

Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Introduction

Discipline is one of the biggest problems that every parent faces. You probably have wondered: "Was I too harsh?" "Did I do the right thing when I spanked Thomas?" "Am I being too easy on my children?" or "What on earth am I going to do now!"

This series of lessons was prepared for parents like you - parents who want to do a better job of disciplining their children. The lessons were especially written for parents of preschool children, ages two to six, but some of the discipline methods are appropriate for older children, too. The titles of the lessons are:

- A Look at Discipline
- Discipline and Punishment-What's the Difference?
- Why Children Misbehave
- To Prevent Misbehavior
- Responses to Misbehavior

Learning to discipline your children effectively is hard work. You can't improve your discipline methods if you read the lessons and continue to treat your child the way you always have. For this reason, you need to do the practice exercises at the end of each lesson.

If you try a suggestion for several weeks, but it just doesn't work for you, forget it! All parents are different and all children are different. What works in one home may not work in another home. However, you won't know whether or not it will work unless you try it! If one suggestion doesn't help you, another one may.

Learning to discipline children is a real challenge. The fact that you are studying these lessons shows that you want to improve and that is half the battle. Your child is fortunate to have a parent who is interested in learning more about discipline.

Note: Since it is awkward to refer to the child as "he/she," all references in these lessons to the child as "he" refer to both boys and girls.

What is Discipline?

Discipline is . . .

Helping a child learn to get along with his family and friends.

Teaching a child to behave in an agreeable way.

Allowing a child the freedom to *learn* from his mistakes and experience the consequences of his decisions.

Effective discipline is helping, teaching, and learning.

Discipline Is Not Punishment

Some parents think discipline and punishment are the same thing. Some think discipline is getting a child to behave and teaching him to be obedient. Some think it is what you do when children are naughty or misbehave.

Whereas punishment focuses on the child, discipline targets the act. When we punish a child we are in effect saying to him, "You are loved (or not loved) because of the things you do." Punishment teaches the child to be "good" as long as we are looking at him but as soon as we turn our heads, watch out!

Discipline separates the child's "goodness" from how well he does on a task. Our message now says, "You are OK even when your behavior is NOT OK." We love the child but reject the behavior.

The purpose of discipline is to raise responsible, confident children who grow up to be

persons who think for themselves, who care about others, and who live satisfying and useful lives.

Looking Ahead

(Adapted from What's A Parent To Do? by Carol Anderson, Iowa Cooperataive Extension Service, 1972.)

When your child is a preschooler, it is difficult to imagine what he will be like in 10 to 15 years. But time has a way of slipping by, so let's look into the crystal ball and see what you hope you might find.

"What do I hope my child will be like in 10 to 15 years? (List some of your thoughts)" I hope my child...

Don't read on until you have done some thinking.

To compare your thoughts with ours, we have listed several things we would want to see in children 10 to 15 years from now.

We would want them to:

1. Feel good about who they are.
2. Make sound decisions and find solutions to their own problems.
3. Have self-control.
4. Get along well with others.
5. Be responsible citizens.
6. Care about others.

Since the type of discipline you use influences the kind of person your child will become, it is important to keep in mind your goals for your child.

Styles of Discipline

What kind of discipline do you use?

Parents are extremely permissive when they . . .

- Have few rules.
- Allow children to do as they please.

Parents are extremely strict when they . . .

- Expect immediate obedience.
- Give no explanation for demands.
- Use physical punishment often.

Parents are moderate when they . . .

- Set limits and allow children to decide within those limits and make their own mistakes.
- Allow the natural and logical consequences to do the teaching for them.
- Are firm, with kindness, warmth, and love.

When parents are extremely permissive . . .

- Children are spoiled, cranky, whining persons who are very aggressive and want their own way all the time.

When parents are extremely strict . . .

- Children are timid and withdrawn persons who are very dependent, or rebellious persons who defy authority.

When parents are moderate . . .

- Children are responsible, cooperative persons who have a good self-concept and are considerate of others.

With either extreme discipline method, both parent and child are unhappy. Neither method produces the kind of behavior parents want in their children. There is a more effective way to discipline children. It is the moderate way, the middle road between extreme permissiveness and extreme strictness. The discipline methods described in these lessons as "effective" are a moderate style of discipline. They are based on common sense, research, and knowledge about how children grow and learn.

Most parents use the style of discipline that their parents used with them. They say, "I turned out OK, so why shouldn't I treat my kids the way my parents treated me?" Good

question! "Our world is different and society is different from the way it was 25 years ago. In the past we raised children to do as they were told; and this was effective because we were training them to enter a job and stay with it until they retired. Today, however, we are training children for jobs that we don't even know will exist 5, 10, or 15 years from now. To keep up with these rapid changes, today's children are going to have to retrain themselves three or four times during their working careers. In order to be successful at this, they will need to believe that most of the solutions to their problems can be found within themselves. They need to know that they can take control of their own learning.

Program Your Child For Success

How To Talk So Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, Rawsen, Wade Publishers, Inc., Newark: 1980.

How often have you heard,

- "My youngest is such a headache; my oldest is such a pleasure";
- "Brian has always been hyperactive"; or
- "Katie is such a slow poke."

The most important factor that determines children's success in life is how they see themselves. Do they see themselves as learners? As being loveable and capable? Each day brings new experiences that have the potential for either building or destroying their self-concept.

Every time we give a child an order we are sending him a powerful message that says, "You can't think for yourself; I've got to think for you." Children look to their parents for confirmation of what kind of person they are. At a very early age they begin to look for things within themselves to prove that mom or dad is right.

If it's possible to program children for failure, it's equally possible (and preferable) for us to program them for success. We can free children from playing negative roles by:

1. Looking for opportunities to show them a different picture of themselves. "You've had that toy since you were a baby and it still works like it was brand new. You take good care of your toys."
2. Putting children in situations where they can see themselves differently. "Picking

up your blocks is a big job. I'll hold the bag open while you put them in. Cleaning up is more fun when we do it together."

3. Letting children overhear you say something positive about them. "She held her arm steady for the Doctor even though the shot hurt."
4. Modeling the behavior you'd like to see. "It's no fun to lose, but I'll try to be a good sport about it. Congratulations!"
5. Being a storehouse for your child's special moments. "I remember the time you . . ."
6. Stating your feelings and expectations when the child slips back into playing an old role..
7. "I don't like that. I know you want to win but I still expect good sportsmanship from you."

Age And Stage Make A Difference

Parents are often annoyed by a child's behavior when he is only acting his age. Some behavior that is hard to live with is typical of most children that age. For example, young children have a great deal of energy and need to be active. If parents realize how hard it is for a young child to sit still and be quiet, they arrange for the child to use up his energy in a way that doesn't irritate them. Our number one concern, whether we are two or ninety-two, is to have personal control over our lives. Young children want to be independent and to do things for themselves, so that much of their so called "bad" behavior is a sign that they are growing. After all, parents wouldn't want the child to remain a baby who is completely dependent on them. Preschool children have a hard time telling the difference between fact and "pretend." If children in this stage say, "I saw a bear," they may not know the difference between what they "saw" in their imagination and what they actually saw. Parents would not call the child a liar; instead, they would say, "You did?" and encourage his imagination. By school-age the child should be able to tell the difference between reality and fantasy.

Children are curious. They just naturally want to learn about things around them. They may take things apart just to see what will happen. Children don't do these things to annoy their parents; they do them because they are curious.

Curiosity is a valuable trait. A curious child wants to learn and will do well in school. Parents who understand this will encourage the child's curiosity. Rather than punishing a child for taking things apart, they give him something to safely satisfy his curiosity.

What To Expect Of Young Children

Infants

- Cry to get what they need and what they want
- Are dependent on adults
- Love to play with their food Ç Grow rapidly
- Get into everything -Sleep less as they grow
- Learn by touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, and hearing

2-year olds:

- Are learning to be independent (say "No" many times)
- Are possessive ("That's Mine")
- Are noisy
- Try to get their own way
- Have a short memory
- Can't make up their mind
- Are pokey (play in food, dawdle)
- Can't sit still

3-year olds:

- Try to please
- Follow through on tasks fairly well
- Accept suggestions
- Can be reasoned with
- Are attentive when spoken to, especially when called by name
- Can make choices
- Can talk enough to be understood
- Haven't learned how to share yet

4-year olds:

- Want friends

- Ask many questions
- Tend to be bossy
- Brag and stretch the truth
- Tattle frequently
- Talk a lot
- Can learn to take turns
- See themselves as the center of attention
- Enjoy playing with made-up words
- Say words that shock you

5-year olds:

- Are friendly with friends (usually) and parents
- Are businesslike
- Like to imitate grown-ups
- Like to feel independent
- Tattle on others
- Enjoy dressing up
- Can give their name and address
- Are serious and demanding

It is important to know the characteristic behavior for each age. Often parents are irritated by children's behavior when they are only acting their age. This does not mean that the misbehavior should be ignored, but it does help when you realize that the child will out-grow the behavior.

Discipline needs to be in keeping with the child's age and abilities. Ask yourself: Are my demands reasonable for this age? Do I expect too much?

A Look At Discipline

To discipline effectively, think about these ideas:

1. Effective discipline is positive. It is helping, teaching, and learning.
2. The purpose of discipline is to help children learn to do that is right because they want to, not because they fear punishment.
3. Effective discipline is moderate, neither very permissive nor very strict.

4. Moderate discipline is not effective for the age we live in.
5. Discipline influences the kind of adult your child will become.
6. Understanding your own individual child is the basis for effective discipline.
7. Discipline needs to be in keeping with the child's age and abilities.

See How Much You Have Learned

Place a check in the appropriate box.

True

False

1. Sharon, age 4, wants to stay up and watch an adult movie on TV which starts at 9 p.m.. Mother says, "This movie isn't for children, and you need your sleep. You will be tired tomorrow, but you decide."
Mother is using a permissive style of discipline.
2. Bryant, age 6, is late for dinner. Father said, "You know you are supposed to be home at 6 p.m. No TV tonight for you."
Father is using a strict style of discipline
3. Terri, age 5, forgot to empty the wastebasket. Mother said, "Terri, it is your job to empty the wastebasket this week."
Mother is using a moderate style of discipline.
4. A child who seeks attention is a spoiled child.
5. When children make mistakes, they should be scolded and told how "dumb" and "no-good" they are."
6. It isn't necessary to tell children we love them because they already know it.
7. A child's health has nothing to do with the way he behaves.

Answers

1. = T
2. = T
3. = T
4. = F
5. = F
6. = F

7. = F

Practice Exercises

1. Study the three styles of discipline and decide what kind you use. Probably you use one style at one time and another style on a different occasion. Or perhaps you are half-way between two styles. Think about the kind of discipline styles you would like to have.

2. Observe your child for one week. Make a mental note of the styles of discipline you use when the child needs guidance. Ask yourself:

- What did I say or do?
- How did I feel afterward?
- How did the child feel?

A Record of My Discipline Practices and Their Efforts

Adopted from Practical Education for Parenting by Kent G. Hamdorf, Extension Specialist, Human Relations Family Development, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, 1978.

Complete one week after studying Lesson 1. Check the items that apply to you.

1. The way I usually discipline:

Yell and scream

Ignore misbehavior

Scold

Isolate

Explain reasons calmly

Spank

Remove privileges

Let the child experience
the consequences

Give choices

Threaten, but don't follow
through

Show disapproval

Distract

2. During the past week, I:

More Less About
the Same

Acted calmly

Acted firmly and kindly

Used kind words, not unkind words

Gave choices and let the child learn
from the consequences

3. The atmosphere in our home has changed to one of:

More Less About
the Same

Friendliness

Cooperation

Understanding

Confusion

Hostility

Tension

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