

Discipline: What Works Best

Learning to behave well at home teaches your youngster to manage herself and get along with others—skills she needs in school. It also makes home life more peaceful for everyone. Try these suggestions for positive, loving discipline that will lead to better behavior.



Stay connected

Building strong bonds with your child can encourage cooperation. That's because she'll be less apt to act out to get your attention. Aim

to spend time each day focused solely on your youngster. Ask about her day or her hobbies, and tell her about yours. Share activities that you both enjoy, such as doing jigsaw puzzles, playing board games, or riding bikes.



Stick to it

Your youngster will be more likely to follow the rules if he knows you mean what you say. Perhaps he's late for school because he wouldn't get up on time, and you say he has to go to bed early that evening. Resist the urge to change your mind, even if he insists that he *has* to stay up to finish his project. Otherwise, he may get in the habit of not listening because he doesn't believe you'll do what you said.



Plan for success

Create routines and an environment that inspire good behavior. Say your child is usually tired and hungry right after school. Consider letting him rest and eat a snack before he starts homework or chores. Or if he's always leaving his towel on the bathroom floor, shop together for a hook to hang it on. Have your youngster help you install it on the wall at his level.

Choose consequences wisely

Consequences that make sense to your child will inspire her to do the right thing in the future. For instance, if she tracks mud into the kitchen, a logical consequence would be that she has to mop it up. Next time, she may remember to remove her shoes when she comes into the house.

Express empathy

Acknowledging your child's feelings shows respect for her even when she makes a poor decision. Say she does a flip off the couch and scrapes her ankle. You could say, "I know you wish you had gymnastics practice today, and I'm sorry you got hurt. But you can't do flips off the furniture. Let's get you a bandage."

continued



Get your child's attention

When you correct your youngster, use a soft voice, and bend or kneel down so you're face to face. Then, explain what he did wrong and what he should do next. ("You left the front door open again, and the dog could have gotten out. Please post a reminder on the door so you don't forget to close it next time.") Then, have him repeat what you said in his own words, and let him show you that he understood. He'll be proud to share his sign with you, and he will know that you were serious.

Wait to respond

Feeling frustrated by your child's behavior? Try stepping away for a bit. You can say, "I'm angry that you went next door without asking. Go to your room, and we'll talk when I cool off," or "I need time to think about this. I'll let you know when I'm ready to talk." You'll set a good example for how to manage emotions, and you'll be able to discuss things calmly.

Decide what to overlook

If your youngster isn't hurting anyone or being disrespectful, consider overlooking behavior or decisions that you disagree with. Say you tell him that it's chilly outside and he needs to wear pants, but he shows up at breakfast in shorts. You might say, "I think you're going to be cold, but it's your decision." On the other hand, if he wants to wear flip-flops on PE day, you could explain that he must wear sneakers to stay safe.



"Secrets" from teachers

Good discipline strategies help teachers manage their classrooms so children get along and learn. And guess what? Some of their methods will work for you at home! Here are a few teacher favorites.

Teacher tip: "I let my students participate in creating the rules. First, I ask for suggestions that will make our classroom a peaceful place to learn and play. Next, I write our rules on poster board, and the children decorate it. Having some say motivates them to follow 'our' rules more cheerfully."

Parenting idea: Design a household rules poster together. Narrow it down to just a few so the rules will be easier for your youngster to remember. Also, keep rules positive ("Speak respectfully" vs. "Don't be rude"). Then, let your child illustrate each rule, and hang the poster where everyone can see it.



Teacher tip: "I like to make children my assistants. When I give them jobs to do, they feel special and important. Usually, they want to live up to that responsibility."

Parenting idea: Find opportunities to let your youngster help you. At the grocery store, for example, invite her to hold the shopping list and look for items you need. She'll concentrate on helping and be less likely to misbehave to get your attention.

Teacher tip: "I compliment good behavior whenever possible. Say there's a lot of commotion, and I need the class to settle down. I'll scan the room for someone who's sitting quietly. Later, I'll let that student know I noticed."

Parenting idea: Tell your child when she has done a nice job, especially if it wasn't easy for her. For instance, you could say, "I know there wasn't a lot for you to do while Aunt Linda and I chatted at her house, but you were patient and used good manners."

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