Discipline: A Teaching & Learning Experience

Discipline can be one of the most difficult and confusing issues when it comes to children. Remember that discipline does not only mean punishment. The word "discipline" comes from a root word meaning "to guide or to teach."It is your job to teach children the rules of the world. Children who have been disciplined positively and respectfully have a better chance of becoming secure, competent, well-adjusted and independent people.

Some experts claim there are surefire ways to discipline children using specific approaches. These methods often do not take into account a child's individual personality and temperament. General guidelines are more practical and beneficial because they can be adapted for individual children and specific situations. You know your child better than anyone. Choose discipline techniques based on your family's goals and values.

WHAT IS DISCIPLINE?

- Discipline is a PROCESS by which children learn how to act in the world.
- The ultimate goal of discipline is for a child to eventually be able to control his own behavior.
- Effective discipline enhances a child's self-esteem because it teaches self-control.
- Discipline helps a child learn the values and morals of the family.
- Effective discipline is positive in nature — it teaches the child what he or she CAN do rather than harshly criticizing or punishing for what he or she should NOT do.
- Discipline is a learning experience for the child and a teaching experience for the parent or caregiver.
- Discipline is on-going; it is not accomplished in a few months or even years.
- Discipline changes as a child's thinking processes grow and mature. Two-year-olds think differently than 4-year- olds and should be disciplined differently. Be sure your expectations for your child are in line with his or her developmental level.

WHAT IS NOT DISCIPLINE?

- Discipline is not a game to see if the parent can "catch" the child misbehaving.
- Discipline is not about who is more powerful — parent or child.
- Discipline does not have to be painful for a child to learn from it.

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SUGGESTED INTERACTION TECHNIQUES

- Reinforce appropriate behavior. Catch a child being good and encourage that behavior, rather than always calling attention to negative behavior.
- Use distraction for very young children.
- Think about WHY a child misbehaves. Is the child hungry, tired, not feeling well? Avoid punishing a child for things he or she has no control over.
- Minimize the "no's" and tell the child what behavior is acceptable. Instead of, "No, don't run," say "you need to walk."
- Avoid threats that you can't or won't carry out. If you take TV away from a child for a year, the child knows you are not being realistic.
- Label the behavior, not the child. Say, "I am disappointed that you hit your sister," instead of "you are a naughty brat for hitting your sister."
- Use respectful language and tone of voice rather than extreme yelling, name calling or swearing.
- Effective discipline requires a quick response to misbehavior. Saying, "Wait until Dad gets home" or punishing your young child for something that happened at daycare may not be very realistic.
- Give natural or logical consequences a child can understand. A natural consequence is what naturally happens from mistakes. For example, say "If you leave your toy out in the rain, it will be ruined." A logical consequence is one that you apply, but that fits the crime "If you color on the wall, the crayons will be put away for the rest of the day and you will need to help wash the wall."
- Avoid unrealistic consequences or punishment. "If you don't stop crying, you will get a spanking." Spanking a child will usually make him cry more!
- Use non-judgmental statements. "You hit your friend and now he doesn't feel like playing with you" rather than "No wonder no one likes you — you're a bully."

- When a child makes a mistake, give a positive expectation for the future. "You didn't come when I called you for snack and now snack time is over. I'll bet you'll remember tomorrow." This technique tells the child that you are confident that he will learn to make correct choices even if a mistake was made.
- Help children learn to use words to get what they want, and to express their feelings.
- Be an example for your children — they look to you to see what is appropriate and acceptable in the world.
- Time out is meant to be a time to separate the child from the misbehavior and a time for the child to think about the misbehavior and make a decision to change behavior. Try to be calm when you put your child in time out. Avoid over-using time outs, which decrease their effectiveness, and limit the time to about one to two minutes per years of age (ex., four minutes for a 2-year-old).
- Think seriously before using physical punishment like spanking. Most child development experts caution against using physical punishment.
- You are your child's first and most important teacher. The task of child discipline is a daunting one, but your efforts will help your child become a happy, self-sufficient and productive person.

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