

Positive Discipline

Used correctly, discipline is an opportunity to help children learn right from wrong. It is a positive way to teach children about acceptable behavior. Discipline differs from punishment. It is not negative and does not hurt the child physically or emotionally. Children who are bullied, shamed, or frightened into behaving often make choices based in anger, deceit, or fear. Children who are taught through positive methods learn to trust their own abilities to recognize and make good choices.

Toddlerhood can be a trying time for parents. At this age, children continually test their newly discovered skills and independence. It is very important for the child's sense of security that one disciplines or set limits on behavior. Decide on what behaviors are clearly not appropriate (crossing the street unaided, hitting another child), and then be clear, calm, and consistent in relaying that information to children. It is also important that children be given many opportunities to make decisions (choosing an outfit or activity) and to explore.

These techniques can be useful in disciplining young children:

Praise: Praise your child whenever she is behaving appropriately. Children work very hard for adult approval.

Ignore: Some types of behavior are handled best by ignoring them. Whining and tugging at your hand while you are on the phone is an example. Completely ignore the behavior. If your child sees that tugging or whining will not get your attention, the behavior will often stop. Later, when you are finished with your phone call, say to her, "I don't like when you tug at me unless it is an emergency. When I'm done with my conversation, you and I will be able to talk."

Time Out: There are certain behaviors that cannot be ignored, or situations that get out of control. In those cases, a "Time Out" may be warranted. Time Out gives both the parent and the child the opportunity to step away from an emotionally-charged situation, so the issue can be calmly discussed later. Designating a chair or place in your house where your child can be safe and quiet is a helpful practice to begin in toddlerhood. Never leave your child in Time Out for more than 10 minutes. The general rule of thumb for a Time Out is 1 minute per the age of the child; a 1-year old is in Time Out for 1 minute, and so on.