



## Guiding Young Children Series: A Look at Discipline

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Discipline is one of the biggest problems that every parent faces. You have probably wondered, "Did I do the right thing?" or "Why doesn't Johnny obey me?"

We prepared this series of lessons for parents who want to do a better job of guiding their children and gain the desired result—good behavior. These lessons are for parents of young children, ages two to six. However, some of the methods given are also appropriate for older children. The titles of the lessons in this series are:

- T-2324 A Look at Discipline
- T-2325 Why Children Misbehave
- T-2326 To Prevent Misbehavior
- T-2327 Responses to Misbehavior
- T-2328 Encouraging Self-Control
- T-2329 Discipline Without Punishment

Being effective with your discipline and guidance is a challenge. Being a good parent is hard work. The discipline methods in these lessons may or may not work for your family. However, until you try them, you will not know what works for your situation. If one suggestion is not effective, try another. For many years, parents have told us these methods work well. Reading these lessons will help you improve how you discipline your child. Your child is fortunate that you are learning some positive discipline techniques.

Effective discipline begins with a warm, caring relationship. Parents and children give and receive affection frequently. The child feels secure in the parent's love.

Your style of parenting may be limited by what you remember your own parents doing, what your friends do, and what you see on television. There are many other ideas you can try, such as watching other parents, or attending a quality child care center to watch how the teachers interact with the children. Try the things you learn from these fact sheets. We think you will like how these positive methods work and how you feel when you use them.

### What is Discipline?

Discipline is:

- Teaching children responsibility.
- Showing a child how to get along with family and friends.
- Developing a child's self-control so that the child wants to do what is right, and not just to avoid punishment.
- Encouraging a child to be independent.

We want our children to behave properly even when we are not around. We want children to think for themselves and take

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**Positive discipline includes using words of encouragement to teach a child good behavior.**

care of themselves. As parents, we want to raise responsible, confident, well-behaved children. Discipline helps children learn to care about others and to live satisfying and useful lives.

### Isn't discipline punishment?

Discipline and punishment are different. Positive discipline is teaching and showing children correct behavior while respecting and encouraging their developing skills. We want children to be responsible for their own behavior. Some think that discipline is teaching a child to mind or that discipline is what we apply when a child is naughty and behaves badly. Some think the purpose of discipline is to give a child feelings of shame and guilt.

Effective discipline is a way we help a child learn self-control, and know what to do and when to do it. Punishment

is using an unpleasant experience to try to change a child's behavior. It may stop bad behavior for the moment, but does not teach children about the good behavior that is expected of them. Punishment builds anger and resentment.

### What do you want your child to be like?

Think ahead a few years and check some of the attributes you would like your child to have.

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Achieving        | <input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic     | <input type="checkbox"/> Loving                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reserved         | <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive      | <input type="checkbox"/> Energetic             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neat and orderly | <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful     | <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Generous         | <input type="checkbox"/> Obedient       | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confident        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive      | <input type="checkbox"/> Has initiative | <input type="checkbox"/> Open-minded           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-disciplined | <input type="checkbox"/> Conforming     | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patient          | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of humor | <input type="checkbox"/> Considerate of others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest           | <input type="checkbox"/> Persevering    | <input type="checkbox"/> Strong-willed         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Independent      | <input type="checkbox"/> Polite         | <input type="checkbox"/> Well-adjusted         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative      | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrious    | <input type="checkbox"/> Positive self-concept |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Well-rounded     | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative       | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curious          | <input type="checkbox"/> Interdependent | <input type="checkbox"/> Popular               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dependent        | <input type="checkbox"/> Kind           | <input type="checkbox"/> Productive            |

Give this some careful thought. What can you do as a parent now to help your child accomplish these goals? Below, we have listed several things that research findings associate with success:

1. Self-esteem and self-confidence.
2. Independent thinking and problem solving skills.
3. Self-control.
4. Getting along well with others, being caring and empathetic.
5. A sense of responsibility.

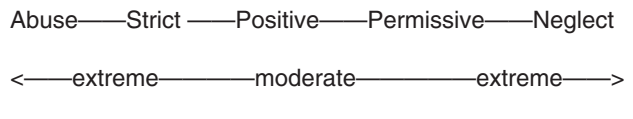
It is important that you keep in mind the goals you have for your child. Doing this will aid you in remembering the important things you want to teach your child, and help you to decide the type of discipline you want to use. You can influence your child in the appropriate ways to achieve those goals.

### Types of Discipline

**Abuse** is a method of discipline that uses excessive physical and verbal punishment. Abuse undermines a child's physical and emotional health. It can be life threatening. Child abuse is illegal and may cause parents to lose custody of their children and face imprisonment. Professionals who abuse children may lose their license to work and may face imprisonment as well. People who abuse children may not know about positive discipline methods and are usually under stress. Often, they were abused as children. Their experiences taught them to be abusive.

**Strict discipline** uses many rules and punishments. The children do not have any say in the decision-making process. The rules and punishments are set by the parents. Children are not allowed to ask questions or make suggestions. Many of the rules are arbitrarily set by the adults. This sort of discipline can be militaristic and not reflect an understanding how children learn and develop at different ages. Authoritarian adults with a high need to be in control often use strict discipline methods.

### Diagram 1. Types of Discipline



**Positive discipline** considers the child's age and development. Children and parents work together to decide the rules necessary for the well-being of the whole family. Children become involved in the decision-making process. Deciding the consequences for not following the rules helps children understand cause and effect. When parents need to take control, they do so firmly, with dignity and respect for the child's feelings and ideas. The rules change to suit the child's age and ability. The rules reflect family beliefs, interests, and culture.

**Permissive discipline** puts children in control. No rules are set by the parent because the child makes all rules and decisions, thus, the household revolves around the child. Parents who choose this type of discipline may view children as free spirits, be too busy with other things, or not understand how children grow and develop.

**Neglect** is a serious lack of discipline or abuse combined with no provision for the child's food, shelter, clothing, medical needs, and protection. Child neglect can result in loss of custody or license to care for children. Adults who neglect children in their care are often depressed, physically ill, or unable to care for themselves and their children. Research studies show that neglect is more harmful than abuse. Some children never recover from neglect. Your caring attention is very important to your child.

Each type of discipline can also vary as to rigidity, harshness, and consistency. Some adults are very strict and continuously correct and punish children. Some parents vary their strictness according to their goals for the child, the child's needs, and the family's values. For example, they may be strict about bedtime but permissive about how late the child stays awake reading in bed.

Most parents use the style of discipline that their parents used, with the idea of "I turned out "okay." The problem is that our world is rapidly changing. Today's children live with much more diversity, information, and independence. They must learn to make responsible decisions. They need to know why we have certain rules so they can apply the rules in other situations. Children treated with respect and dignity can stand up for what they know to be right. Extreme types of discipline do not work with children today. Abuse, neglect, strict, and permissive types of discipline do not produce the kind of people our world needs.

The use of positive discipline is described in this series. Positive discipline is based on research, common sense, and knowledge about how children grow and learn. Parents and children are usually much happier using positive discipline.

### Know Your Child

Each child is unique. Discipline techniques work differently depending on the temperaments of the child and parent. Read the following temperaments and related characteristics. Which one best describes the traits of your child?

### Effects of Discipline

- When parents use strict discipline, children become timid, withdrawn, dependent persons, or they may become rebellious and defy authority.
- When parents are permissive, children become spoiled, cranky, crying persons who expect to continually get their own way.
- When parents use positive discipline, children become responsible, cooperative, and are considerate of others. They develop a positive self-concept.

#### A difficult child

- shrieks rather than cries.
- is upset by new people or places.
- is irregular in eating and sleeping habits.
- has violent temper fits.

#### An easy-going child.

- Is generally cheerful.
- responds agreeably to new people, places, and foods.
- has regular eating and sleeping habits.

#### A timid child

- withdraws from new situations.
- adapts to changes slowly.

#### A bright child

- is easily bored and finds their own entertainment.
- questions and thinks of exceptions to rules.
- pays close attention to adult role models.

#### A creative child

- thinks of new and different rules.
- finds clever ways around rules and consequences.
- has serious problems with strict discipline.

Children are all unique individuals. Some are persistent; others give up easily. Some are active; others sit still. Some talk a lot; others are quiet. What works for one of your children may not work for another. Parents need to recognize and be aware of individual differences. Consider each child's temperament when you select discipline techniques.

Discipline techniques need to keep pace with the child's age and abilities. As parents, we need to ask, "Are my expectations reasonable for a child this age?" "Do I expect too much?"

Be aware that age and stage in development make a difference. Be familiar with what is normal for a child at a certain age. For example, we cannot expect a two-year-old child to sit still and be quiet. Young children need to be active. It is important to know the characteristic behavior for each age. Your child care provider and other early childhood professionals can

help other adults and parents understand normal growth and development. We must remember that behavior we find bad or annoying may be normal for a child that age.

Young children have a difficult time telling the difference between fact and pretend. If a child says, "I saw a bear," an adult may think the young child is lying or is afraid. Actually, the child is behaving normally. The best adult response is to agree that it is fun and safe to pretend. In a few years, the child will know the difference between reality and imagination.

Children are curious. They may take things apart to see how they work, not to annoy parents. Curiosity is a valuable tool for learning. Rather than punishing a child for taking things apart, provide something to satisfy curiosity.

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**A child's curiosity should be encouraged through all stages of development.**

# WHAT TO EXPECT OF YOUNG CHILDREN:

## The infant

- cries to get what is needed.
- is dependent on adults.
- loves to play with food.
- grows rapidly.
- gets into everything.
- sleeps less each month.
- learns by touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, and hearing.

## The toddler

- is negative and says no many times.
- is possessive and considers everything "mine."
- is noisy.
- is self-centered.
- has short memory.
- is curious and explores.
- can not make choices.
- is easily distracted, plays, dawdles.
- can not sit still.

## The three-year-old

- tries to please.
- minds well and can follow brief instructions.
- accepts suggestions.
- can understand reasons.
- listens well especially when called by name.
- can make simple choices.
- speaks well enough to be understood.
- is not capable of sharing.

## The four-year-old

- wants friends.
- asks many questions.
- tends to be bossy.
- brags and stretches the truth.
- tells on others.
- talks a lot.
- can learn to take turns if the wait is not long.
- values self.
- enjoys playing with made-up words.
- says words to shock others.

## The five-year-old

- gets along well with friends and parents.
- is businesslike.
- likes to act like grown-ups.
- is dependable.
- likes praise.
- likes to feel important.
- tells on others.
- enjoys dressing up.
- can give name and address.
- is serious and demanding.

## The six-year-old

- thrives on approval.
- is possessive with belongings.
- has trouble compromising.
- has difficulty making choices.
- responds negatively at first and then cooperates.
- plays best with one other friend, not a large group.
- does not want to hurt people.
- wants to learn.
- needs to be reminded of instructions.
- is active.
- resists punishment.

## The seven-year-old

- is sensitive to others' feelings.
- does not listen well.
- is very competitive and does not know how to lose.
- dislikes individual praise.
- wants to be part of a group.
- lies because of immaturity.
- has an immature sense of ownership.
- loses interest suddenly.
- fights with words.
- cries when something does not work.
- does not take correction well.
- responds well to rewards.
- needs personal touch and conversation.

## The eight-year-old

- can respond rapidly to instructions.
- prefers a hint or a cue instead of a direct order.
- asks for praise.
- dislikes being teased about shortcomings.
- has a lively sense of property and ownership.
- tells tales with some truth.
- can not lose gracefully.
- is tolerant of other cultures.
- learns through others' mistakes.
- behavior improves after brief isolation from a group.
- likes hard tasks.
- interests are brief.
- likes to argue and to compete.
- needs extra time.
- can be controlled with just a glance.

## SEE HOW MUCH YOU HAVE LEARNED:

Which of the following statements are true and which are false?

1. Sharon, age 4, wants to stay up and watch an adult movie on TV that starts at 9:00 p.m. Mother says, "This movie isn't for children, and you need your sleep. You will be tired tomorrow, but you decide." Mother is using a permissive style of discipline.
2. Bryant, age 6, is late for dinner. Father said, "You know you are supposed to be home at 6 p.m. No TV tonight for you." Father is using a strict style of discipline.
3. Maria, age 5, forgot to empty the wastebasket. Mother said, "Maria it is your job to empty the wastebasket this week." Mother is using a moderate style of discipline.
4. A child who seeks attention is a spoiled child.
5. When children make mistakes, they should be scolded and told how dumb and no-good they are.

ANSWERS: 1. True, 2. True, 3. True, 4. False, 5. False

## A Record of My Discipline Practices and Their Effects

Complete this exercise one week after studying A Look at Discipline. Check the blanks that apply to you.

1. The way I usually disciplined this week was:

- Compare one child with another
- Explain reasons calmly
- Ignore misbehavior
- Isolate the child from others
- Let the child make choices and experience consequences
- Praise
- Prevent misbehavior before it occurs
- Remove privileges
- Scold
- Shame the child
- Show disapproval
- Spank
- Threaten and not follow through
- Threaten and follow through
- Yell and scream
- Redirect child's attention

2. During the past week I:

|                                      | More                     | Less                     | Same                     |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Acted calmly                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Acted firmly with kindness           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Let my child learn from consequences | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Used kind words                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Used unkind words                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. The atmosphere in our home has changed to one of:

|               | More                     | Less                     | Same                     |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Confusion     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cooperation   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Friendliness  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fun           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hostility     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tension       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Adapted from *Practical Education for Parenting* by Kent G. Hamdorf, Extension Specialist, Human Relations Family Development, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, 1978.

## Practice Exercises

1. Study the styles of discipline and decide what kind you use. Probably you use one style one time and another style on a different occasion, or perhaps you are half-way between two styles. Think about the kind of discipline styles you would like to have.
2. Observe your child for one week. Make a note of the styles of discipline you use when the child needs correction. Ask yourself:

Misbehavior 1

Misbehavior 2

Misbehavior 3

What did my child do?

What did I do or say?

How did I feel afterward?

How did my child feel?

How did my child's behavior change?  
(right away? during the week? long term?)

What style of discipline did I use?

## POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

1. Is teaching and showing children correct behavior while respecting and encouraging their developing skills.
2. Helps children learn to do what is right because they want to, not because they fear punishment.
3. Is moderate, neither very strict nor very permissive.
4. Suits today's world and today's children.
5. Meets goals for the future.
6. Reflects your beliefs and values.
7. Respects the uniqueness of each child.
8. Considers the child's age, ability, interests, family background, and need to play.

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Parenting Made Easier...



Credit is extended to Elaine Wilson, retired Parenting Specialist for the original development of this fact sheet.

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- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
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- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
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- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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