

THE ABCs OF DISCIPLINE AT HOME



Ways Parents Can Help Their Children
Do Better in School



One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

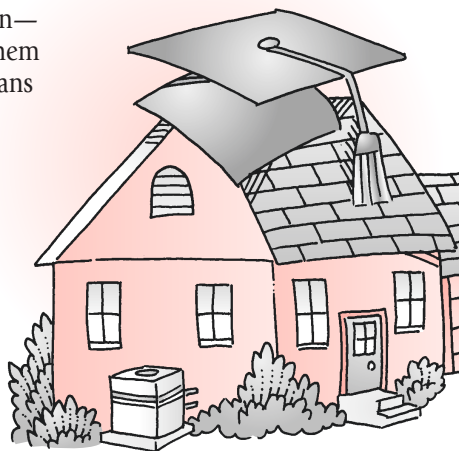
THE • DISCIPLINE • SERIES

Discipline Means Teaching

Some people think discipline means punishing children—controlling them, making them “obedient.” But it really means *teaching*.

Discipline is:

- **Teaching** children to live and work with others.
- **Teaching** children self-controlled, responsible behavior.
- **Teaching** children to become independent, well-adjusted adults.



Schools work to teach

children discipline, but schools can't do the job alone.

Children spend far more time at home than they do in school.

In fact, the primary place children learn discipline is at home.

Of course, schools will keep working to do their part. But to raise well-disciplined children *both at home and at school*, parents and schools must work together.

This booklet summarizes some of the most important basics of discipline—practical ideas you can use at home right now.

Tip: *Don't expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make parenting changes is one step at a time. Focus on one or two ideas at a time ... and don't forget to celebrate progress!*



**Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun.*

We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.

Do Any of These Discipline Mistakes Sound Familiar?

Discipline is a big challenge. Here are common discipline mistakes most parents make at one time or another:

- **Yelling** to let kids know you *mean business!* Kids figure out you are yelling because you don't know what else to do—so they tune you out.
- **Labeling**—saying things like, “You’re so lazy,” “You’re so dumb.” Eventually your child may believe it—and act like it.
- **Making idle threats.** “Sit down this minute or I’ll never take you for a ride again!” Kids won’t take you seriously if you threaten what you can’t—or aren’t willing to—enforce.
- **Nagging**—telling children over and over again to do something. It often motivates kids *not to do* what you want them to do.
- **Praising too much—or too little.** Praise too much and the child can get an unrealistic view of himself and may not learn to pursue goals for his own satisfaction. Praise too little and he may suffer from poor self-esteem.
- **Treating kids like little adults.** Children lack adult experience and judgment. They need behavior boundaries and someone to look to for strength, protection and guidance.
- **Using bribes instead of rewards.** Rewards should reinforce good behavior. A bribe is a reward to stop bad behavior. Confused? Children are, too!
- **Disagreeing in front of children.** When parents argue openly over family rules, kids get confused and insecure. A united front keeps children from playing one parent against the other.



If you recognize yourself making any of these common mistakes, try the ideas in this booklet.

We asked more than 20,000 discipline experts—school leaders with many years of experience working with children—what they would like to tell parents about the ABCs of discipline. Here are their most important ideas.

Be Firm, Fair & Consistent

You are the parent, and only you can decide how to carry out discipline in your own home. But, no matter what you do, the experts say the secret of success is to be *firm, fair and consistent*.



Be Firm

You are the adult, and you are in charge. You have the maturity and the experience. Your child doesn't. Only an adult can establish the limits of acceptable behavior in your household. With loving firmness and authority, you must establish the rules and firmly enforce them.

Be Fair

Children have a keen sense of fairness. They will accept nearly any rule you make if they understand that it is fair and that it is being applied fairly. If kids believe a rule is unfair, they will resent it and disobey it.

Be Consistent

Children will test you to find the limits. That's natural. It's how they learn what you *really* believe and what the rules *really* are. Your actions always speak louder than your words.

You may say the rule is "No TV until homework is done." But if your child finds she can sometimes talk you into letting her watch a program, she learns that the rule really is, "No TV—unless you can talk me into it."

If you are consistent, your child will learn the important lessons discipline can teach. If you are not consistent, your child will be confused and won't learn much of anything.

Establish Rules and Expectations

Children need and want limits. They want to know what is expected of them. Rules and expectations are important, and only you can set them up.

Tips for Making Rules That Work

- **You decide on the rules, but get your child's suggestions.**
Here are some kinds of rules many families have found useful. Make your own headings, then talk about rules that would be useful under each.

Permission	Obedience	Neatness	Respect
Getting permission from parents:	Following parents' directions:	Keeping yourself and your room tidy:	Being polite to parents and others:
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____	5. _____	5. _____

After getting your child's ideas, decide on the final rules. Write them out on a sheet of paper and put the rules up for all to see.

- **Talk about the reasons for every rule.** No one likes rules that don't make sense.
- **Don't have more rules than your child can remember** or than you can enforce.
- **Don't make the rules so tough that no one can follow them.** Be sure you can follow them yourself.

Communicate Your Expectations

Think about what you expect of your child on subjects like: the grades he should be making in school, how much education he should get (high school? college?), how much he should be reading, how he should cooperate with teachers. Talk with your child about your expectations often.

Let Natural & Logical Consequences Help You

Teaching children that actions have consequences is one of the most powerful of all discipline techniques. It teaches children to take responsibility for their actions.

See that your child experiences the consequences of her actions. Natural consequences mean you need to do nothing at all—the consequence just happens. The natural consequence of not studying for a test is getting a poor grade. Next time, your child may be more interested in studying.

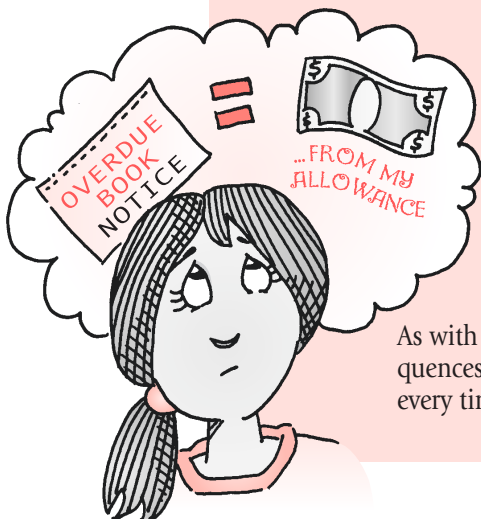
But some actions have no natural consequences. That's when you need to step in and set up a logical consequence. If your daughter loses a school book and you require her to come up with the money to buy a new one, that's a logical consequence. You have chosen a consequence that makes sense for the original action.

Tests of an Effective Logical Consequence:

To be effective, a consequence should meet three criteria:

1. Is it logically related to the misbehavior?
2. Is its enforcement respectful of your child?
3. Is it reasonable to you *and* your child?

As with all discipline techniques, the consequences must be consistently enforced—every time—or they accomplish little.



Set Up Routines

A routine is a simple series of steps a person learns to repeat without thinking. Psychologist Rudolf Dreikurs said, “Routine is to a child what walls are to a house; it gives boundaries and dimensions to his life. Routine gives a feeling of security.”

By setting up routines, you provide “road maps” of good behavior for your child. Soon, doing the right thing becomes automatic.

5 Steps to Setting Up a Routine:

- 1. Describe the problem you want to solve.**
Pick a time when everyone is relaxed, or discuss the issue at a family meeting.
- 2. Brainstorm solutions and ideas, giving everyone—parents and children alike—an opportunity to make suggestions.**
- 3. Make up a step-by-step list of what each person will do, using everyone’s best ideas. Here’s a sample:**

Getting Off to School:

- Backpacks are packed and put by the front door before bedtime.
- Mom has the bathroom from 6 a.m. to 6:30, Dad—6:30 to 7:00, Sean—7:00 to 7:15, Caitlin—7:15 to 7:30.
- All beds made and rooms picked up by 7:35.
- Sean pours cereal and juice for everyone by 7:40.
- Breakfast finished by 8:00.
- Mom has lunches packed by 8:10.
- Caitlin cleans table and Dad stacks dishes by 8:10.
- Everyone out the door by 8:15.

Routines are great for:

Getting off to school

...

Coming home from school

...

Meal time

...

Chore Time

...

Homework Time

...

Bed time

- 4. Practice the new routine for a couple of days and make adjustments as needed. Make it fun.**
- 5. Repeat for 21 days—and the routine will be set.**

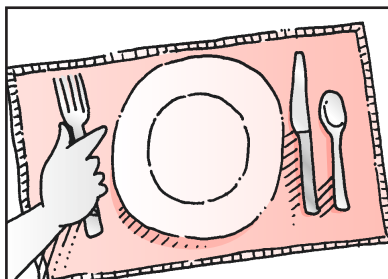
Teach Your Child to Accept Responsibility

Teaching your child to accept responsibility for his actions is one of the highest goals of discipline. Here's how to do it:

1. Give your child real responsibilities.
2. Encourage your child to do the right thing.
3. Require your child to accept the consequences of his actions.

Giving your child responsibilities at home is one of the best ways to teach responsibility. Here are some ways to do it:

- **Let your child help select responsibilities.**
Talk about jobs that need to be done. Then ask your child to volunteer for some of them. That key step—*asking*, rather than *telling*—can make the difference.
- **Assign chores that will help your child develop skills in all areas of life.** Chores should help him develop skills in personal care, clothing care, house cleaning, cooking and money management.

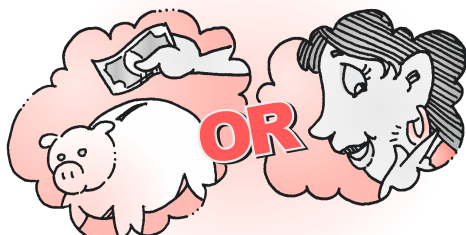


- **Show your child how to do the chore correctly.** Be sure he knows your expectations.
- **Don't expect more from a child than he is capable of doing.** Ask yourself: Is my child ready—emotionally, physically and mentally—to perform this task?
- **Don't assign it if you won't enforce it.** Even though it will be your child's responsibility to do the job, your job will be to monitor your child's performance and praise or encourage as appropriate.

Perhaps you could do the job better. But that won't help your child learn. Point out what your child does right—and demonstrate again if needed. But don't redo the job. Let him experience the consequences of doing it right—or wrong.

Help Your Child Learn to Make Good Decisions

The ability to make good decisions is one of the most important qualities of a “disciplined” child—and it is a skill that improves with practice.



Your child must make decisions every day. Some are as trivial as what to eat for breakfast. Other decisions can have serious life consequences: How do I deal with peer pressure to try alcohol, tobacco, drugs? How important are good grades? What about education after high school?

3 Steps You Can Take at Home

- 1. Give your child practice making decisions every day.**
A kindergartner can pick library books or choose between two or three sets of school clothes to wear the next day. An older child can select vegetables for dinner, gifts for family birthdays, the color to paint her room. Ask yourself, “Could my child decide this for herself?” Whenever possible say, “You decide.”
- 2. Let your child live with the consequences of her decisions.**
Don’t be too quick to shield your child from the results of her decisions. Running out of money the day she gets her allowance—and doing without the rest of the week—can teach her more about making good budget decisions than you can ever tell her.
- 3. Talk about the results of your child’s decisions.** Ask your child to talk about what happened as a result of her choices: “I decided to play right after school and now I don’t have time to do my homework before bedtime.” “I studied an hour every day for my math test and I got an A!” Help your child see the connection between a decision and the consequences.

"Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

—James Baldwin

Be a Good Example

No matter what you want to teach your child, it's always good to remember that the example you set by *what you do* will always have more influence than *what you say*.

Children are great observers. They learn the complicated art of speech while they are still babies. They figure out how to walk without any lessons. They learn that crying gets attention. They learn that smiling makes others happy. They learn all those things long before they ever start school—just by watching and listening to others—and as they grow, they continue to learn in exactly the same way.

Use the Power of Example To Teach Your Child

1. Decide what you want to teach your child.

Perhaps you want to teach responsibility for completing chores.

The key is to decide what you specifically want to teach.



2. Demonstrate what you want your child to learn.

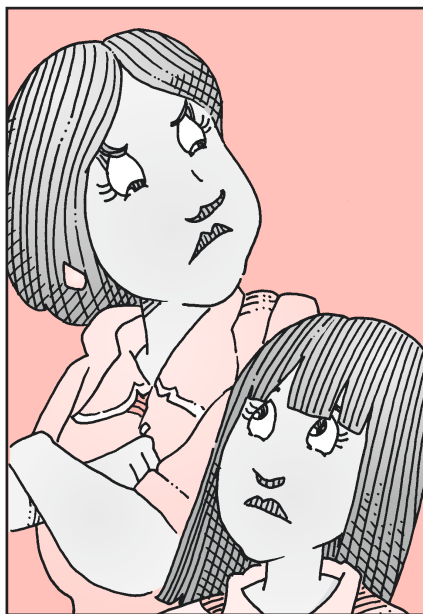
For example, make sure your child sees you doing your chores—like vacuuming the house every weekend. Talk about how you complete your chores even when you are tired, or when you would rather do something else. When your child sees that you feel chores are important enough to complete, he will learn to do the same.

Control Your Anger

Your child should know that you are unhappy when she has misbehaved. But nothing is accomplished if you lose control when trying to discipline your child. If you are out of control you can't teach your child what she needs to learn.

You Can Be Effective & Still Control Your Anger

- 1. Experiment to see what works best to help control your anger:** Leave the room. Drink a glass of water. Some parents refuse to react immediately when they are angry. They say, "I am angry right now. We will discuss this after dinner." That gives everyone a cooling-off period—and useful time to think.
- 2. Use a long, meaningful stare to "say" what needs to be said.** Children usually know *exactly* what they have done wrong. A great way to control your anger and deliver precisely the right message is to say nothing. Just give your child a long ... meaningful ... stare. She will "fill in" exactly the right words. She has nothing to argue about, and you stay in control.
- 3. Speak softly to be heard.** When there is lots of noise and your child is screaming, use the control technique teachers use—speak quietly. Even whisper. The contrast will get your child's attention fast.
- 4. Say, "I'll certainly keep that in mind."** Calm your child's indignant protests just by letting her know she has been heard. ("I hate running the vacuum!") Look her in the eye, and say with perfect honesty, "I'll certainly keep that in mind."



Treat Your Child With Respect

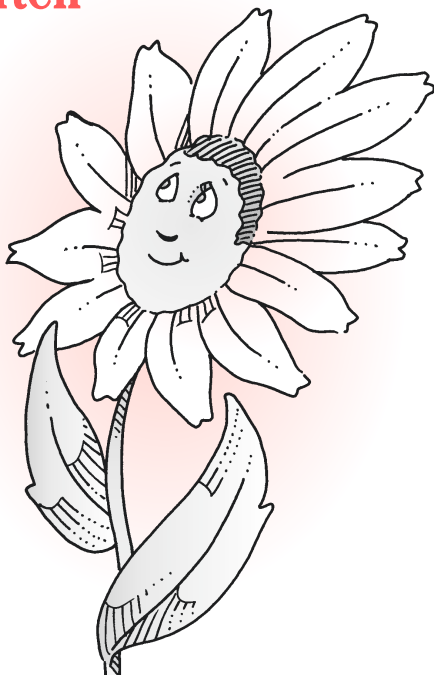
When children know their parents respect them, discipline is more effective. They know their parents want to help them. Here are some effective ways to show your child respect:

1. **Talk with your child every day.** Look at your child and give him your full attention. Don't interrupt. Listen more than you talk. Your child will have plenty to say once he sees that you are really interested.
2. **Ask your child's opinion often.** Asking your child what he thinks shows that you think he matters. Even a young child has worthwhile, thoughtful opinions, and he will share them if given the chance.
3. **Discipline your child privately,** when possible, not in front of a friend. Humiliation doesn't show respect. A child who is humiliated or embarrassed is not likely to learn what you're trying to teach.

Praise Your Child Often

Praise is to a child as water is to a flower. It helps him blossom into his best—and that's what you're trying to achieve through discipline.

Praise good behavior, accomplishments and progress often. But don't overdo it, or your praise won't mean much. A good rule of thumb: Compliments should outweigh corrections about three to one. If your ratio is far higher, your praise may be insincere or exaggerated; if lower, you may be too critical.



Show Your Child Your Love

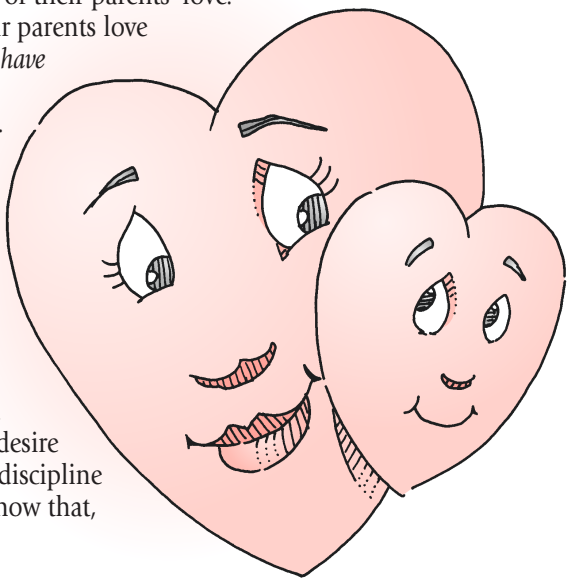
Children need to be sure of their parents' love.

They need to know their parents love them *now*, that they *always have* loved them and *always will* love them, no matter what.

It is not enough to simply love your child. Children of all ages need to *know* they are loved.

They need to hear you say, "I love you" day after day. They need to see it in your eyes, hear it in your voice and read it in your actions.

Parents' love, and their desire to help, is the reason they discipline children. When children know that, it helps them learn.



'I Don't Love Your Behavior, But I Do Love You'

Don't let your child think you only love her if she makes a good grade, or if she does as you say, or if she does her chores.

So when your child misbehaves, tell her you love her and want to help her.

Your child will thrive on an attitude that says, "You're a good kid. But right now we have a problem that needs fixing." That attitude makes kids want to cooperate.

When you have to discipline your child, make sure she knows you love her. But that doesn't mean she can keep teasing her little sister.

Support Good Discipline at School

Here are some ways to make sure your child is well behaved at school as well as at home:

1. **Know and support school rules.** Get a copy of the school's policy on discipline and rules of conduct. Review the rules with your child to be sure everyone understands what's expected.
2. **Show your child you are interested** in what she does at school.
3. **Stress the importance** of good discipline to your child.
4. **Be sure your child eats properly.** Bad eating habits may cause mood swings and discipline problems.
5. **Insist on good discipline at home.**

What If Your Child is Disciplined at School?

When your child is disciplined at school, a natural reaction is to be angry—perhaps at your child, perhaps at the school, perhaps at both. But the best reaction is to put your emotions on hold. Then:

- **Talk calmly with your child** about what happened and express support for the school staff until you can collect all the facts. It is important for your child to see that you and the school are a team.
- **Call the teacher or principal** and set up a time when you can talk.
- **Collect all the facts** before you blame or defend your child.
- **Listen to what the teacher or principal** has to say. Then give your viewpoint.
- **Try not to take it personally** that your child has been disciplined.
- **Remember that even though you may sometimes disagree** with the school, you both want the same thing—the very best for your child!



The ABCs of Discipline

- Be firm, fair and consistent.
- Establish rules and expectations.
- Let natural and logical consequences help you.
- Set up routines.
- Teach your child to accept responsibility.
- Help your child learn to make good decisions.
- Be a good example.
- Control your anger.
- Treat your child with respect.
- Praise your child often.
- Show your child your love.



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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin. Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Writer: Luann Fulbright. Editor: Erika Beasley. Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Alison McLean.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola. Business Manager: Cynthia Lees.

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Distribution Manager: Marc Sasseville.

Graphic Design & Illustrations: Joe Mignella, Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.