

Discipline Tips

Dealing with Young Children

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- Small things done right form the foundation for big things to be done right. Start with courtesy & manners. They are the language and actions of good character. Remember: if you can't get "please" and "thank you", you'll never get "Be home by 10:00".
- Decide now: As you raise your children, you will have routines or you will have events. This applies to bedtime, getting ready for school or day care, brushing teeth, eating meals, bringing dishes over to the sink. Later, it should apply to homework, chores and so on. Doing a task in a consistent way is what makes it routine.
- If you try to discipline your children from the couch or the computer, you will probably be raising your voice when you should be moving your feet. Almost all discipline techniques require you to be in close proximity to your children if you want to be effective.
- You're not really a parent until your child is about 18 months old. Until then, you're a servant. It's called nurturing and it has great benefits for the child. However, it also sets up one of the greatest challenges. Are you able to make the switch from being a servant to being a parent? Some people continue to cater to their children - buying them whatever they want; making whatever food they wish to eat; letting them stay up late even on a school night. Just remember that if you cater to your children just to keep the peace, you might be able to skip the terrible twos but you will end up dealing with the terrible teens.
- Assign age-appropriate chores as a way of teaching responsibility and contribution within the community of the family. Ensure chores are done "from the heart", not from a deal.
- Contrary to a popular theory, consequences are not the greatest technique in discipline. First, they are reactive and often come too late. Second, they only work on children who care about consequences. If you keep relying on consequences, what are you going to do when you start to hear the word "whatever" and have to deal with the attitude that goes with the word?
- Most discipline is supposed to happen before there's a problem, not after. Don't think of what you're going to do when your children do things wrong - think of what you're going to do so they do things right. After all, you usually get what you plan for.
- Express confidence that your children can handle life's daily challenges from lost mittens to missing a favourite show or not getting their own way on something. There will be bigger challenges in later years and they need to develop a positive "I can handle it" attitude young.

- Children should have choices - but only the choices they're ready to make. They have to learn about rules and limits as well. When you're driving, the red lights don't say, "Stop if you feel like it".
- Temper tantrums stop when they don't work. If you give in one time out of ten, that's enough to keep them going. Many adults give in when they are tired, busy or in public places. And keep in mind that children also learn to use whining tantrums and pestering tantrums to get their own way.
- When your children are watching television, playing video games and reading books, teach them the difference between the fantasy world and the real world. Think of it as the "Las Vegas Rule" - what happens on TV stays on TV. As they grow up, this helps you make sure that they don't talk to you with the language they hear on television and on their MP3 players.
- You can try to be your child's best parent or your child's best friend - but not both. Part of being a great parent is the willingness to make difficult decisions which the child may not like - decisions about rules, limits, chores and privileges. You want to have a loving, caring relationship which makes the child feel secure. They should know you're always willing to listen. However, children need more guides and leaders in their lives, not more buddies and playmates.
- If adults won't say "no" to children, how will children learn to say "no" to strangers, drugs, bullying, shoplifting, and vandalizing? Saying "no" to yourself is a character trait called self-restraint which is part of self-discipline. How will children develop this trait if adults lose the courage to do their job?
- A reward which builds motivation is called an incentive. A reward which builds selfishness and greediness is called a bribe. Incentives are fine because everyone likes something to look forward to. With bribery, expect to hear the words, "What do I get? What's in it for me?"
- To improve your discipline techniques, think about the best teacher in your own life and model yourself after that person. Chances are that your best teacher was firm, fair and consistent. He or she was a good role model and very clear on their expectations for appropriate behaviour. (Notice that no one says their best teacher was a "yeller".)
- A child's sense of the passage of time is determined by the activity, not by the clock. Two minutes in the back seat of a car with nothing to do feels like two hours; two hours spent playing a video game feels like two minutes. That's why children need to be forewarned about transitions and changes.
- Lessons taught when children are young pay off when they're old. The reason for making sure young children come when you call them is to establish what will later be called "curfew".
- When children are very young, they learn everything by watching and listening to others and imitating what they see or hear. Be a good role model for your child, including when you are frustrated. Your child assumes that the way you conduct yourself is how you want them to act.
- Before you over-react, remember: What is misbehaviour to an adult is often entertainment to a child.