it is expected of them. Protect your child. Reject low expectations and continue to see and bring out the best in your teen and his friends.

> **Model appropriate behavior**

- Perhaps the most important thing you can do to promote positive behaviors is to model the kind of good behavior you hope your child chooses. Our children watch us. They see how we manage stress. They see how we treat our neighbors. They see whether we take care of ourselves. They even hear the language we choose to use. Your child looks up to you and will follow your lead by trying to act the same way!
- To model positive stress management techniques, show your child that you are able to:
  1. Separate real problems deserving your full attention from issues that might make you anxious but that do not require all of your energy.
  2. Manage stressful situations through active problem solving or by letting some things go.
  3. Build a healthy body through exercise, relaxation, and eating and sleeping well.
  4. Work through your emotions through talking, journaling, meditation, or expressing yourself through art.
  5. Learn lessons by volunteering and serving others in your life or in your community.+

*Continue noticing all of the wonderful things your teen does. It is still important to “catch him being good!”*

> **Use criticism sparingly and thoughtfully**

- We must not be afraid to point out how our children could do better, but if we are not thoughtful about how we criticize, we can shame our children. Shame breeds anger and resentment.

## Follow the Guidelines below for Using Criticism Thoughtfully:

**1. RECOGNIZE STRENGTHS**

Based on what your child has done well in the past.

**2. REMEMBER THAT WELL-DISCIPLINED CHILDREN NEED TO GAIN A SENSE OF CONTROL.**

Self-control is rooted in a person's sense that he or she is capable. Criticism must not make children feel incapable.

- Criticism must be very specific and highlight errors that a child should avoid in the future.
  - > If you child runs into the house, fails to remove his boots and tracks mud on the carpet, don't say, “*You are such a careless slob. What's wrong with you?*”
  - > Instead say, “*You've left a mess on the rug that could have been avoided if you took your boots off in the hallway. Luckily, you are really good at cleaning up. I need you to clean this up now.*”

3. AVOID MAKING PERSONAL OR GENERAL STATEMENTS.

4. WHEN YOU ARE ABOUT TO MAKE A CRITICAL COMMENT,

Stop and ask yourself, "How can I use this experience to help my child learn from this mistake, increase his confidence and decrease his shame?" By reminding your child what he has done well in the past, he can use his strengths and past experiences to fix the problem. This will allow your child to feel more in control and gain confidence.

The best form of discipline is to teach your children to behave appropriately. This can be accomplished by praising good behavior, paying less attention to bad behavior, using criticism thoughtfully, and being a good role model.

SOURCES:

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The Triple P Positive Parenting Program, Triple P America ([www.triplep.net](http://www.triplep.net))

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