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CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Positive Discipline and Child Guidance

Human Development and Family Studies Extension

Every adult who cares for children has a responsibility to guide, correct and socialize children toward appropriate behaviors. These adult actions often are called child guidance and discipline. Positive guidance and discipline are crucial because they promote children's self-control, teach children responsibility and help children make thoughtful choices. The more effective adult caregivers are at encouraging appropriate child behavior, the less time and effort adults will spend correcting children's misbehavior.

Family specialists agree that using physical force, threats and put-downs can interfere with a child's healthy development. For example, there is evidence that spanking can have negative effects on children. Family specialists also agree that a perfect formula that answers all questions about discipline does not exist. Children are unique and so are the families in which they live. A discipline strategy that might work with one child may not work with another.

Effective guidance and discipline focus on the development of the child. They also preserve the child's self-esteem and dignity. Actions that insult or belittle are likely to cause children to view their parents and other

caregivers negatively, which can inhibit learning and can teach the child to be unkind to others. However, actions that acknowledge the child's efforts and progress, no matter how slow or small, are likely to encourage healthy development.

Teaching children self-discipline is a demanding task. It requires patience, thoughtful attention, cooperation and a good understanding of the child. It also requires knowledge of one's own strengths and struggles with disciplinary issues. Unfortunately, the only preparation for most parents is their own experience of being parented. Such past experiences may not always be helpful in raising today's children.

Proactive strategies

Child misbehavior is impossible to prevent completely. Children, usually curious and endlessly creative, are likely to do things parents and other caregivers have not expected. However, there are many positive steps adults can take to help prevent misbehavior.

- Set clear, consistent rules.
- Make certain the environment is safe and worry-free.
- Show interest in the child's activities.
- Provide appropriate and engaging playthings.
- Encourage self-control by providing meaningful choices.
- Focus on the desired behavior,

Parents' early experience with discipline

Take a few minutes to reflect on your own childhood years. Evaluate the ways your parents disciplined you. Which practices would you thank them for, and which would you like to do differently?

Practices to keep

New practices to try

Remembering how it felt to be a child can help you understand children and relate to their behavior.

rather than the one to be avoided.

- Build children's images of themselves as trustworthy, responsible and cooperative.
- Expect the best from the child.
- Give clear directions, one at a time.
- Say "Yes" whenever possible.
- Notice and pay attention to children when they do things right.
- Take action before a situation gets out of control.
- Encourage children often and generously.
- Set a good example.
- Help children see how their actions affect others.

Possible reasons children misbehave

If parents understand why their children misbehave, they can be more successful at reducing behavior problems. Listed here are some of the possible reasons why children misbehave.

1. They want to test whether caregivers will enforce rules.
2. They experience different sets of expectations between school and home.
3. They do not understand the rules, or are held to expectations that are beyond their developmental levels.
4. They want to assert themselves and their independence.
5. They feel ill, bored, hungry or sleepy.
6. They lack accurate information and prior experience.
7. They have been previously "rewarded" for their misbehavior with adult attention.
8. They copy the actions of their parents.

Positive discipline techniques

True misbehavior occurs when a child chooses to behave inappropriately. Before you take action, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is the child really doing something wrong? Is there a real problem, or are you just tired and out of patience?
 - If there is no real problem, release your stress away from the child.
 - If there is a problem, go to the next question.
2. Think for a moment. Is your child actually capable of doing what you expect?
 - If you are not being realistic, re-evaluate your expectations.
 - If your expectations are fair, go to the next question.
3. Did your child know at the time that she or he was doing something wrong?
 - If your child did not realize she was doing something wrong, help her understand what you expect, why, and how she can do that. Offer to help.
 - If your child knew what she was doing was wrong, and she intentionally disregarded a reasonable expectation, your child misbehaved.

If the behavior was an accident, like wetting her pants while sleeping, it was not a misbehavior. If the behavior was not an accident, ask your child to tell you the reasons she has for doing what she did. If the child is old enough, ask her how she might solve the problem or correct the situation. By using a



problem-solving approach, children can develop skills in thinking through a situation and developing possible solutions.

Responding to misbehavior

Here are five strategies parents and other caregivers can use to respond to child misbehavior. Remember, however, that it's always a good idea if rules are explained fully and clearly understood before misbehavior occurs. Whenever possible, involve children in making the rules for the family or the classroom.

Natural consequences

Allowing children to experience the consequences of their behavior is also called learning the hard way.

For example, Gena does not put her books back in her school bag after she finishes reading. One day she loses a book, and therefore must find a way to replace it. Only use natural consequences when they will not endanger the child's health or safety.

Logical consequences

These are structured consequences that follow specific misbehaviors. The child should be able to see how the behavior and the consequence are directly related.

For example, Andrew, who is a teenager, knows that if he stays out past his curfew on a school night, his parents will not allow him to go out with his friends over the weekend.

Fix-up

If children damage something, they need to help in fixing it or in cleaning up. If they cause someone distress, they should help in relieving that.

For example, “Now that you made your brother cry, please come apologize and help me soothe him.”

Time out

During time out, children are required to spend time alone in a specific place that has few, if any, rewarding characteristics. This strategy gives the child a chance to reflect quietly on her or his behavior away from others. When giving a time out, be calm and firm. One minute for each year of the child’s age is appropriate.

For example, “Hannah, we have talked often about how hitting is not acceptable. But because you hit Jerry, please leave the playground and go to the Time Out Table for five minutes. Please think about how Jerry might have felt when you hit him.”

Redirection

This strategy can work when you notice that a child is not following the rules and is being uncooperative. Quickly get the child’s attention and introduce another activity.

For example, “Tom, please help me water the flowers now. You’ve been riding the bike for a long time and it’s now Lena’s turn.”

Parenting styles

Researchers have described four general styles of parenting: authoritarian, permissive, neglectful and authoritative. Most parents, however, do not fall neatly in one category, but fall in the middle, showing characteristics of more than one style. Also, some parents change styles depending on experience, age, maturity level of the child and the given situation.

A caregiver who is **authoritarian:**

- Values obedience, tradition and order
- May use physical punishment
- Usually doesn’t allow choices or freedom of expression

Possible outcomes: Children of authoritarian parents might become followers and depend on others for making decisions. They may develop low self-esteem, become aggressive or defiant.

A caregiver who is **permissive:**

- Sets few rules and guidelines
- Does not provide structure
- Does not enforce limits when they are established

Possible outcomes: Children of permissive parents may have low self-control and little ability to handle frustration. They may remain immature and have difficulty accepting responsibility.

A caregiver who is **neglectful:**

- Rejects or ignores the child
- Does not get involved in the child’s life
- Allows the child to do as she or he pleases

Possible outcomes: Children of neglectful parents may face many challenges, including difficulties with skill development, trust and self-esteem.

A caregiver who is **authoritative:**

- Sets appropriate rules and guidelines

- Is firm, consistent and fair
- Has reasonable expectations
- Encourages child independence and individuality
- Uses clear communication and reasoning
- Allows choices and empowers the child

Possible outcomes: Children of authoritative parents are likely to be responsible, independent, have high self-esteem and able to control their aggressive impulses. This style of parenting provides a balance between setting appropriate limits and granting independence to the child. It is this style of parenting that provides warmth and supportive guidance.

Parenting, however, is not the only factor influencing child outcomes. Cultural values, peer behavior, family circumstances and community characteristics all impact the development of children. These factors also influence the style of parenting that is used. For example, authoritative parenting is more effective in some contexts and for some groups than others.

Knowing what to expect from a child

At times, adult expectations may be beyond children’s abilities. Discipline and guidance strategies should take into account a child’s unique needs and developmental level.

From birth to about age 2, children need a lot of support, holding and loving interactions. If the caregiver is absent, the child may fear that she or he will not return. At this stage, children build attachments with caregivers. They will learn to trust that adults will be there for them when they need them. During these years, children learn through their senses and their physical activity.

From age 2 to about 6, children



learn language, some reading and many social skills. They also begin to struggle for more independence from caregivers. If such efforts are understood and encouraged, children begin to take more initiative. During these years, children learn by

exploring, pounding, touching, mixing, turning objects over and throwing them, and asking many questions.

From age 6 to about 12, children begin to act with increasing self-control. During these years, they begin to lay the groundwork for becoming productive members of society. They process the information they receive and can make complex decisions. They are able to follow rules and accept responsibility. They also develop a self-image based on their experiences and feedback they receive from significant adults. If this feedback

is positive, children grow to become confident and successful teens. If it is frequently negative, a child can grow to feel inadequate and inferior.

Nurturing your child

According to numerous studies, nurturance in raising children is a highly important quality. A nurturing adult is warm, understanding and supportive. Researchers have found that a child will learn more easily from a nurturing parent than from a harsh parent. Children who are raised by nurturing parents are also less likely to become delinquent than are children who are raised by rejecting parents.

Here are some examples of nurturing messages to give children.

- You are valued as a person.
- I believe in you.
- I trust you.
- I know you can handle life situations.
- You are listened to.
- You are cared for.
- You are very important to me.
- I am pleased with you.
- I love you.
- You can tell me anything.

Learning about your child

Your child is a unique individual. To interact with your child effectively, take time to learn about the special qualities of your child. Observe him or her in various settings and jot down your responses in the space below.

How my child is similar to me... _____

How my child is different from me... _____

Ways my child gets my attention... _____

Things my child loves... _____

Special challenges my child faces... _____

Special strengths of my child... _____

What I appreciate about my child... _____

It's also important to talk directly with your children about their feelings and daily life experiences. Through frequent and positive interaction, the parent-child relationship is strengthened.

Growing with your child

Learning is a lifelong process for both children and adults. Take a few minutes to think about the new information you've gained about discipline from this guide. Writing down your responses can help you remember them.

I used to think discipline is... _____

Now I know discipline is... _____

I have used this strategy to discipline... _____

Now I will... _____

I used to think that I am... _____

But now I know that... _____

I used to think my child is... _____

Now I know my child is... _____

- It's OK to make mistakes.
- You belong.
- I am learning with you.

More help for parents

To learn more about children, consider taking a class, attending a workshop, reading a book, subscribing

to a parenting magazine, accessing Internet resources and/or talking with other caregivers.

To develop a sense of connectedness, consider forming or joining a support group. Support groups are a great way to share ideas, learn with others and possibly trade child care.

As you care for children, remember

that caring for yourself is very important. Rest, nutrition, exercise and relaxation can help make caring for children more enjoyable.

Parenting and child care will always be challenging, no matter how well prepared you are. However, helping your children achieve self-discipline is worth your effort. It is a major

foundation for their lifelong personal and social development.

This guide was originally written by Ibtisam S. Barakat and Janet A. Clark, Human Development and Family Studies Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Kim Leon, state specialist in Human Development and Family Studies, reviewed and revised this edition.

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