

Creating a Discipline Process at Home

By Eileen Bailey^[1]

The home is a place where children feel safe and secure. They feel accepted and loved. But children can also act out at home; they can fight with siblings, talk back or not listen to their parents and be defiant. Children with ADHD are more difficult to discipline than those without ADHD. They tend to forget more often. They tend to not respond to normal discipline methods.

Parents need to provide a consistent level of discipline. They need to show they are united and stay together in their discipline measures. If parents are not in agreement, children will see this as an opportunity to misbehave. Maybe one parent is tough on certain behaviors while the other parent is willing to ignore the action. Without presenting a united front, chaos in the household can run rampant.

Working together with your spouse to create a long-term plan will help your family discover a method of discipline that is acceptable to both of you. It will help you to stay on track, no matter which one may be handling the discipline at any given time.

There are a number of steps you can take to create your own discipline process:

Step One: Planning

As parents, we do not always see the need for planning our discipline process. We see our children misbehave and we give the appropriate punishment. But sometimes that is not enough. Sometimes we need to measure how discipline is handed out and sometimes we need to be sure that both parents (and any caregivers) are all consistent in their approach. For children with ADHD, consistency is of utmost importance. Take the time to sit down with your spouse to prepare before completing a discipline plan.

- 1) Work in the evenings, after you have put the children to bed. Before beginning, discuss your thoughts on discipline and decide that this will not be a time for arguments, that you each may need to compromise on certain points in order to show that you are united in your decisions. Let your spouse know that once the plan is in place, both of you

will need to follow it completely.

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2) Write down your daily family routine. Then break this down for each child. What are they doing from the time they get up in the morning until bedtime? Are there structured times (such as school), or do they have mostly free time during the day. Write down all items they need to complete during the day, including brushing teeth, baths, chores, school, homework, play time, etc. The more detailed you can be for each child, the easier the planning process will become.

3) Make a list of each child's strengths and weaknesses. Include what they are interested in and what they are good at as well as areas they have difficulty with.

4) Make a list of you and your spouse's strengths and weaknesses as they relate to discipline. Does one of you tend to be easier on the children in the evening when you are tired, letting certain behaviors slide even when you know you should do something? Is there a certain behavior that you and your spouse are always disagreeing on the method of discipline? You will need to work together to provide consistency, so working with your strengths and weaknesses will help you back one another up.

Step Two: Normal Daily Routines

Each family has an overall daily routine they follow every day. Many families must get up each morning, get ready for school and work, come home later in the day, prepare dinner and then continue on to play time, homework time, bath time, etc. But inside the general family routines, each person also has a daily routine. Some people are better at certain tasks than others. For example, one child may get up, get dressed and be ready for school well ahead of time while you find yourself constantly frustrated with another child in the morning as they never seem to be ready on time. Using a daily plan for each member of the family can help you see where each child needs help.

1) Make a daily routine plan for each child. Start with the time they normally get up in the morning and plan their day. This plan should include all necessary items, such as brushing their teeth, getting dressed, chores and eating. It should also include structured times, such as school and homework and unstructured playtime. Use a separate paper for

each child's daily routine. The routine will be different for a five-year-old child and a ten-year-old child.

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2) Break down tasks into steps to follow. For example, if "getting ready for school" is on your list, break it down into steps: eat breakfast, brush teeth, wash face, brush hair, get dressed, make bed, get school items together. If "clean your room" is on the list, break this down into steps: pick up toys, make bed, and put dirty clothes in hamper. Your tasks will be different for each child, depending on their abilities. This will help to clarify what you expect. Your idea, your spouse's idea and your child's idea of "clean your room" are probably three different ideas. Being specific will help all of you know exactly what to expect.

3) Put a star next to each activity that child seems to have problems with. If your child is always lagging behind in getting ready for school, put a star next to that on their daily chart. If another child has trouble with completing chores, put a star next to that time on their chart.

4) Decide if you want to begin a reward and consequence program for any tasks to be completed. If you have placed a star next to getting ready for school, you could place a chart in the kitchen and put a sticker up for each day your child gets ready for school on time. If "complete chores" has a star next to it, you can start a sticker chart for chores for that child. Start with only one behavior to chart. A child will become overwhelmed if you try to change too many behaviors at one time. However, you are now targeting behaviors to be changed for each child, using their own strengths and weaknesses.

5) Once you are happy with your daily routines and rewards/consequences, make copies of the routines. You should have one and your child should have one. You can tape it on the inside of their bedroom door so they can reference it whenever they need to.

Step Three: Planning for Misbehaviors

No matter how much planning you do, your children will still misbehave. They will not follow directions; they will not listen or will talk back. Each household has their "normal" misbehaviors. This might include throwing a ball in the house, hitting a sibling, or

watching television instead of completing their chores. Although not earth shattering, these misbehaviors need to be dealt with. If you wait until they happen, you may react emotionally and hand out discipline that is not appropriate. You and your spouse may give different punishments. If you, however, plan for minor misbehaviors, then you will be better able to work together.

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- 1) Make a list of minor misbehaviors that might occur in your house. Work with your spouse to determine what the consequences should be for each action. If you feel it is necessary, you can write down consequences for 1st, 2nd and 3rd times. Make sure the consequence is something that both you and your spouse are willing to follow through with.
- 2) Plan for as many minor misbehaviors as possible. Keep a copy of the list so that both you and your spouse have access to it. Commit to following this chart and letting your children know that no matter who may be home, the discipline will be the same.
- 3) As you see additional misbehaviors add them to the list and discuss with your spouse the consequence.
- 4) If you see a pattern of misbehaviors for one child, turn the situation around to a positive reinforcement program and reward them for not engaging in the behavior rather than punishing them for the behavior.
- 5) Remember, try to change only one behavior at a time for each child, to prevent having them become overwhelmed.

Step Four: Planning for Major Misbehaviors

No matter how much planning you may do, it is inevitable that your child will find a new way to misbehave. Some of these are minor and even if not exactly on your list, will fit into a similar category. Some behaviors, though, are not minor and must not be overlooked.

- 1) Set up a system for what happens if there is a major misbehavior. Will your child

need to remain in their room until you and your spouse have had a chance to discuss the appropriate reaction? There is nothing wrong with telling your child that you will discuss the behavior with your spouse and you will let them know later of their punishment. By doing this, you are letting your child know that whatever may come, you and your spouse are working together and are going to back each other up.

Step Five: Implementing the Plan

In order to fully work together, you and your spouse will need to divide up responsibilities to show your children that you are both involved in their daily lives. One of you may be better at helping your children with homework, while the other may be better at working with your children on daily chores. Use your strengths to divide the responsibilities up.

1. <http://www.healthcentral.com/adhd/c/1443/profiles/>