

## Discipline Strategies and Technics

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 acknowledges the child's efforts and progress, no matter how slow or small, is 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."