



Discipline

The Basics

Positive discipline is one of the most important things you can give your child. Positive discipline means teaching and guiding, not punishing your child. When limits are given with love it builds up your child's self-esteem and helps her learn self-control. It allows both child and parents to feel good about themselves. How you discipline also helps you teach your child values. This helps them build a base for developing their own values later on.

Know What to Expect

Does the way you expect your child to behave match her age or developmental level? For instance, you can expect many 5-year-olds to share toys but not a 2-year-old. Also, take your child's temper and personality into account. It may be too much to expect a very active child to sit for long time.

Keep Rules Simple

Set a few major rules when your child is young and slowly add to your list. This will help keep you and your child from feeling frustrated. Start with rules that keep your child safe. Then add others such as, "being kind to ourselves and to others." Toddlers and young children will need to hear and practice rules many times before they understand. Avoid trying to change more than one problem behavior at a time and allow time for change.

Adjust Your Home

It's your child's job to explore and learn about the world around them. It is your job to provide a safe place for them to do it. You can avoid many problems by simply changing things at home. Move

unsafe items out of the reach of very young children. Provide some areas that are free for your child to explore. Children may be less likely to fight over toys if there are enough toys to go around and enough room to spread out and play in. You can also rotate toys. Older children need space that is off limits to their younger siblings so that their things are safe.

Plan Ahead and Keep Flexible

Conflicts often happen when children feel rushed or surprised at a change in plans or routine. Give your child a warning when it is getting time to change from one activity to another such as from playing to clean-up time. Problems can also happen when your child gets bored and restless. Bring along toys, books and activities your child can do while waiting. Plan outings that fit your child's age. Avoid taking tired, hungry children on errands and outings. If your child gets out of control at the same time each day, it might be that she is tired or hungry. Try an extra snack or rest time.

Clear Expectations

Children need to be told very clearly what is OK and not OK. This helps them to learn how to control their own behavior. Be very exact when telling your child what you expect. For example, "You have to finish all your homework before you can ride your bike." Rules will change as your child gets older. Discuss and explain these changes as they occur.

Take time to explain the "why" behind your rules. "We don't hit others, hitting hurts." This helps your child develop the understanding and respect needed for getting along with others.

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Positive Discipline—The Basics

Clear Expectations, continued

New or special events such as weddings, funerals or a visit to the hospital may excite your child or make her anxious. Talk with her ahead of time about the event. Describe what your child might see and hear. Explain clearly what she is supposed to do or not do.

Be Consistent

Your child may be confused if it's OK to eat in the living room when Dad's home, but not OK when Mom's home. It is best if all the people who care for your child enforce rules in the same way. Be very clear about exceptions to rules: "You can ride your bike in the street only when I am riding with you."

Honor Your Child's Feelings

It is important to help your child learn the difference between the way she feels and how she shows that feeling. "I see that you're angry that your sister knocked down your blocks, but it is not OK to hit her." Show her you accept her feelings and help her learn OK ways to deal with the event. "You can say you're mad and you can come tell me what happened."

Children may act out more during stressful events such as a move, holiday, divorce or starting school. During these times it is very important to talk with her about how she feels. Read children's books about the event your child is going through. Remind your child of your love and spend some special time with her each day. This will help far more than if you scold or punish her.

Be a Role Model

How you act is the most powerful way to teach your child. Act as you would like your

child to act. For instance, when a driver cuts you off on the road and you don't yell your child sees how you handle frustration. If you use words to tell others when you're angry and give yourself time to cool down before you react, you can expect your child to copy you.

Praise Good Behavior

Let your child know when she has done something right. This will help to increase the behaviors your child does that you like and want more of. When you hug your child and say, "I am so proud of the way you picked up your room," you reward her with praise. Focus more on what you want your child to do instead of not do. For instance, if your child stalls and resists cleaning up, as soon as you see the smallest effort say, "Oh, I really like the way you are picking up!"

Respect

When you treat your child with respect you show her that you value her as a person and you teach how to treat others. This is one of the best ways to help your child develop positive self-esteem.

To learn more, call for the Positive Discipline Booklist from Children's at the number listed below or find it on our Web site at www.seattlechildrens.org.

For More Information

- **Your health care provider**
- **Children's Resource Line:**
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- **www.seattlechildrens.org**

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

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