

Positive Guidance and Discipline of Children

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, 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 teachers 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.

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

- *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.
- *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.
- *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 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.

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."

Teaching Styles

Researchers have described four general styles of teaching: Authoritarian, Permissive, Neglectful and Authoritative. Most teachers, however, do not fall neatly in one category, but fall in the middle, showing characteristics of more than one style. Also, some teachers 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 teachers 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 teachers 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 teachers 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 teachers are likely to be responsible, independent, have high self-esteem and able to control their aggressive impulses. This style of teaching 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.

Teaching, 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 Age 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 Age 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.

Learning About Your Children

Your children are unique individuals. 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 answer the questions below.

- How my child is similar to me?
- How is my child different from me?
- How does my child get my attention?
- What are the things my child loves?
- What special challenges does my child face?
- What are my child's special strengths?
- What do 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 life-long process for both children and adults. Take a few minutes to think about the new information you've gained about discipline from this guide sheet. 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...
 - Now I know that...
- I used to think my child is...
 - Now I know my child is...

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.

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

Setting a Positive Tone from the Beginning...

Whenever there are two or more people in the same place, there is a potential for disagreement and conflict. Conflict is a natural part of being alive. Even though we may want to avoid it, conflict often provides us with challenges which help us grow, use creativity, exercise self-control, and learn how to solve problems. However, we also want to do as much as possible to avoid and prevent unnecessary conflicts. As a preschool teacher, you can do a lot to prevent unnecessary conflicts:

- ◎ Talk with the children in advance to share ideas for how they can work together in a positive way.
- ◎ Recognize that children have varying abilities and skills for handling problems and conflicts. Some children excel at physical activities. Some have a talent for music and dancing. Some enjoy reading and writing poems or stories. Some are artistic. Some have pre-leadership skills. Some have a knack for getting along with others and being a team player.

Here are some ways preschool teachers can help children make the most of their unique capabilities:

- Observe children closely and plan activities which match their abilities.
 - Ask children about things they really like to do and try to include them in the classroom.
 - Ask children what they think they're good at as well as what they don't feel good at.
 - Encourage children to try new things.
 - Provide support and encouragement for children who want to work on difficult challenges.
 - Help children find resources and ideas for building on their strengths.
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- ◎ Keep in mind the DO's and DON'T's of problem solving outlined by your school. Many conflicts arise when teachers fail to keep these guidelines in mind.

- ⦿ Work with children to establish program rules and limits everyone agrees to live by.
- ⦿ Plan activities which are linked to children's developmental needs and are appropriate for your classroom.

Teaching Children Step-by-Step Problem Solving Strategies...

As you work in the classroom, use the steps presented below to teach children how to solve problems one step at a time. This will help them develop ownership of their problems and assume a sense of responsibility for their actions. It will also help them identify and express their emotions, opinions, and concerns appropriately.

Steps for Effective Problem Solving:

1. **Stop and calm down.** Do whatever it takes to get yourself feeling neutral. Take a few deep breaths. Relax; count to 10. Get a drink of water. Remove yourself from the group and close your eyes for a minute. ***Remember, no one can use thinking skills to solve problems or conflict when they are feeling angry, upset, or hurt.***
2. **Get together to figure out the cause of the problem.** What is the problem about? You may want to take turns describing the problem and sharing your feelings, wants and opinions related to the problem. Listen without interrupting. Don't talk about **solutions** until you agree on **what the problem is about**.
3. **Brainstorm ideas for solving the problem.** Make a list of all the possible solutions - practical and impractical. Don't judge yet.
4. **Evaluate the ideas for solving the problem.** Choose the best idea(s) and use them to **plan** a course of action.
5. **Put your plan into action.** Decide on a time and place to check your progress - how is your plan working? Do you need anything else?

Learning to Recognize The Common Causes of Conflicts in Preschool Programs

There are certain problems which occur in preschool programs. The contents of this module are designed to help you anticipate and avoid many of them. The checklist below can help you identify what might be causing conflicts which arise in your program. Then use the step-by-step problem solving process to correct the situation.

Checklist of Common Causes of Conflicts in Preschool Programs

Use this checklist to identify possible causes of conflicts in your program

- Inappropriate or poorly planned program activities for the age of the children
- Inappropriate use or lack of suitable space, equipment or supplies
- Poor handling of transition times - too much waiting between activities.
- Failure to spot or anticipate problems about to happen
- Lack of understanding of children's needs, resulting in a mismatch between the children's capabilities and the expectations of the program
- Personality or temperament clashes among children or between staff and children
- Overly competitive atmosphere
- Intolerant/unfriendly atmosphere
- Poor communication (by children and/or adults who can't or don't express needs appropriately, can't observe, don't know how to listen)
- Misuse of power by staff - expectations too high, too authoritarian or controlling
- Too many unreasonable rules - failure to involve children in shaping rules
- Absence of problem-solving skills
- Lack of clarity about what the expectations are, how things are organized, what the limits and boundaries are

Tips for Diffusing and Reducing Conflicts When They Emerge

It is unrealistic to think that you will be able to eliminate all conflicts in your program. In addition to step-by-step problem solving, the techniques listed below may be helpful when conflicts begin to emerge. It's important to remember that **no technique** will work in every situation. You will need to use good judgment in deciding what techniques will work best depending on who is involved your own capabilities, the causes(s) of conflict, and the setting.

Techniques Staff can use to Diffuse or Reduce Conflict Situations

- **Get your own feelings under control.** Act with firmness and authority if needed. But never vent your own anger towards the children.
- **Ignore the behavior.** Assume it won't get worse and don't fuel it with your attention.
- **Intervene immediately if children are in danger or hurting each other.** Help them find ways to use words to talk through their issues.
- **Redirect children.** Help children get involved in a different activity. Invite them to help you with a chore. Help them start a new game.
- **Help children withdraw temporarily if they are out of control.** Help them think of ways to cool off and "get themselves together". This is especially helpful when children are very angry, crying, or having a temper tantrum.
- **Use special signals.** Use eye contact or gestures to alert a child of the need for self-control. This is most effective if you and a child have agreed on the special signal in advance.
- **Move closely to children when you see signs they may be losing control.**
- **Show interest.** If children look bored, sad, upset or angry, engage the child in conversation. Let them know you are interested in their problem, concerns, fears, ideas, etc.
- **Use humor.** Make a joke to ease the tension. Be sure to use humor with sensitivity. Never use humor to make fun of children.
- **Give assistance.** Offer help and support when children might not understand directions or feel frustrated.
- **Change the routine.** Break the tension with a change of pace if an inappropriate activity or schedule seems to be causing the problem.
- **Remove objects which cause problems.** Put away or move objects which seem to bring out negative behavior and provoke conflicts.