

WHAT IS DISCIPLINE?

GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

Review training module

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Introduction

Whenever parents or caregivers get together, they usually talk about discipline. They talk about their problems in getting children to do what they are supposed to do.

A good way to think about discipline is guidelines—guidelines for helping children protect their safety and get along with others. We want children to learn to make choices, share, take turns, and be considerate. This kind of guideline training takes time and occurs gradually throughout childhood. **The goal of discipline is to help children manage their own behavior.**

For any discipline to be successful, it must be based on an understanding of children. It must be consistent, and it must give children a balance between control and freedom.

Objectives

- ◆ To provide day cares with a strategy to prevent discipline behaviors.
- ◆ To educate on the importance of guiding children's behavior through what you say, what you do, and how you give emotional support.
- ◆ To enable the provider to change undesirable behavior to desirable behavior using positive methods.

Preventing Discipline Problems

Consider this situation:

Andrea, 5, flaunts a red truck in front of David, 5, jeering, “You can’t drive this like I can. I do it better than you.” After several taunts, David gets angry and grabs the truck. They push and shove each other, and the truck gets swung against Andrea’s cheek. She screams and comes running to you. David cries, too, yelling, “She made me do it.”



Situations like this are common whenever two or more children get in the same room. But they don’t have to happen so often or go on so long. Many problems like this can be prevented.

Preparing the Environment

The first step in preventing discipline problems is to prepare the children’s environment—the home, the yard, the play materials, the schedule. Both the home and the yard should be child-proofed. By moving your crystal vase to a high shelf instead of waiting for a child to knock it over, for example, you are avoiding the need to say “No, No,” and scold a child.

Children should have enough of and the right kinds of play materials to suit their abilities and interests. A 3-year-old, for example, can easily get frustrated trying to put together a 60-piece puzzle and may throw the pieces on the floor. Children need a well-organized room with storage so they can choose materials they want to play with and put things away after they have finished. If you notice constant squabbling in the block area, for example, you might try rearranging the space or the toys so children can play better.

The daily schedule should follow a certain order so that children know what to expect. They need the security of routines—snacks, toileting, washing hands, lunch, nap. If you have to change the schedule for some reason, let children know beforehand. “We’re not going to play outside today because the plumber is working on the drain pipe. But we will do some jumping jack exercises inside during that time.”



Plan activities carefully. Children need a balance between indoor and outdoor activities, quiet and noisy play, physical exercise and mental challenge. Children who are overly tired or excited are more apt to present discipline problems. The schedule should be flexible to adapt to children’s changing needs. With babies and toddlers, for example, it’s easier to feed them when they are hungry, put them to bed when they are tired, and play with them when they are feeling sociable rather than to force them into a rigid schedule.

Setting Realistic Expectations

The second step in preventing discipline problems is making sure children are able to do what you want them to do. It is unreasonable, for example, to expect a child to be toilet trained at 12 months or to have perfect table manners at 4 years. Expecting children to learn things that are way above them makes children feel inadequate and causes misery for grownups.

At every age, children should be given only what they can handle. A 10-month-old baby, for example, should be given a half rather than a full cup of milk. A toddler with crayons should not be left alone but rather encouraged to scribble on a large sheet of paper—and only on the paper.

Rules Offer Security

Children need to know how far they can go. They need to know they will be kept safe and their things will be protected. One way to satisfy this need is to have rules. Many rules are based on safety. If carried out right, rules help children develop a healthy respect for danger, without making them too fearful or withdrawn.

Other rules are based on what we need to do to live happily and get along with other people. These include being honest, not taking things that don't belong to us, and being courteous. Children learn rules of behavior and courtesy day by day in the natural course of living.

It's a good idea to have a few simple, set rules.
Here are some examples:

- ◆ We are kind and do not hurt each other
- ◆ We ask first before taking someone's things
- ◆ We run outside and walk inside



You can add other rules about staying in the yard, playing quietly during baby's nap, but use only rules that are necessary. Keep the list short and use words children can understand. When someone breaks a rule, you can say, "I think you forgot about our rule. I'll remind you so you can remember next time."

Be consistent. It does no good to have rules if you let children slip by them sometimes. Make sure everyone abides by the rules, except infant and toddlers who are too young to understand. Praise children when you see them following the rules. "Juan, I like the way you asked Benito if you could play with his car."

Taking Time for Each Child

When caring for several children, it's easy to overlook the needs of individual children. Some children are more demanding than others, and all children are more demanding at certain stages of growth. As children grow, they develop their own sets of strengths and weaknesses. If Stephanie shows an interest in using a spoon before any of your other children, let her have a spoon and experiment with feeding herself.



All children feel small and helpless from time to time. They need individual attention from their parents and from you. You can help by listening to what children say and talking about how they feel. By giving children encouragement and affection and responding promptly to their needs, you reduce the need for them to get your attention by whining or misbehaving.

Guidance Techniques

What you do to prevent discipline problems is an *indirect* way of training children to manage their behavior. But you can also train children *directly* through what you say, what you do, and how you give emotional support.

What You Say:

Children learn a great deal about what they may and may not do from what you say to them. And it's not just what you say, but how you say it. Here are some tips for using clear, positive language in guiding children's behavior:

- ◆ Speak in a calm, kind voice
- ◆ Go close to the child instead of calling across a room. Kneel down, if necessary, so that you are at the child's eye level and can look directly into the child's face
- ◆ Make sure you have the child's attention before speaking
- ◆ Give children advance warning when it's time to change an activity so they can finish what they are doing. "It's almost time to wash your hands for lunch, so try to finish the puzzle." It's unreasonable to expect children to do something immediately after you make a request.



- ◆ When possible, explain why you are asking a child to do something. Instead of saying, “Move the game off the table,” say, “We’re going to have lunch in a few minutes, so please put the game on the shelf.”
- ◆ Give only one or two directions at a time
- ◆ Be specific in making requests. Instead of saying, “Put those toys away,” say, “Put those trucks back on the bottom shelf.”
- ◆ Make important requests firmly. When you want Johnny to stop jumping on the coffee table, speak as if you mean it. When you talk in a tired or wishy-washy way, the child may think you don’t really care whether he does it or not.
- ◆ Give choices only when the child has a choice. When you ask a toddler, “Do you want to put your coat on to go outside?” chances are the child will say no. It’s better to say, “I want you to wear your coat outside.”
- ◆ Translate don’ts into do’s so that children know exactly what they are supposed to do. Instead of saying, “Don’t dump the puzzle on the floor,” say, “Keep the puzzle on the table.”
- ◆ Avoid making threats. Making vague threats like, “If you do that one more time, you’re going to get it” teaches children to hate and fear you. Instead state what will happen if they do or don’t do something. Assume, for example, that a child bangs a toy on a table and you say you will take the toy away if the child doesn’t stop. If the child refuses to stop banging, then say, “If you cannot put the toy away, I’ll put it away for you.” Then do it.
- ◆ Give children encouragement rather than belittling them, making fun of them, or making them feel guilty when they do something wrong. Instead of saying, “You never do anything right,” say, “That’s hard to do. Next time, try it this way.”



What You Do:

In some situations, words are not enough. This is especially true with toddlers. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Help toddlers get started in the behavior you expect. If you want Jenny to put away animal figures after playing, for example, say, “I’ll hold the barn, and you put the animals in it.” Sometimes older children feel overwhelmed at the prospect of doing a task, and you have to break it down into smaller parts that seem more “do-able”. When a school-age child complains about “tons of homework,” for example, suggest that he do math first, take a break, and then study his spelling words.

- ◆ Show children how to do the behavior you want them to learn. Toddlers have to be shown many times how to do such things as washing their hands and brushing their teeth. When you ask children to be quiet, talk in a whisper and walk on tiptoes. Instead of just saying, “Sit down,” sit down with children and say, “Let’s sit down.”
- ◆ Be courteous with children. Say “please,” “thank you” and “you’re welcome.” Don’t interrupt them when they are telling you something. Set the example you want them to follow.
- ◆ Occasionally make routines and chores into a game. “Who can be the first to get his coat on?” “Pick up all the toys that are yellow!” Or use a puppet to ask the children to do something such as wash their hands or use the toilet.
- ◆ Hold or restrain children who are in danger of hurting themselves or someone else. When Annie gets angry and starts kicking another child, you should hold her firmly until she stops. Then you can say, “I won’t let you hurt anyone and I won’t let anyone hurt you.”



Changing Undesirable Behavior



Even though you may be a skillful caregiver and do everything you can to prevent discipline problems, you will still have them. Toddlers often do what they are not supposed to do just to test you. Some children pose a special challenge because they always seem to be hitting, biting, or screaming.

In these trying situations, you will want to help children change their behavior through positive control. Positive control stresses desirable behavior over undesirable. Children are rewarded for what they do right rather than punished for what they do wrong. The techniques that follow are some examples of positive control.

Distraction & Substitution

Because children have short attention spans, you can often change their behavior by getting them interested in something else. When a baby wiggles too much when you are changing his diapers, whistle or make faces so the child gets interested in what you are doing. This is distraction, and it works best with babies and toddlers.

As children get older, you also have to give them a substitute for the unacceptable activity. When the children make too much noise, take them outside for a walk. This is substitution. It’s a way of trading one activity for another.

Rewarding the Good and Ignoring the Bad

Children thrive on attention. They want to please their parents and you, but they often settle for any reaction they can get. In some situations, it's best to ignore the undesirable behavior and reward desirable behavior. When a 3-year-old gets no attention for saying curse words but receives praise for saying other words, he probably will stop using foul language. Sometimes, especially when other children are around, it's not enough to simply ignore the behavior. Children may get the idea that it's okay to use curse words. In that case, you should say matter-of-factly, "I don't like hearing those words and I don't want them used." Or give children an acceptable substitute: "We don't say that. We say "ouch"."



It's important to reward children for every small effort toward a goal and not wait until they do it exactly right. For example, if you are toilet training a 2-year-old who uses the potty but leaves pieces of toilet paper on the floor and forgets to wash his hands, praise him first for what he does right. "You went in the potty and pulled up your pants by yourself. That's great, Todd. Now let's put the toilet paper in the potty and wash your hands."

Suffering the Consequences

One of the most powerful ways to help children change their behavior is to suffer the consequences of their actions. Assume that a child sits at the lunch table, plays with the fork, pokes at the ice in her glass, and does everything but eat. Instead of getting angry and forcing her to eat, you can caution her that the table will soon be cleared and the food put away. When lunch is over, remove the plates and go on to the next activity. The child will probably get hungry and want something to eat. If so, you can say, "We've already had lunch, so you will have to wait for snack." Feeling hungry is a natural consequence of not eating lunch. That feeling will probably do more to encourage the child to eat than any scolding or coaxing from you.



Sometimes a behavior has no natural consequences that a child can learn from. In that case, you have to create one. For example, when a child rams their tricycle into a group of children, take the tricycle away and say, "We're going to let other children ride it for a while. When you know how to ride it better, you can have it again."

When you create consequences for misbehavior, they are more effective if you follow these suggestions:

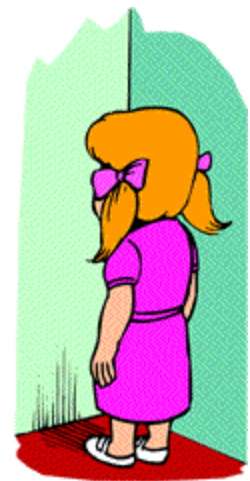
- ◆ Put the consequences into effect immediately. The child has to feel discomfort right away.
- ◆ Make the consequence as closely related to the misbehavior as possible. If a child scribbles on the wall with crayons, have the child clean up the wall.
- ◆ Make the consequences last a reasonable time. For preschoolers, a few minutes are usually enough. A day or week is too long to be meaningful.
- ◆ Choose a consequence that is unpleasant but not harsh. For example, you would not deprive a child of his birthday cake, take away his security blanket, or refuse to let him talk to his mother on the phone. A consequence like that would only make the child hostile and try to get back at you.

Time Out

In some situations, especially when children between 3 and 12 years old are involved, the best thing to do is remove a child from the group, or to have all children go to a separate place and sit quietly for a few minutes. This technique is “time out”.

Assume, for example, that two children are fighting. Separate them and calmly say they need a time out. Tell them they can get up in three minutes, and show them what the time will be on a clock. Ask them to spend the time thinking of how they could have solved their problem another way.

When the time is up, announce it and ask the children for their ideas about how they could have behaved better. Then allow them to go back to their playing.



If you chose to use time out, follow these suggestions:

- ◆ Use it only for children 3 and older
- ◆ Announce it in a calm, matter-of-fact way
- ◆ Use it only for stopping behaviors that hurt children or destroy property
- ◆ Use it no longer than 5 minutes for preschool children
- ◆ Don't expect it to work with all children. Some may not understand what time out is, or they may use it to get attention.
- ◆ Use it only as a last resort. Observe the problem carefully to see if it could be corrected some other way. The less time out is used, the better it works.

Hurting Behavior

Whenever any child hurts another—by hitting, biting, kicking, pushing, shoving—it usually means the child feels angry or frustrated and does not know a better way to express feelings. In some situations, it can mean something else. When a toddler bites another child, it can mean the toddler is teething and needs something to chew on, or the toddler is using biting to get attention, not knowing how much it hurts.

Whatever the reason, the first step is to stop the hurting behavior. Sometimes a stern word is all that is necessary, but at other times you may have to hold the misbehaving child or take the child bodily from the room.

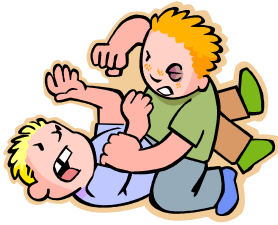
When the behavior has stopped, begin immediately to give most of your attention to the victim. Don't lecture the misbehaving child or listen to excuses. You can simply say, "We don't hurt other people." Spend several minutes comforting and consoling the hurt child—holding, rocking, and putting ice or a bandage on the hurt. This helps the misbehaving child learn how much it hurts.

When the children have calmed down, ask them to tell you about it. It's not necessary to decide whose fault it is or who started it. Ask for their ideas about other ways they could have handled the problem. Don't force children to say they are sorry because they are probably not. Then say, "When you feel you are ready, you can go back to playing."

In some situations, you may have to redirect the children into another activity. If Michelle continues hitting someone, for example, you can move her out of the group and give her a pounding bench and hammer, saying, "You can hit this but not people."

If you are having trouble with one particular child, observe the child more closely and try to figure out the reason for the behavior. When does the behavior occur? If it occurs shortly after the child arrives in the morning, it could mean he is angry at his mother about something. Who is the victim? If the victim is always the same, you may need to keep the children separated. If it's not the same one, you will have to watch the child closely and be ready to step in to protect other children. Does the child have a way to express angry feelings? You may need to provide clay or Playdough for pounding and rolling, or crayons and paints for scribbling and painting. Discuss the problem with the child's parents and ask if anything has changed at home (new baby or a divorce, for example). Emphasize that you are dealing with the problem when it happens and parents should not punish the child again for what the child does while in your care. Remember that the most difficult children are often the ones who need love and guidance the most.





In some cases, you will have to ask parents to make other care arrangements for their child. Since it's your job to ensure the safety of all the children in your care, you cannot allow an overly aggressive child to constantly hurt other children.

Caution about Biting: Some caregivers believe that the way to stop biting is to bite the child back. They are misinformed. Biting is wrong whether it's done by a biting child, the child who gets bitten, or the adult who cares for them. Besides that, a caregiver who bites (or spanks) a child can be prosecuted for child abuse.

Everybody Has Bad Days!

No matter how well you have planned and tried to deal with problems, you will have days when nothing seems to go right. You will get angry at the children, feel sorry for yourself, or feel like crying. It's natural to feel this way. Anyone who cares for children all day long has one of the hardest jobs in the world.

At times like these, it helps to shift gears a bit. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Do something physical. Have everyone run in place for a few minutes or do jumping jacks until you are all breathing hard. Then drop to the floor and rest.
- ◆ Do something quiet. Have everyone lie on the floor with his head on his hands for a few minutes. As the children to be still and listen for the sound of the refrigerator running, the clock ticking, or the wind blowing outside.
- ◆ Laugh together. Lie on the floor with the children, have each child place his head on someone else's tummy, and start giggling.
- ◆ Drop everything and do something different. Spread a bed sheet on the floor, have children hold it around the sides, and ask them to slide under the sheet while holding it. Or give each child a bucket of water and a rag to wash the back fence.



Toddler Biting

Biting is a reaction toddlers frequently express when they are frustrated or angry. If they are forced to share too early, they may bite to get what they want. Toddlers are usually unable to cause a strong response and can be rewarding if it gets them what they want.



When a child bites, the caregiver should immediately stop the child. The adult should accept the child's feelings, but let them know that biting is not allowed. One might say, "I know that you want the doll, but you must not bite." Then, the adult should pay attention and give sympathy to the bitten child instead of the biter.

The child who bites regularly may need closer supervision until he or she can work through the behavior. The adult should take note of what kinds of situations seem to cause the biting, what children seem to be the victims, and at what times of the day it occurs. The teacher may offer an appropriate substitute such as a clock or teething toy which the child can bite and would not be harmful to the child. If there are certain situations in which the child bites, the caregiver should help the child either avoid or deal with these situations.

Biting should be dealt with immediately after it happens. Discourage parents from punishing the toddler at home for behavior at school because the toddler will have forgotten the reason for the punishment. The provider may want to discuss with all parents of children this age that biting is normal behavior and offer suggestions such as the ones above for parents to use at home.



UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES IS IT DESIRABLE FOR AN ADULT TO BITE A CHILD BACK OR TELL ANOTHER CHILD TO BITE BACK! If this occurs, the adult is encouraging the very behavior that is unacceptable. Besides, biting back will not show the child how it feels because children of this age are *too young to imagine themselves in another's place*. It is also not desirable to punish a child by washing their mouth out with soap or other unpleasant substances. In a child's mind this does not relate to the action of biting. The use of food as punishment or reward is never a good idea.

Biting can be frustrating for caregivers to deal with and hard for parents to understand, but with patience and time, caregiver's efforts will be rewarded.

What To Do When All Else Fails!

Basic Principles Underlying a Positive Approach to Guidance

Elizabeth Jane Row, PH.D.

1. All children have the basic need to be loved, feel secure, wanted and recognized as valuable. Treat each child with respect and personal interest.
2. All behavior (negative and positive) has a cause. The child is trying to tell you something by the way he/she behaves.
3. All children are trying the best they can to learn to live in the world. It takes time and training to learn to behave appropriately.
4. Children view the world differently than adults. They have a different point of view regarding behavior.
5. Adults are powerful models for children in showing them acceptable and appropriate behavior.
6. The underlying goal of guidance is to help the child toward achieving self-control, while nurturing a healthy self-concept.



Below are some general guidelines to discipline children:

1. Know the age appropriate expectations for your children and set realistic limits for their behavior. All people need limits. Maintain the limits consistently.
2. Keep your voice calm and firm. Children count on adults to be calm and in control. Use a tone of voice that communicates to the children that you expect they will behave appropriately.
3. Give directions in a positive fashion. Tell them what they can do and avoid the “don’ts”
4. Protect the rights of the people (children and adults) in the room and the property in the room.
5. Help children comply with your directions. Give them time and room for acceptable behavior. Don’t back them into a corner.
6. Avoid shaming and belittling children.



7. Leave the directions that you give to essentials. Avoid long, involved and wordy directions.
8. Play for smooth transitions. Give children warning about changes in activities and give them time to change.
9. Keep things busy and interesting and fun, and then there will be no time to get into trouble or be bored. Plan enough age-appropriate activities.
10. Give children liberal amounts of *sincere* praise and affirmation.
11. Give children responsibility for the care of the room and the equipment.
12. Tell children the reasons for the rules. Help them discover the answer to the “Why?”
13. Let children be children. Let them run, move, talk, make noise and deal with all their energies. Help them find acceptable ways to channel all the energy. Maintain your own energy and have fun with them!



NEW WAYS TO TALK ABOUT CHILDREN

By Kathie Spitzley

“Bobby is so hyper. He is all over the place. It’s no wonder I can’t teach him anything!”

How many times have you heard teachers or associates making negative comments about children or other adults? They seem to infer that by describing the child it should be obvious why the situation would seem unworkable. Sometimes a child’s qualities are only a problem because we chose to see them that way. In fact, what seems to be Bobby’s “problem” is often Bobby’s strength. High energy level may someday carry him to completion on a complex task or be what fuels his championship swimming ability. It is fun and helpful to think of positive sides of qualities that are often assumed to be problems in children. Read the list of problems on the left. Then look at the list on the right! Have fun!

Outer Appearance

quiet	inner directed
bossy	good director/leader
clingy	connected
tattletale	justice seeker
stubborn	focused/committed/determined
fussy about food/clothing	discriminating
talks back	courageous/honest
too talkative	good relater
finicky eater	future gourmet
doodles	creative
dawdles	easy going
nosy	high curiosity
mouthy	expressive
spoiled	well-loved
crabby	speaks out needs
wants attention	speaks out needs
sneaky	inventive
compulsive	efficient
silly	fun loving
goofy	untamed creativity
loud	expressive
plain	natural
shy	inner directed
timid	careful
dependent	connected
domineering	charismatic
fearful	careful risk taker
foolish	fun loving
rigid	high sense of order
guarded	watchfully observant

Personality

