

Discipline: How to Teach your Child Appropriate Behavior

General guidelines

1. Discipline means “teach.” Discipline doesn’t mean punishment! Tailor your discipline to the age of the child.
2. All consequences must occur immediately after the behavior, whether rewards, time out, etc.
3. Start now giving specific instructions. Instead of saying, “stop,” state what you would like to child to do, such as “Sit quietly,” or “Wait here.”
4. Don’t let one person be the one who always punishes.
5. Don’t say, “you were a bad boy/girl.” Children are not bad, but their behavior may not be desirable.
6. Set he child up to succeed. Use environmental controls. Ex: Putting breakables up high, taking several toys when on a long outing, having a specific place to study.
7. Choose your battles! You don’t have to change everything right now. Decide which behaviors are the most important or bothersome. Decide how to change that behavior.
8. Behaviors are hard to change! Think about the last time you decided to change a “bad habit.” It was hard and it took time. You made mistakes. But if you kept at it, you changed. Children are the same way!

Age	Qualities	Strategies
<8 months	Not moving around independently. Communicates by crying.	Meet the infant’s needs. Check for hunger, wet diaper, pain, sleepiness, etc.
8 months-18 months	Moving around. Beginning to be independent, and wants to try to be independent! Focused only on him or her. Can’t wait for things and has no understanding of time.	Safety proof the home and other places the child visits frequently. Prevent accidents. Distract the child when he or she plays with something dangerous or breakable. Ignore minor misbehavior. Begin saying, “no.” You can move them to an area where you want them. Encourage small steps in learning. You are an important role model. Reward and praise every appropriate behavior.
18 months-3 years	Moving around. Beginning to be independent, and wants to be increasingly independent! Focused only on him or her. Can’t wait for things and has no understanding of time.	Same as above. You can add time out. Reward and praise appropriate behavior.
3-6 years	The children understand feelings and behaviors. They can start to regulate themselves. They understand cause-effect relationships (If I throw a rock on the playground, I will go to time out and can’t play.)	Time out. Natural, logical consequences are important. For example, if I throw my toy, it will break. Start explaining why behavior is inappropriate (reason with the child). Reward and praise appropriate behavior frequently (almost every time).
6-12 years	Children understand time better. They can wait longer for rewards. School and peers become very important.	Decreased use of time out. Increase logical consequences (If I get my homework done quickly and correctly, I will have more time to play video games). Earn privileges for appropriate behavior. (Can use losing privileges.) Reward and praise appropriate behavior, but some rewards can be weekly instead of everyday.
12-18 years	Teenagers rebel against over control. They begin to establish their own identity. Their peers become the most important.	Logical consequences are important. (If I spend money on the CD, I won’t have money for a date.) Earn privileges for appropriate behavior. (Can use losing privileges.) Family conferences can help resolve conflict and increase agreement of rules. Reward and praise appropriate behavior.

Those Annoying Behaviors

Rewards and Praise

Rewards and praise are the most important technique you can use to change behavior!

No matter what positive reinforcer you use, pair it with verbal praise.

There are many fun ways to reward behavior, and many are inexpensive. It is important to reward your child with things that he or she likes not what we like. There are many possible choices:

Walks	Playground	Art activities	Small toys
Trip to park	Trip to museum	Trip to library	Stickers
Star chart	Limited TV time	Special time with Mom	Special time with Dad

The most important part of praise and rewards is that they must occur frequently. You can't praise and reward too much.

Ignoring Inappropriate Behavior

Ignore inappropriate behavior. Ignoring unwanted behaviors works well, but is very difficult to do! *Ignoring inappropriate behavior must be paired with rewards of desired behavior.*

Time Out

Time out works if you use it well and use it all the time. *You must use praise and rewards, or "time in," with time out.*

- List behaviors that will cause time out. Make two lists: one for behaviors that cause an immediate time out, such as hitting or running into the street. The second list has things that the child gets warnings first, such as picking up toys.
- Identify the place for time out, usually a chair in a quiet, safe place.
- If you make a request, wait before giving a warning. For example, ask the child, "Pick up your toys." Then wait 10 seconds. If the child doesn't begin to pick up the toys, say, "If you don't pick up your toys you will go to time out. Please pick up your toys. Then wait another 10 seconds. Then if the child hasn't started picking up the toys, place him or her in time out.
- Use a timer with a bell, one minute or less of time out for each year of age. Explain why time out is given—Since you didn't pick up your toys, you are going to time out. Don't lecture or give long explanations.
- If the child leaves time out before the bell, return to time out, again with no discussion.
- When time out is over, start immediately back with rewards and praise, "time in."

Tantrums:

Usually between 18 months and 3 years.

Do walk away and ignore the behavior—and that is very hard to do! If the child follows and persists, continue to walk away.

Do not show anger or hit the child.

Biting:

Also 18 months to 3 years

Say (don't yell) "No biting." Don't bite back. Don't laugh and indicate you think it is funny to have a child bite.

Eating:

Defiant children can throw food on the floor, not eat with family, constantly get out of the high chair, drink too many fluids, receive too many snacks. Problems with eating when young can translate to problems eating when older.

Offer children three meals a day. If child insists on getting down, that's it: no more food until the next meal. If parent weakens and wants to give child something, offer same meal just rejected.

Have children come to table with family and get down when finished

Restrict fluids and snacks between meals.

Turn off the TV, put the toys away.

Sleep:

Start good sleep habit near birth: Put baby in bed drowsy, but not asleep. Begin play and eat during day and sleep at night.

Charts for how much sleep to get

No co-sleeping, night time feedings

Ferber: place child (>6mo) in bed. Leave bedroom. Return at longer and longer intervals

If child >2 yo gets out of bed, return them to bed. Tell them to stay.

Can indicate stress in the family

Ms. Garcia brings Julio, a 20 month old, in to see you for a routine health assessment. You ask about behavior. She is frustrated with his behavior. She reports, "He's always getting mad. He throws himself to the floor and starts to scream. The screaming seems endless. He hits his arms, legs, and head on the floor. I'm afraid he's going to hurt himself."

Ms. Collins brings Katie, a second grader, into clinic because she is failing in school. She says she seems very bright, but can't seem to get good grades. She got the following grades on the report card she got last Tuesday:

Reading	F
Math	C
Science	C
History	C
Conduct	U

Ms. Stephens brings Jessica in for her 9 month routine health assessment. Her behavior is great, but when you ask about sleeping, Ms. Stephens rolls her eyes in frustration. She says, "Jessica just will not go to sleep at night. She stays asleep once she gets to sleep. But, it often takes us three hours to get her settled in her bed at night."

Ms. Melton brings Leah, a three year old, in to see you because she has a cold. You are finished talking with her about the cold and ask if there are any more questions. She pauses, then asks, "How can I get Leah to eat more? Will vitamins help?"