



CHILDREN: GUIDANCE/DISCIPLINE

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Parents and their children are engaged in a very important interaction, one in which the child is learning, doing, and growing, and the parent is trying to help the child learn, behave, and grow in appropriate ways. This is Guidance/Discipline.

Is there a difference between guidance/discipline and punishment? YES!

Guidance/discipline help the child learn to think and behave in appropriate, healthy, and positive ways. For example, a child tells the truth because he or she knows it is the correct thing to do. Discipline helps the child develop inner- or self-control.

Punishment is what the parent does to stop the child from doing what the parent dislikes. Punishment usually involves some forceful, painful, physical or verbal action by the parent that stops the undesired behavior. Punishment reinforces the child's need for someone else to control his or her behavior; this is outer- or other-control.

Typical or common kinds of punishment:

- **Physical.** Hitting, slapping, spanking, switching, pinching, jerking, kicking, and shaking.
- **Verbal.** Name calling, shaming, ridiculing, poking fun, swearing, and using put-down words.
- **Holding back rewards.** No birthday party, no trip to the mall, cannot watch favorite TV show, cannot go outside with friends, lose your allowance this week or month.
- **Penalizing.** Grounding the child for some period of time, making the child do extra chores or some undesirable household tasks; give up an allowance; or have no time on the computer for a week.

Physical and verbal punishment are not effective long-term methods of guidance. Physical punishment tends to make children dislike themselves and others. The child often feels that now he or she has been punished, he or she has paid for the bad behavior and can misbehave again. As the child gets older, in order to correct or stop the misbehavior, the parent must punish more severely and more often; thus, a vicious cycle of force (violence) may become routine.

REMEMBER:

- **The effective use of guidance and discipline is a thinking and trying process.**
- **Effective guidance and discipline is good for both parent and child.**
- **A child can learn to control his or her behavior and take responsibility for it.**
- **The parent-child relationship needs to be continually warm and open.**
- **The goal of guidance/discipline is to help the child learn how to control his or her own behavior, not to make the child suffer.**

Using harsh, cutting words or ridicule is also ineffective in preventing or correcting misbehavior. Repeatedly using harsh words damages, even destroys, the child's feelings of being a person of value. This lack of self-worth limits the child's desire to try to behave.

Holding back rewards and penalizing the child may be used by the parent as either discipline or punishment—depending on how the parent uses them.

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO DISCIPLINE A CHILD

- **SEPARATION.** Have children rest or play apart for a time when they irritate each other, fight, squabble, hit and kick. Being apart for a while lets a child calm down. Then you can use other ways to encourage better behavior.
- **BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT.** Talk calmly with the child to learn what happened and why and how he or she sees it. Then talk about ways to deal with the incident. Come to a solution that's agreeable to both you and the child. This helps the child learn to be responsible for his or her behavior.
- **REDIRECTION.** When young children get into trouble, stop them, explain why you are stopping them and suggest another activity. When they scribble on the wall, give them paper and crayons. When they race dangerously indoors, take them outside for a game of chase. When they throw books, gather them for a story time or organize a beanbag toss.
- **FIX IT.** When children cause trouble or hurt, expect them to fix it or at least help. If they spill milk, give them a cloth to clean it up. If they break a toy, ask them to help you fix it. If they make another child cry, have them help with the soothing. If they throw toys around the room, ask them to put them away.
- **IGNORE.** A good way to deal with misbehavior aimed at getting your attention is to simply ignore it. However, be sure to give attention to your children when they behave well. Children need attention for good behavior, not misbehavior.
- **BE FIRM.** Clearly and firmly state, or even demand, that the child do what needs to be done. Do not use a wishy-washy tone of voice. Speak in a tone that lets your child know that you mean what you say and that you expect the child to do it. Being firm doesn't mean yelling, threatening, reasoning, or taking away privileges. Being firm works in many situations and for a child of any age.
- **STAY IN CONTROL.** Act before the situation gets out of control, before you get angry and overly frustrated, and before the child's behavior becomes unreasonable.
- **BE DETACHED.** In other words, "keep your cool." If your child does something you don't approve of, or is wrong, pretend your child is your neighbor's child and ask yourself, "What would I do?" Or, imagine that you are your child's teacher. How would the teacher handle this situation? That is how you might handle it, too.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Child Guidance Techniques, PNW0064
Communicating With Young Children, EB1348
Young Children and Safety, PNW0483
Young Children and Stories, PNW0484
Young Children's Play and Toys, PNW0485
Teaching Young Children Right from Wrong:
Learning to be Honest (video—6/98)
Understanding Babies and Toddlers, PNW0279
Understanding 3- to 6-Year-Olds, PNW0280
Disciplining Preschoolers, PNW0281

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Web sites:

- National Network for Family Resilience (NNFR):
<http://www.nnfr.org/parented/>
- National Network on Child Care
(NNCC): <http://www.nncc.org>