

Discipline for Toddlers

Positive Discipline has nothing to do with punishment and everything to do with teaching and guidance. Babies and toddlers need non-punitive discipline that enhances their development – not blame, shame and pain. The Latin root of the word discipline means “teaching; learning.”

Understanding your Child’s World (from Positive Discipline)

- A child learns about the world by “doing”
- A child’s frustration due to lack of abilities or skills may be labeled as misbehavior
- A child’s developmental need to explore and experiment may be labeled as misbehavior
- Young children rarely misbehave purposely
- A child’s concepts of reality and fantasy are different from those of an adult
- Patience is a virtue far beyond the reach of most young children.

Three Ways to Modify Behavior (from Darn Good Parenting)

- **Step in and stop** the child from doing what she’s not supposed to do. This is the option you choose when there is no choice – involving the child’s safety. You won’t even have to think about choosing this option (if child is running toward a wood burning stove, you’ll be out of your chair to stop them before you have time to think.)
- **Step near and guide** the child to better behavior. In this situation, you might offer the child a choice. Compromise or negotiate with her, attempt to solve the problem together or teach a skill for better behavior. Correct the issue (ex: not sharing) and model the correct behavior (ex: give the toy to the other child, explaining what you’re doing.) Keep in mind that children don’t learn from one lesson alone. This takes patience, but the rewards will be satisfying.
- **Step back and watch** to see if the child can manage the situation herself. Believe it or not, you don’t always need to interfere. Often children can determine how to behave all their own.

Keep in mind, if you always step near and guide, you’ll exhaust yourself. There are too many disciplinary situations to attend to every single one of them. You’ll tire yourself & over-parent your child. Work on one or two skills at a time. When your child masters one, move to another.

Likewise, if you always step back and watch, you’re being too permissive. Children need protection and guidance. If left completely to her own devices, a child may flounder and learn an unduly harsh lesson. Keep in mind that discipline involves guidance, teaching and training.

References

Darn Good Advice Parenting by Faull, M.Ed. 2006

The Mister Rogers Parenting Book: Helping to Understand Your Young Child by Rogers 2002

Positive Discipline: The First Three Years by Nelsen 2007

Parenting with Love and Logic by Cline and Fay

The Happiest Toddler on the Block by Karp and Spencer

17 Tips for Toddler Discipline

- 1. Describe what your child is doing right** – Then move or guide them to the next activity
- 2. Use proximity control** – When your child is beginning to be disruptive, quietly and gently move closer. Often your calm presence raises a child to a higher level of behaving
- 3. Redirect your child** – If your toddler is touching something he's not supposed to, show him what he can touch. 'No, stop it' is not enough because they aren't to the point where they can think of something better to do.
- 4. Remove the object** – If your child is coloring on the wall, remove the crayons. Another time, demonstrate where & how to use the crayons.
- 5. Lay out realistic expectations** – "When we get on the airplane, I expect you to keep your seatbelt on and to whisper". With fair warning and realistic expectations for their age and ability, kids usually behave better.
- 6. Stay away from difficult situations** – For example, use your trip to the grocery store as 'me' time and leave your little one at home if possible
- 7. Avoid lots of change all at once** – Don't move, fly to Disneyland and buy a new puppy all in the same month that your child starts daycare. They do not have the coping skills to adjust to all that change at once.
- 8. Remove your out of control child** – Take her from the scene of her misbehavior. Go for a walk, go to another room and stay with her until she's calm.
- 9. Provide the control your child lacks** – If you want your toddler to get off the table, say "I'm not going to allow you to stand on the table – do you want to get down yourself or do you want me to get you down?" You provide the control and in time it transfers to the child as well.
- 10. Give clear commands and demonstrate** – Rather than say, "Put the toys away", it's better to say, "Put the truck in the box. I'll put one in; I bet you can do that too. I'll watch you".
- 11. Look to the next event** – "We had fun playing at Jaime's today. In 5 minutes, we're going to get in the car, drive by the fire station and go to the grocery store." Because children live in the moment, transitions are tough for them.
- 12. Offer a choice in a 'no choice' situation** – "You must sit in your car seat. Do you want to look at a book or hold your blanket?" When giving a directive, children are more responsive when given a choice in the matter.
- 13. Give to children in fantasy what they can't have in reality** – "You wish you could have a whole plate of cookies – you wish you could eat as many as you like, when you like. I understand, but I can't allow it."
- 14. Ease transitions** – help your little ones make the transition from one activity by singing a song when it's time to clean up or go to the dinner table.
- 15. Surrender** – When a situation is difficult and you, your children or household seem out of control, stop! Sit on a chair or the floor near the children and let the tense moment pass. Don't feel you always need a perfect solution.
- 16. Let your child be in charge** – Children need the opportunity to be the boss, be in control of the situation or be in charge of a project. Follow your child's lead playing with blocks or play sets or if they are very young, lay on the floor, hold your child over you and playfully announce, "oh no! You're tall and I'm small!" Putting a child in charge of certain situations increases the likelihood she will comply with your requests.
- 17. Engage your child's imagination** – Children have wonderful imaginations. Play into that imaginative world for compliance. Say, "Mr. Sock (a puppet) says it's not OK to poke, he likes you to pat the baby" or "Your dolly needs a bath – she wants to take one with you!" Such imaginative approaches put your child on the path to good behavior.