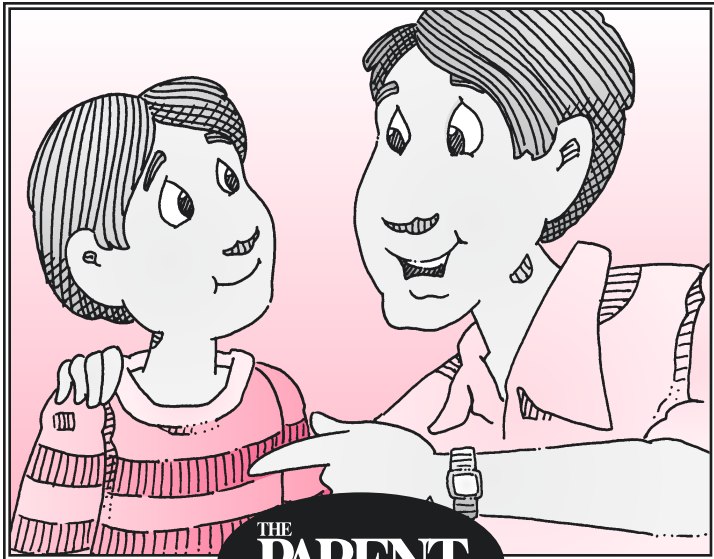


SCHOOL READINESS SERIES
FOR
PRESCHOOL
PARENTS

Building **Discipline** & **Responsibility**



THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

Why Are Discipline and Responsibility So Important?

Your child's overall success will depend on her ability to be disciplined and responsible. She'll have to finish homework on time, get along well with others and make important decisions—often without your help.



That's why it's important to start teaching children about discipline and responsibility *before* they begin school, while you're there to offer plenty of guidance and support. Children who learn about responsibility early have an advantage as students—they can focus more on schoolwork and less on discipline.

When thinking about discipline, keep in mind that it's not the same thing as punishment. The word *discipline* really means teaching. When you show your child how to choose responsible behaviors, you are disciplining her—teaching her.

Discipline is a challenge. But the ideas in this booklet will make it easier and more rewarding for you and your child.



**Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.*

How Does Age Affect Discipline?

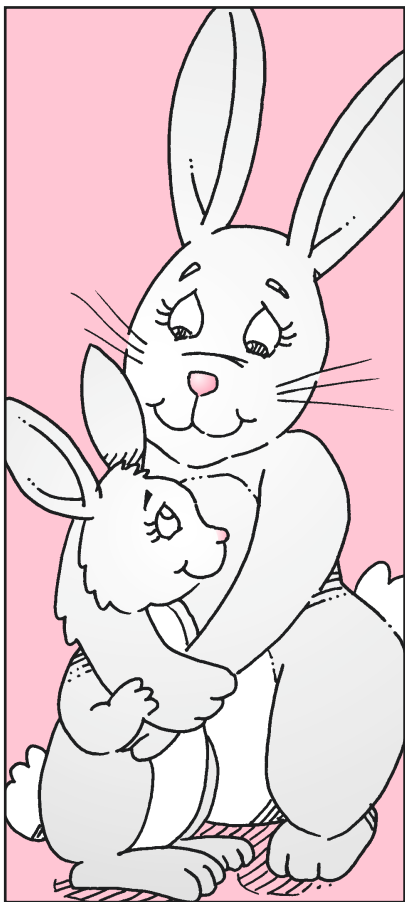
As your child grows, you'll have to change the ways you discipline him. That's because children learn in different ways at different ages. For instance, a baby can't follow rules, but a preschooler can. Here's a short description of how discipline skills develop:

- **Babies** don't have any self-control. The best way to teach them is by example. For instance, when you meet your baby's needs repeatedly, you show him what it means to be reliable.
- **Toddlers** have some self-control, but it's limited. It's hard for them to imagine how others feel, so they often don't understand the effects of their actions. For example, a toddler who hits may not know he's causing pain. Making a few easy-to-understand rules will help your toddler improve his behavior.
- **Preschoolers** are better at understanding rules and consequences. For instance, a four-year-old might think, "I shouldn't hit because it hurts someone else. And Mommy will be upset with me." This helps improve self-control.



Discipline Begins With Respect and Love

Discipline works best when children are loved and respected. Love and the desire to help are the reasons parents discipline children. When children know that, it helps them learn. To show love and respect for your child:



- **Say “I love you”** every day. Experts say simply loving children isn’t enough. It’s important to express love with actions *and* words often.
- **Be involved.** Spend time learning about your child’s likes and dislikes. Ask her opinion about things. Talk about her hopes and dreams.
- **Discipline in private.** Try to avoid embarrassing your child in front of others. When a child is humiliated, it’s hard for her to learn what you’re trying to teach.
- **Criticize your child’s actions**—not your *child*. This shows that, although you don’t love your child’s behavior, you do love *her*.
- **Believe in your child.** Children generally do what we expect of them. If you expect your child to succeed, she probably will.
- **Use praise often.** Tell your child that you are proud of her accomplishments.

FIRM, *Fair* Consistent

Be Firm, Fair and Consistent

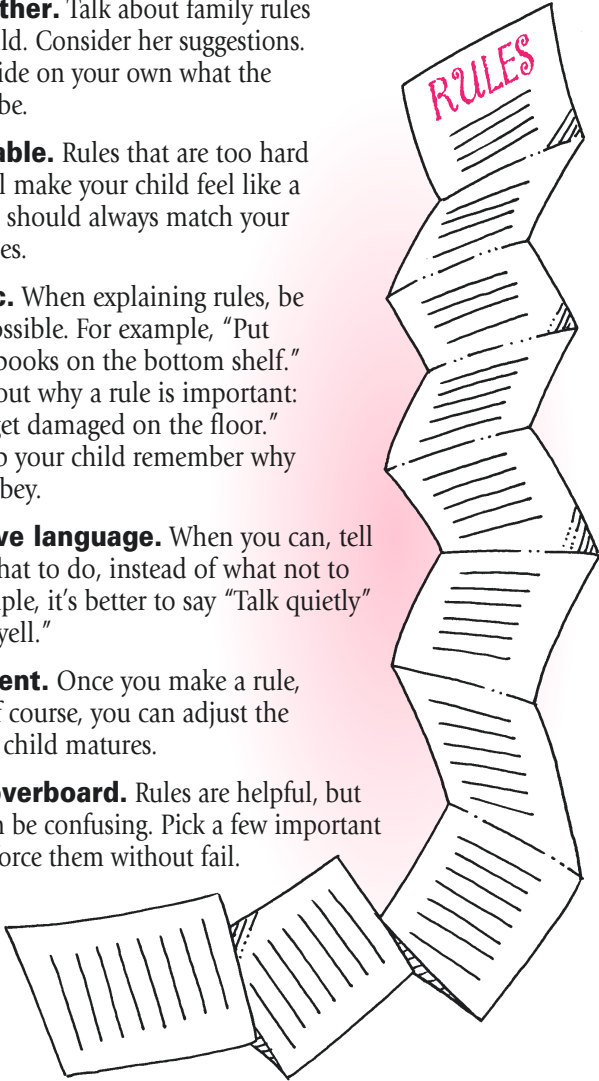
In addition to love and respect, there are three other keys to effective discipline: firmness, fairness and consistency. Remember when using discipline:

- **Be firm.** A firm parent is very much in charge, but willing to listen. Letting your child do anything he pleases—or ignoring his desires completely—can lead to poor school performance.
- **Be fair.** Children will accept almost any rule if they understand that it is fair and that it is being applied fairly. If your child believes a rule is unfair, he may resent and disobey it.
- **Be consistent.** All children will test you to find limits. For example, you may say the rule is “No bedtime story until you pick up your toys.” But if your child finds he can sometimes talk you into a bedtime story, he learns the rule really is “No bedtime story—unless you can talk me into it.” Without consistency, your child may become confused and miss out on important lessons.

Make Rules Meaningful

Children need limits—and they also want them. Rules help children feel safe while they explore and learn. Rules are most effective when parents follow these suggestions:

- **Work together.** Talk about family rules with your child. Consider her suggestions. But YOU decide on your own what the rules should be.
- **Be reasonable.** Rules that are too hard to follow will make your child feel like a failure. Rules should always match your child's abilities.
- **Be specific.** When explaining rules, be as clear as possible. For example, "Put your library books on the bottom shelf." Also, talk about why a rule is important: "Books can get damaged on the floor." This will help your child remember why she should obey.
- **Use positive language.** When you can, tell your child what to do, instead of what not to do. For example, it's better to say "Talk quietly" than "Don't yell."
- **Be consistent.** Once you make a rule, stick to it. Of course, you can adjust the rules as your child matures.
- **Don't go overboard.** Rules are helpful, but too many can be confusing. Pick a few important rules and enforce them without fail.

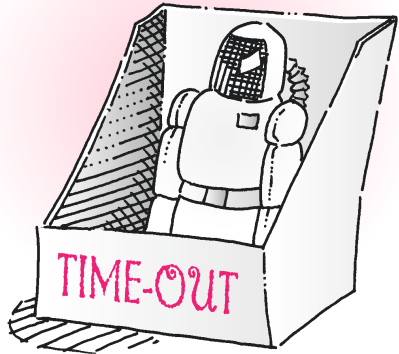


Use Natural and Logical Consequences

No matter how good your family's rules are, mistakes will be made. A chore won't get done. Or one child will be mean to another. This is normal. After all, no one is perfect. The most important thing is to learn from mistakes—and consequences often are the best way to do this.

There are two types of consequences: natural and logical. Here's how they work:

- **Natural consequences** mean parents do nothing at all—the consequence just happens. For example, a child who plays outside without wearing sunblock will get sunburned. Of course, you must protect your child from dangerous natural consequences. A child who disobeys and plays in the street could be hurt or killed.
- **Logical consequences** are used when misbehavior has no natural consequence. When possible, plan them ahead of time. For example, if your child abuses one of his toys, he loses the privilege of playing with it for a day. Logical consequences should always be:
 - Related to the misbehavior. (Your child needs to see the connection.)
 - Respectful of your child.
 - Reasonable to you and your child.
 - Consistently enforced.

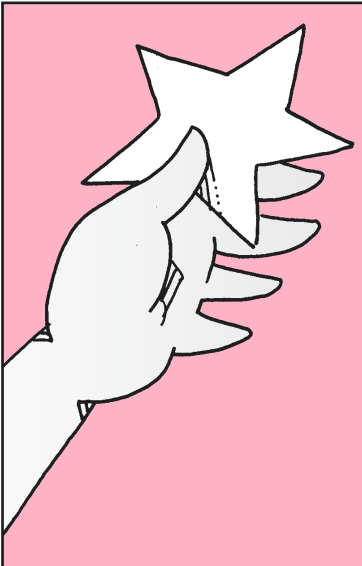


Here's another tip: When your child makes a mistake, ask him what he gained from the experience. What would he do differently next time? What did he learn that can help him in the future? Talk about how mistakes can help us become better people.

Reward Your Child's Successes

It's just as important to reward your child's accomplishments as it is to notice her mistakes. In fact, it's probably more important. Parents' praise and recognition mean more to children than nearly anything else. When praise is used too often, however, it loses its impact. The right balance seems to be to compliment about three times as much as you criticize. To be effective when praising your child:

- **Be specific.** Tell your child exactly what you like about her behavior. Say, "Thank you for being quiet while I was on the phone" instead of "Good girl!"
- **Notice effort.** Don't wait until your child completes a task to give praise. Comment on her improvement every step of the way.
- **Remember.** Every once in a while, mention your child's past accomplishments. For example, "Remember when you helped Jamie fix her toy?"



- **Chart successes.** If your child is working on a specific skill, keep track of her progress. You might put a star on the calendar for every day she gets herself dressed.
- **Brag.** Occasionally, let your child "overhear" you talking about her good behavior to others.
- **Give awards.** Words aren't the only form of praise. Try giving awards, such as the "Self-Starter Award." Each week, recognize the family member who took the most responsibility for doing things without being reminded.



Be a Responsible Role Model

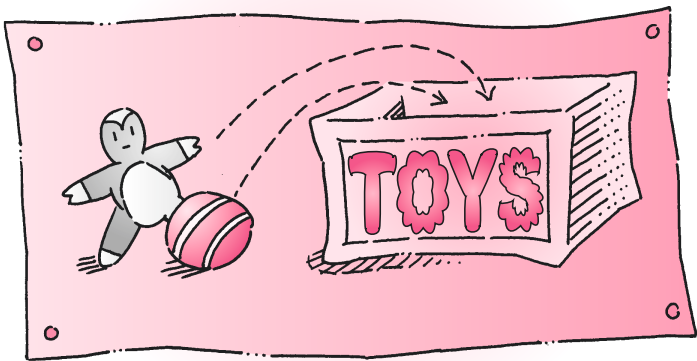
Your child learns all kinds of skills by watching you—including how to be responsible. To show your child what being responsible means:

- **Control your anger.** Instead of lashing out when you're upset, take time to cool down. This shows your child that it's better to solve problems when you're calm and thinking clearly.
- **Admit mistakes.** When you admit errors and apologize for them, your child learns that he can, too. It teaches that part of growing up is taking responsibility for what you say and do.
- **Be self-disciplined.** Make it a priority to be on time, keep promises, and take care of your own chores and responsibilities.
- **Face problems head-on.** Show your child that resolving problems quickly stops them from growing.

Trust Your Child With Responsibilities

Giving your child responsibilities is another kind of praise. It shows you believe in your child, and builds her self-confidence. Responsibilities also provide hands-on experience in self-discipline. They teach kids how to depend on themselves to get things done. To build your child's sense of responsibility:

- **Choose responsibilities your child can handle.** Young children have limited attention spans, so short activities are best. Here are some examples:
 - **Age two** - Put dirty clothes in the hamper.
 - **Age three** - Carry light grocery items into the house.
 - **Age four** - Help clear the table.
 - **Age five** - Straighten up bedroom.
- **Let children help pick chores.** Talk about jobs that need to be done. Then help your child choose a few. Involving your child can make the difference.



- **Break chores into small parts.** For example, instead of saying "Clean your room," say, "Put your toys in the toy chest. Then put your art supplies on your desk." Show your child how to do chores or help her with them first.
- **Don't redo your child's work.** Instead, explain how to improve it. Redoing a job hurts your child's self-esteem.

- **Keep track of chores.** Make sure your child completes her responsibilities. If she doesn't, let her learn from the consequences.
- **Encourage community responsibility.** As a family, donate time or goods to charitable causes.
- **Discuss irresponsibility.** Talk about what happens when things don't get done. What if the plants weren't watered? What if the dishes weren't washed?
- **Be patient.** Keep in mind that experts say we need to repeat an action every day for 21 days for it to become a habit.
- **Praise your child's efforts.** It feels good to be recognized for a job well done.

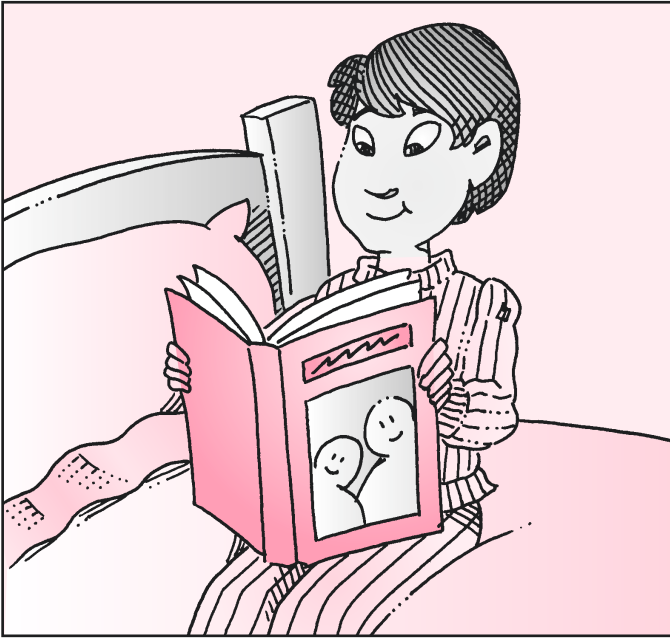


Practice Solving Problems

One of the hardest times to be responsible is when there's a problem. It can be tempting to shout angrily or leave things unresolved. Learning to solve problems before they arise is important. To help your child become a good problem solver:

- **Discuss the "Golden Rule."** Getting along with others is easier if you "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Explain to your preschooler that this means asking himself how he would feel if someone did this to him.
- **Role play.** Talk about situations your child might encounter. For example, "What would you do if a playmate teased you?" Act out the situation with your child playing himself.
- **Give your child options.** For instance, "Would you like to wear jeans or shorts today?" This helps him become comfortable with decision making. With regular practice, you may be surprised at how good your child becomes at making good decisions.





- **Solve problems as a family.** Include your child in conversations about minor family problems. Take turns listening to each other and choose a solution together.
- **Teach tolerance.** Talk about the importance of accepting and enjoying people's differences. Describe how you've learned to get along with people who seem very different.
- **Trust your child's judgment.** When your child comes to you with a problem, see if he can solve it first. Say, "What do you think you should do?"
- **Encourage persistence.** When your child is working on a problem, don't let him give up easily. Make sure he gives it his all before you consider helping.
- **Compromise.** Practice meeting halfway with your child on negotiable issues. For example, you might let him stay up 10 minutes later if he spends the time playing quietly in his room or looking at a book.



Set the Stage for Success

You can work as a family on certain skills that promote self-discipline. As a result, you're all likely to be more responsible. Here are some examples:

- **Organization.** Decide together where you'll keep everything from toys to trash. Knowing where things are makes family responsibilities easier. For example, if pet food is always in the same place, the dog is more likely to get fed.
- **Goal setting.** Set goals as individuals and as a family. To help your child with this, encourage her to choose a challenging, but attainable, goal. Start with one that will take about a week to reach. Then decide how she'll accomplish it, step by step. At the end of the week, evaluate her progress. Did she reach her goal? Why or why not? How did the family support her efforts?
- **Time management.** Household routines make it easier to remember what should be done when. For example, for your child's morning routine she gets up, makes her bed, helps set the table and eats breakfast.

Many parents wish they could always be there to guide and protect their children. But teaching children to be self-disciplined is even more rewarding. That's because it gives kids a skill they can use forever—the ability to take care of themselves.



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Writer: *Susan O'Brien*. Editor: *Erika Beasley*. Translations Editor: *Victoria Gaviola*.
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Graphic Design & Illustrations: *Joe Mignella, Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ*.