



Discipline

The words punishment and discipline are often used interchangeably, yet each exemplify a different approach to teaching children appropriate behavior.

The word discipline literally means, “to teach.” A person who is learning is a *disciple*. Discipline creates a positive learning process for the child. Children learn appropriate behaviors when parents set consistent limits that are enforced by firm kindness.

Discipline teaches children:

- actions produce consequences
- appropriate behavior results in positive consequences
- inappropriate behavior results in negative consequences
- we are all held accountable for our choices

Parents, who render punishments, hope that their children will not repeat the misbehavior. The belief behind punishment is that pain must be felt in order for learning to occur. The problem with punishment is that when a child commits subsequent infractions, the severity of the punishment must also increase.

Because the punishment, *example*: (spanking) is rarely connected to the actual misbehavior (leaving shoes out in rain), the child learns nothing about real-life consequences and grows up without the ability to discipline his or herself. Punishment is experienced externally while discipline is experienced internally.

Punishment teaches children:

- to be afraid or resent authority
- to lie
- how to do things without getting caught

Natural & Logical Consequences

Some consequences are natural and require little intervention from the parent. If a child refuses to eat dinner, he will be hungry by bedtime. If the parent allows the child to go to bed hungry, he will have learned something about natural consequences (cause and effect).

Issue: Child keeps leaving jacket at school.

Natural Consequence: He waits next morning for the bus without his jacket.

When there are no naturally occurring consequences, the imposed consequences must (1) be enforceable, (2) fit the “crime,” and (3) be laid down firmly in love.



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Issue: Child is playing in a busy street.

Logical Consequence: Child must stay inside for a period of time.

Sometimes imposed consequences look conspicuously like punishments. But when imposed without anger or threats, and when presented to children in a way that the connection between their misbehavior and the consequences is made clear, the lessons are learned.

Allowing children to experience consequences while showing empathy can sometimes be tough for parents; but, it teaches children that eventhough they make mistakes, they are still loved.

Step by Step

1. When you notice non-compliance, first give a reminder. "Screaming is an outdoor activity." Remember to make direct eye contact. This simple strategy will work most of the time.
2. Begin to think of an effective consequence if the reminder doesn't work.
3. Effective consequences are: a) clear and specific; b) logically related to the misbehavior; c) time-limited; and, d) varied.
4. Continued misbehavior requires a warning of the consequence. Move closer to the child than normal conversational distance and make direct and prolonged eye contact.
5. Be very specific about your expectation and the time frame for compliance. Tell him exactly what the consequence of noncompliance will be.
6. Walk away and give him the opportunity to comply.
7. If the warning doesn't work, send the child to another area while you both cool off.
8. Ignore arguing, whining, or expressions of anger.
9. After a few minutes go to your child, speak calmly without emotion and explain the consequence and how long it will last.
10. Avoid power struggles by listening to your child and helping him plan how he will do what you ask of him.
11. Don't let the consequence slide. Enforce it.
12. Forgive your child for his misbehavior, start with a clean slate and don't dwell on past mistakes.
13. Keep your own emotions in control. Avoid using sarcasm, name calling, yelling, insulting or hitting.
14. Do show respect for your child and recognize his good intentions. Tell him that you know he wants to do the right thing and you are there to help him.

Produced by

PARTNERS IN PARENTING (PIP) (800) 457-2736

Colorado Family Education, Resources & Training

Colorado State University Cooperative Extension

Funded by the Alcohol & Drug Abuse Division and CSAP

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