



**Questions Parents Ask About ...**

# Discipline





## The Truth About Discipline

**C**hildren thrive on loving and consistent discipline. But remember: Discipline is not the same as punishment. The goal of discipline is not to make children obey their parents. The true goal of discipline involves teaching children to:

- » **Develop a sense** of which behaviors are acceptable and which are not.
- » **Respect rules**, authority and others.
- » **Take responsibility** and accept consequences for their actions.

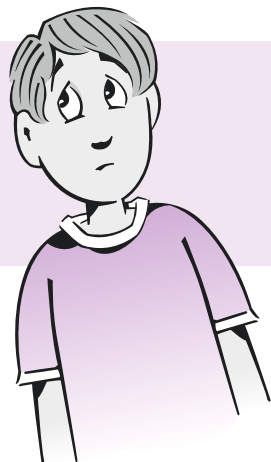
For discipline to be effective, consistency is crucial. The rules you set yesterday should also apply tomorrow. The respectful behavior you teach and expect at home should also apply in the classroom, on the playground and in the supermarket.

This booklet is filled with practical solutions to questions parents ask about raising respectful and well-disciplined children who feel secure and loved.



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

***My child is constantly forgetting things—from bringing his homework to school to what I asked him to do just five minutes ago. What can I do without having to nag him?***



One of the most powerful of all discipline techniques is teaching your child that actions have consequences. Why should he remember to bring his homework to school if he knows you'll jump in the car and deliver it? Why should he feed the cat if he knows you'll keep reminding him—or do it yourself?

To teach your child to take responsibility for his actions, use:

## Natural consequences

Don't let your child make excuses. Let him experience the consequences. If he frequently forgets his homework at home:

- » **Don't bail him out** by taking it to school for him.
- » **Say, "I'm sorry,** but actions have consequences. You'll have to tell your teacher you left it at home."
- » **Let him experience a bad grade.** Next time, he'll know that turning in homework is *his* responsibility.

## Logical consequences

Sometimes there is no natural consequence and you have to assign a logical consequence. If your child fails to feed the cat after school when you repeatedly ask him to do it, then:

- » **Let him do without** his own after-school snack for two days, for example.
- » **Make sure the consequence** is reasonable for both of you. You will need to enforce it *every time*.

*My child spends his day in a disorganized mess. He never seems to know where his things are or what he's supposed to do next. He really needs to become more self-disciplined. How can I help him?*



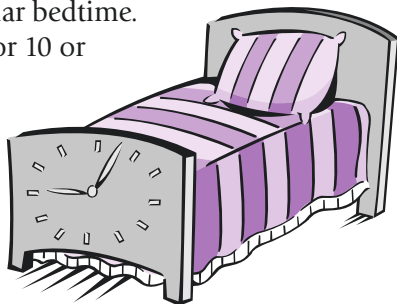
Use the power of routines. Most children thrive on them. Think about it: A basic school day is guided by routines. Knowing what to expect helps kids feel safe, secure and able to learn. Routines also promote responsibility. Once a child is completely familiar with his routine, he can begin to perform it independently.

## Establish routines

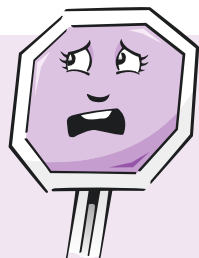
To get started, write down routines for everyday activities. Post them where your child can refer to them. Here's an example of a daily routine he can follow:

- » **Morning.** Get up. Use the bathroom. Get dressed. (Lay out clothes the night before.) Make his bed. Eat breakfast.
- » **After school.** Put his backpack next to his study spot. Hang up his jacket. Have a snack. Play. Settle down to homework.
- » **Homework.** (Have him start this routine at school by placing a bright sticky note on items he needs to bring home.) Focus on homework at the same time and in the same place. Then, his backpack goes by the front door.
- » **Bedtime.** Establish a regular bedtime. Get ready for bed. Read for 10 or 15 minutes. Lights out.

Stick to the routine for three weeks. Experts say that after 21 days a repeated action is likely to become a habit.



*Last week, my child had a total meltdown in the supermarket. She constantly whines to get her way. I know she's manipulating me. How can I make this behavior stop?*



From claims of “I can’t go to school because I have a stomachache” or “You’re the meanest parent” to pleas of “Just 10 more minutes,” children learn to push the right buttons to get what they want. Your job is to keep those buttons from being pushed and to curb the manipulative behavior.

Here’s what to do:

- » **Remove her.** This is difficult to do, especially when you are in a public place like the supermarket and you’re tempted to give in to almost anything—just to stop her from fussing. But it works. At the first sign of a stomping foot or a quivering lip, take her out of the store. Don’t yell. Just leave the scene until she calms down.
- » **Set clear rules.** Explain your expectations to your child. Make sure she understands. Then, if she complains and says, “I’ll do my homework after I watch this show,” set her straight: “Sorry, but you know the rule: Homework comes first. Then we can discuss TV shows.”
- » **Make *no* mean *no*.** Don’t let your child pull you into an unwanted discussion. Whether you hold up one hand or simply say, “Enough,” develop a signal that tells her the case is closed. It will show her that you mean what you say.
- » **Be consistent.** If you give in *sometimes*, your child will learn soon enough which buttons she *can* push and when.



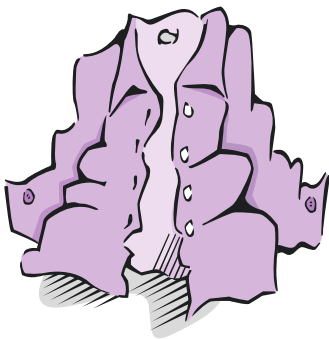
*I'm constantly reminding my child to finish his chores. I've tried nagging, time outs, sending him to his room—but nothing works. We argue until he wears me out, and I simply give up—and do it myself. Any ideas?*



**S**ometimes parents get locked in power struggles with their children. Or they go along with almost anything—just to maintain peace and quiet.

As you have learned, these approaches don't work very well. Nor are they effective strategies for teaching your child to accept his responsibilities. Here's what you can do instead:

- » **Focus on the positive.** Find times when your child is doing what he should. Let him know that you appreciate those behaviors. "Thank you for remembering to walk the dog." "I'm pleased that you started your homework."
- » **Choose one behavior** that you would like to change. Start with something small. Perhaps you would like him to hang up his jacket when he comes home from school.
- » **Tell him that you expect** him to hang up his jacket from now on. Together, discuss what a reasonable consequence should be if he doesn't do it.



- » **Stick to your expectations.** Don't nag. Each time your child leaves his jacket lying around, remind him of the agreement you had.
- » **Remain consistent** for this one behavior. Soon enough, your child will learn that you mean what you say. Then move on to the next behavior.

*My daughter is a procrastinator. She puts everything off until the last minute. She doesn't start her homework until I get angry. What can I do?*



**P**utting things off until the last minute is an easy habit to fall into. Your child's procrastination is no doubt frustrating for you, but it can also harm your child academically.

Children procrastinate for a variety of reasons. Most often it's due to poor organization and lack of awareness of time. To change her "I'll do it later" attitude, help her:

**Set a regular time and place** for homework every day.

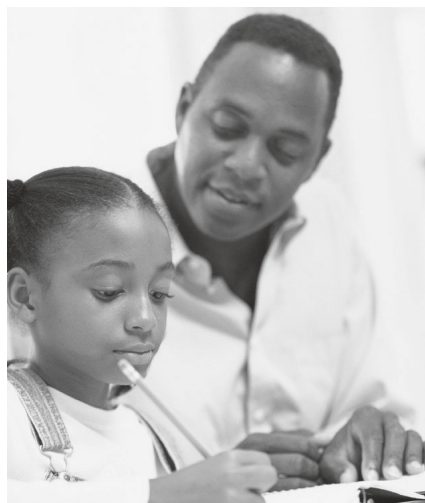
**Create a "homework box"** and keep it stocked with supplies. Kids sometimes procrastinate because they have a hard time finding everything they need.

**Tell your child,** "Let's work out a plan to get your English assignment finished on time."

**Get a large calendar** and have her write down the assignment due date. (Do this for each subject and assignment.)

**Break the assignment down** into manageable chunks. Write due dates for each step: Gather information, make an outline, etc. (Build some flexibility in the plan, "just in case.")

**Celebrate success.** Teach your child to reward herself after she finishes each task.



*I just received a call from my child's teacher. Apparently my son and his friends have been teasing a boy at school. His teacher actually used the word "bully." I am shocked that my child would do this. What should I do?*



**B**ullying is a serious issue and you are right to be concerned. It is important to address your son's behavior immediately before it leads to more severe problems in the future.

Here are some things you can do:

- » **Talk to your child about the behavior** his teacher has reported. Let him know that it is wrong to tease and embarrass people—for *any reason!*
- » **Do not allow your child to minimize the behavior.** Bullying is not "just kidding around" or "fun." Make sure your child understands that bullying is hurtful—and that you expect it to stop immediately.
- » **Help your child put himself in someone else's shoes.** "How do you think the boy felt when you teased him?" This is called *empathy* and it is a behavior your child will have to work to develop.
- » **Establish consequences for your child's behavior.** Loss of privileges and extra chores at home are examples of some reasonable consequences. Avoid physical punishments. There is evidence that physical punishment may make a child more aggressive—and even encourage bullying.



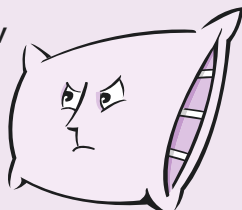




- » **Help your child think about ways to make amends.** Perhaps he could write a note to the boy he teased apologizing for his behavior.
- » **Monitor screen time.** Turn off the violence in your home. Exposure to violent television shows—including cartoons—and playing violent video games can desensitize a child to violence and cruelty. There are plenty of good movies and television shows and lots of nonviolent fantasy games.
- » **Be a positive role model.** Make sure you treat your child and others with respect. Don't tease your child or call him names. And don't ever do anything to purposely embarrass your child.
- » **Remember to praise your son** when you see him making an effort to improve.

Work together with your child's teacher to monitor his behavior at home and at school. Continue to remind him that bullying behavior is not acceptable and that you will not tolerate it. Contact a professional if your child's behavior continues.

**Bedtime is a nightly battle at our house. I know that my daughter is able to get ready for bed by herself, but I have to keep reminding her and I end up sounding like a broken record. What's the solution?**



**A**s long as you do the *reminding*, your child doesn't have to do the *remembering*. To establish a bedtime ritual and help her manage her time, have her make a list that includes:

- » **The things she *must* do**, like putting away her toys and brushing her teeth.
- » **The things she *likes* to do**, like hearing a story or having a bedside chat.



Together, discuss how long each activity should take. Post the list where she can check off each task as she completes it. Then:

- » **Set a kitchen timer for 15 minutes** before the bedtime ritual is to begin. Hand her the timer. The 15 minutes will allow her to finish her current activity.
- » **Have her then set the timer for each item on her list**, according to the times you agreed upon.

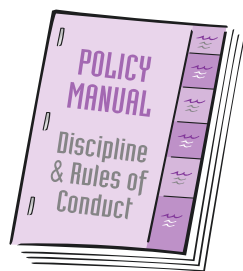
If she dawdles on the tasks she *must* do, she'll have to miss the things she *likes* to do—because time has run out! Soon enough, she'll become motivated to manage her time more efficiently.

*I am angry and disappointed. My child's teacher says my son is misbehaving at school. Sometimes his behavior is disruptive to the rest of the class. How should I handle this?*



**Y**ou've already taken the first step by considering the teacher's comments. The best way to handle the misbehavior is to:

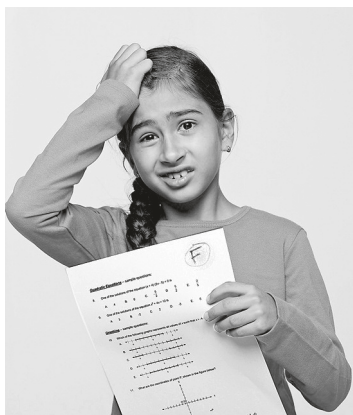
- » **Talk with your child.** He has to be a part of the solution. Tell him what the teacher shared with you and ask *him* why he is misbehaving. Then listen. Is he bored? Is he struggling?
- » **Ask for a meeting with the teacher** to learn exactly what the issues are at school. See if you can visit a class to observe your child. Does he need more challenging work? What are some things you can do at home? Let the teacher know she has your support.
- » **Show your child you are interested** in what he does in school. Ask about what he's learning. Let him know that you believe in him and that you know he can succeed.
- » **Tell your child that you and his teacher are a team.** You both want what's best for him. Together, you will help him make some changes to his behavior so you can help him learn.
- » **Get a copy of the school and class policy** on discipline and rules of conduct. Review the rules with your child. Make sure he understands what's expected—and what the consequences are for breaking the rules. Discuss how misbehavior is disruptive not only to his teacher, but to his classmates, as well.
- » **Ask for weekly reports** from the teacher. And praise your child when he shows improvement. Consider a reward, such as a special Saturday breakfast.



*My fourth grader lied to me about her grade on a math test. She told me she got a B when, in reality, she failed. I have no idea why she would lie and I don't know what to do. How can I make sure this doesn't happen again?*



**W**hen kids lie, it's usually because they worry that something bad will happen. This is especially true when it comes to grades. Your child might want to avoid your criticism and displeasure. So a first step might be to do some reflection.



Ask yourself:

- » **Are my rules too strict?** Are my punishments too harsh?
- » **Do I expect more** than my daughter can do?
- » **Do I emphasize grades** and achievement too much?
- » **Am I too quick to blame** and criticize?

Now it's time to have a talk with your daughter. It's important for her to understand your family values. Let her know that honesty is of great importance. But be careful. You don't want to crush your daughter over this because doing so can backfire. You want her to be *more* willing to come to you with the truth, not *less*.

To promote honesty:

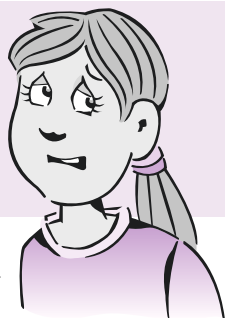
- » **Model the behavior** you want. Don't talk about honesty and then brag about cheating on your taxes. If your child catches you in lies, she probably won't listen when you talk to her about the importance of truth.



- » **Be calm, but be clear.** Say, “I know telling the truth can be difficult. But lying is unacceptable. I am sad when you lie because it makes me feel like I can’t trust you.”
- » **Never brand your child a liar.** Your daughter needs your encouragement to motivate her to improve. Calling her names will make her feel you have decided she is a lost cause.
- » **Get to the bottom of it.** Ask your daughter why she thinks she failed the test. Was she unprepared? Is she struggling with the material? Schedule an appointment with her teacher if you think she needs extra help.
- » **Establish consequences.** Talk with your daughter about what will happen the next time she is caught in a lie. Perhaps she will be grounded or lose another privilege.

*Let your child know that you appreciate it when she tells the truth and admits a mistake. Reward her honesty with praise, new privileges—and your trust.*

*I have a very sassy child. She always has to get in the last word. I'm afraid she might do this with her teacher, too. How can I stop her back talk and teach her the importance of respect?*



**B**ack talk is frustrating and it's rude. As with many discipline issues, the key to ending disrespectful behavior is to be consistent about not tolerating it. Insist on respectful behavior at home and at school.

To end your child's back talk:

- » **Cut her off.** When she starts, say, "Sorry, I can't discuss this until you speak respectfully." Say nothing else.
- » **Don't get drawn into an argument.** It's tempting to react, but repeat what you said above or don't respond at all. Do this *every single time*.
- » **Make a point of praising her** when she is being polite. Give her the attention she deserves for being respectful.
- » **Enforce a consequence** if the problem doesn't stop. Be sure it's a fair and appropriate penalty and that she knows in advance what to expect if she's disrespectful.

## Demonstrate respect

To teach your child respect, you must also *demonstrate* it by being:

- » **Polite.** Say *please, thank you* and *excuse me* to your child. Listen without interrupting. Don't barge into her room. Knock.
- » **Kind.** Don't insult or belittle your child. Never purposely embarrass her or tell jokes at her expense.
- » **Fair.** Don't judge your child before learning the facts. Show respect by hearing her side of the story.
- » **Supportive of the school.** Always return teachers' calls. Discuss the importance of school rules with your child.



***Remember: You are the parent and you are in charge. Only you can decide how to carry out discipline in your own home. But, no matter what you do, experts say that the secret to success is to be firm, fair and consistent—and to say, “I love you” every day.***



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