

How Parents Can Use Effective Discipline

This *Parent Teacher Conference Handout* provides 10 tools for parents that offer a sense of control and parenting they may have been missing for a while.

1 - LIMITS AND GUIDELINES ARE VERY NECESSARY FOR A CHILD'S EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For children, realistic, fair and well defined limits and guidelines represent a "safety net" within which they can behave. Children will know that any act of poor judgment will be brought to their attention if limits are well defined. Consequently they will be brought back to the safety net. Parenting cannot be a popularity contest.

2 - ALL BEHAVIOR SHOULD HAVE A CONSEQUENCE

This means appropriate behavior is rewarded and negative behavior punished. Consistency of consequence, whether reward or punishment will assist the child in developing a frame of reference on how to behave.

3 - PUNISHMENT BY ITSELF WILL NOT WORK

Punishment tells children what not to do, but rewards tell children what behavior is acceptable. If long term changes in behavior are desired, then reward must be included. Rewards need not be monetary. They can include verbal praise, written notes of thanks, extended playtime or TV time, special trip or dinner with a parent.

4 - PUNISHMENT SHOULD BE LIMITED TO SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Quantity or severity of punishment is not always important. The most important thing to remember with discipline is that a parent begins it and the parent ends it. Maintaining both boundaries is crucial. In too many situations, the parent begins the discipline but due to its harshness, unrealistic expectations of time manipulation by children or inability of parent to follow through, there is no closure. For young children with no concept of time, 2 minutes in a "time out" chair (controllable) rather than 30 minutes (uncontrollable) is just as productive.

5 - NEVER TRADE A PUNISHMENT FOR A REWARD

If children do something inappropriate and then something appropriate, then the two incidents should be treated separately. If you begin to trade off, children become confused and may be forced to become manipulative.

6 - FOCUS ON INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR, NOT THE PERSONALITY

Remember, children are not stupid, their inappropriate behavior is unacceptable. You may want to use such phrases as poor judgment, inappropriate behavior, lapse of judgment, acting before thinking etc., when confronting the act. Focusing on the act allows children to save face. Children that tend to grow up in homes where personalities are attacked tend to model that behavior in their social relationships.

7 - CHOOSE YOUR BATTLEGROUND WISELY

Try to view energy like money. In this way you will be deciding whether an issue is worth \$2.00 worth of energy or \$200.00. Investing too much energy in situations may lead to early parent "burnout". However, it is very important that both parents agree on the priority of issues so that the child is not confused.

8 - TRY TO PROJECT AN UNITED FRONT

If one parent should disagree with the other's tactics or reasoning, try to discuss it at a private moment. Open disagreement concerning a disciplinary action can sometimes confuse children and place them in the uncomfortable position of having to choose between parents.

9 - TRY TO USE A FORCED CHOICE TECHNIQUE WHENEVER POSSIBLE

Choose 2 options, solutions, and alternatives etc. that are acceptable to you. Then say to the child, " You may do... or... Which do you prefer"? Using a forced choice technique allows children the to feel that they are making the decision and creates less problems than an open ended question such as, "What would you like?"

10 - DELAY A CONSEQUENCE WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY

The use of delay allows for a different perspective than that which is viewed at the height of anger. Say, "I am so angry now that I don't want to deal with this situation. Go to your room and I'll deal with you in 15 minutes." The use of delay will reduce impractical consequences.