

# Positive Discipline

Here are some guidelines for effective, positive discipline of children:

## Catch 'Em Being Good

Traditional discipline focuses on correcting wrong behaviors – “Don’t do this, don’t do that.” Whereas we want to correct our children when they misbehave, we should also make a consistent effort to point out the things they are doing well. This will encourage them to repeat good behaviors.

### Examples:

“You played very nicely with the other boys and girls today. You allowed the other kids to play with your toys, and sharing is important.”

“You did your homework before watching TV just like we asked you to do. We’re proud of you for that.”

“Thank you for being home on time. That makes me trust you more and prevents me from worrying where you are and if you are okay.”

“Thank you for helping me clean the house today. I don’t think I would have gotten it all done without your help.”



**Positive discipline:** Catch your children being good.

Even when it’s necessary to punish your children, try to point out what they did *correctly* following the misbehavior.

### Examples:

“I’m glad you told me the truth about how the vase was broken. It’s important to tell the truth.”

“Thank you for apologizing. That let’s me know that you understand what you did was wrong and that you care about someone else’s feelings.”

**Suggestion:** For a period of one week, keep a written tally when you talk to your children about their behavior. Make two columns – one for “Good” and one for “Bad.” Put a mark in the “Good” column when you tell your child that they are doing something right. Put a mark in the “Bad” column when you have to admonish them for doing something wrong. At the end of the week total each column. You want to “catch ‘em being good” as often as you correct them, and this will tell you how you’re doing.

## Determine The Cause

Understanding *why* children misbehave enables parents to determine what consequences – if any – are warranted. Often, significant changes in a child’s life may create anxiety. Parents divorcing, the child going to a new school, the family moving to a new neighborhood – all of these can add stress to children’s lives and cause them to “act out.” Ask your child if there is something bothering her or him and then discuss those fears.

Also, consider that there may be medical issues related to your child’s behavior. Many children suffer from undiagnosed attention-deficit, hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). For more information on ADHD or other medical/behavioral issues, consult your child’s pediatrician or school personnel.

## Timely Feedback & Consequences

When your child is disciplined is also important. Generally, with small children the consequence should immediately follow the misbehavior. Young children are still learning which behaviors are good and which are unacceptable, and thus need immediate feedback.

For older children, the consequence doesn't have to be immediate – you may want to cool down and/or consult with the other parent before meting out a punishment – but it should be timely. Making children wait to find out their “sentence” 1) creates anxiety for them; 2) strains your relationship with them; and 3) may cause them to obsess about their punishment instead of thinking about how to correct their behavior.



**Follow through:** Don't say one thing and do another.

say “You are not going to the prom next week!” when in reality the offense was too minor to warrant such a severe consequence. If necessary, take time to cool down and think about an appropriate punishment.

Consequences should be a natural outcome from the misbehavior. For instance, a child who mistreats a toy or does not put it away may face the consequence of losing the right to play with that toy. A child who watches television and neglects her homework may lose her television privileges for a day or more. Children who are late coming home or who go somewhere they are not supposed to may find themselves “grounded” the next time they want to go out.

Also, don't “nit pick.” Use consequences for only the serious offenses. Correcting a child for wiping his face on his sleeve, for example, can best be handled with timely reminders. Punishing children for the smallest of misbehaviors will eventually damage their self-esteem – they may feel that “I can't do anything right.”

## Explain, Then Reassure

Explain the reason for the punishment. You may know what your child did wrong, but don't assume that your child knows. Children can't learn from consequences if they don't know the reason for them.

## Follow Through

Parents need to be consistent in their use of discipline. If you say to your child “you're grounded for a week,” it is critical that you follow through with that consequence. If, three days later your child asks to go out with friends and you allow it, the consequence has not served its purpose.

Often, just the fear of being punished is enough to deter our children from misbehaving. By not following through and not sticking to your word, you have also compromised the fear of punishment as a deterrent. Your child may well assume that since you didn't follow through with the consequence last time, you won't next time.

## Choosing An Appropriate Consequence

Following through with your discipline is much easier when the consequences are appropriate. Don't make the punishment so severe that it is too difficult for both you and your child to bear. In a fit of anger, you might

Also, reassure your children that you still love them. Tell them that you are not disciplining them to be mean, but because you care about them and want them to do things the right way.

### **Spanking**

As a child protection agency, Lucas County Children Services does not condone physical discipline such as spanking. We suggest alternatives, such as a time out or taking away a favorite toy or privilege. However, the reality is that parents are lawfully allowed to spank their children and many do.

If you choose to spank your children, never do so when you are angry. Spanking should NEVER be an outlet for your anger or frustration. Your anger could cause you to lose control, which could result in the child being injured. And, while spanking is legal, injuring a child is not and constitutes abuse.

## **9 Things to Do Instead of Spank**

by Kathryn Kvols

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Research confirms what many parents instinctively feel when they don't like to spank their children, but they don't know what else to do. The latest research from Dr. Murray Straus at the Family Research Laboratory affirms that spanking teaches children to use acts of aggression and violence to solve their problems. It only teaches and perpetuates more violence, the very thing that our society is so concerned about. This research further shows that children who have been spanked are more prone to low self-esteem, depression and accept lower paying jobs as adults. So, what do you do instead?

### **(1) Get Calm**

First, if you feel angry and out of control and you want to spank or slap your child, leave the situation if you can. Calm down and get quiet. In that quiet time you will often find an alternative or solution to the problem. Sometimes parents lose it because they are under a lot of stress. Dinner is boiling over, the kids are fighting, the phone is ringing and your child drops the can of peas you lose it. If you can't leave the situation, then mentally step back and count to 10.

### **(2) Take Time for Yourself**

Parents are more prone to use spanking when they haven't had any time to themselves and they feel depleted and hurried. So, it is important for parents to take some time for themselves to exercise, read, take a walk or pray.

### **(3) Be Kind but Firm**

Another frustrating situation where parents tend to spank is when your child hasn't listened to your repeated requests to behave. Finally, you spank to get your child to act appropriately. Another solution in these situations is to get down on your child level, make eye contact, touch him gently and tell him, in a short, kind but firm phrase, what it is you want him to do. For example, "I want you to play quietly."

### **(4) Give Choices**

Giving your child a choice is an effective alternative to spanking. If she is playing with her food at the table, ask, "Would you like to stop playing with your food, or would you like to leave the table?" If the child continues to play with her food, you use kind but firm action by helping her down from the table. Then tell her that she can return to the table when she is ready to eat her food without playing in it.

### **(5) Use Logical Consequences**

Consequences that are logically related to the behavior help teach children responsibility. For example, your child breaks a neighbors window and you punish him by spanking him. What does he learn about the situation? He may learn to never do that again, but he also learns that he needs to hide his mistakes, blame it on someone else, lie, or simply not get caught. He may decide that he is bad or he feels anger and revenge toward the parent who spanked him. When you spank a child, he may behave because he is afraid to get hit again. However, do you want your child to behave because he is afraid of you or because he respects you?

Compare that situation to a child who breaks a neighbors window and his parent says, "I see you've broken the window, what will you do to repair it?" using a kind, but firm tone of voice. The child decides to mow the neighbors lawn and wash his car several times to repay the cost of repairing the window. What does the child learn in this situation? That mistakes are an inevitable part of life and it isn't so important that he made the mistake, but that he take responsibility to repair the mistake. The focus is taken off the mistake and put on taking responsibility for repairing it. The child feels no anger or revenge toward his parent. And, most importantly, the child's self-esteem is not damaged.

### **(6) Do Make-ups**

When children break agreements, parents tend to want to punish them. An alternative is to have your child do a make-up. A make-up is something that people do to put themselves back into integrity with the person that they broke the agreement with. For example, several boys were at a sleep-over at Larry's home. His father requested that they not leave the house after midnight. The boys broke their agreement. The father was angry and punished them by telling them that they couldn't have a sleep-over for two months. Larry and his friends became angry, sullen and uncooperative as the result of the punishment. The father realized what he had done. He apologized for punishing them and told them how betrayed he felt and discussed with the boys the importance of keeping their word. He then asked the boys for a make-up. They decided to cut the lumber that the father needed to have cut in the backyard. The boys became excited and enthusiastic about the project and later kept their word on future sleep-overs.

### **(7) Withdraw from Conflict**

Children who sass parents may provoke a parent to slap. In this situation, it is best if you withdraw from the situation immediately. Do not leave the room in anger or in defeat. Calmly say, "I'll be in the next room when you want to talk more respectfully."

### **(8) Use Kind But Firm Action**

Instead of smacking an infants hand or bottom when she touches something she isn't supposed to, kindly but firmly pick her up and take her to the next room. Offer her a toy or another item to distract her and say, "You can try again later." You may have to take her out several times if she is persistent.

### **(9) Inform Children Ahead of Time**

A child's temper tantrum can easily set a parent off. Children frequently throw tantrums when they feel uninformed or powerless in a situation. Instead of telling your child he has to leave his friends house at a moments notice, tell him that you will be leaving in five minutes. This allows the child to complete what he was in the process of doing.

*Aggression is an obvious form of perpetuating violence in society. A more subtle form of this is spanking because it takes its toll on a child's self-esteem, dampening his enthusiasm and causing him to be rebellious and uncooperative. Consider for a moment the vision of a family that knows how to win cooperation and creatively solve their problems without using force or violence. The alternatives are limitless and the results are calmer parents who feel more supported.*