

Discipline on my mind  
Clive Graham

I look out of the window as I am writing this. It is home time and mums are collecting their children from the local primary school. I see and hear harassed mums shouting "come here" (no response); "get down from there" (no response); "if you do that again you'll get a slap" (no response; no slap). And what am I writing about? Discipline!

What does that word discipline conjure up in your mind? For many of us it provokes a picture of punishments and the control of others through the threat of punishments.

However, only thinking along those lines might be missing the point. And if we do that there is the danger that we can't do our best for our kids. Let's look at it differently for a moment.

What about these ideas:

- the discipline of quietness, patience, and self-control,
- the discipline required for a sense of justice, tolerance and fair-mindedness,
- the discipline needed for using reading, writing, scientific processes, clear thinking, programming a computer, playing games skilfully, composing music, playing an instrument, creating art, solving mathematical problems, etc,
- the discipline of respecting others and co-operating with them; of playing team games fairly and within the rules,
- the discipline of perseverance and striving to do well,
- the discipline of postponing gratification.

If we have these sorts of aspirations for our children, how can we help them? What can you actually do for your child?

**Firstly, be clear about what you want.** Make a list of everything you want for your kids and the family. Which are the most important things? If you want well-behaved children, what exactly do you mean by that? Be clear about your values and what you want of your children so you can help them through some of the ambiguities and apparent contradictions in life. This will also help you to be consistent.

**Secondly, let those values and goals guide your actions.** You will find that they encourage you to be consistent in many different situations. The following ideas might help.

- **Build a positive relationship with your children.** Nourish their self-esteem and encourage their self-confidence.
- **Help them understand your expectations.** Explain why something is right or wrong; discuss the matter fully and reason it through.
- **Anticipate problems before they arise.** Be prepared!
- **Encourage constructive habits.** Having a few "chores" helps them feel part of the family and gives them a vested interest in its activities. Learning to take responsibility for their own room and toys will stand them in good stead for the future.
- **Deal with bad, anti-social behaviour quickly.** Approach it fairly and with as little fuss as possible so that you can concentrate on preventing it happening again. If you "turn a blind eye" it might make life easy for the moment, but you'll pay for it in the long run.

- **Encourage your kids to get involved in organised activities out of school.** It helps their social development and their emotional intelligence.
- **Keep the promises you make.** If you must make them, keep them - otherwise the inconsistency will cause no end of problems for you and your children.
- **Encourage your children to learn from their mistakes.** Support them through their mistakes and errors so they don't feel badly and can see their improvements.
- **Keep a level head.** Avoid losing your temper. Sure, express anger, but when you lose your temper you won't think constructively. There might be better alternatives.

The word discipline implies some adherence to some sort of rules. If you are going to have any rules, make them understandable, specific and fair. Get your children involved in writing them - the discussions will help them understand. Children have more enthusiasm for respecting rules that they have had a hand in writing. And in following the rules yourself, you are setting a wonderful example to your kids.

BUT ... whatever you do, don't expect that the outcome to be exactly as you expected it! You cannot mould your children into your own likeness. Live with that ... and rejoice in it.

If you want to know more about this subject, contact Clive who has worked with children in primary schools for over 30 years as teacher, headteacher, coach and mentor. He now applies his knowledge, skills and understanding to helping others fulfil their dreams. You can find out more at: [www.clivegrahamcoaching.com](http://www.clivegrahamcoaching.com)

If you want to share your thoughts or ask any questions, he would be very happy to hear from you. Contact him: [info@clivegrahamcoaching.com](mailto:info@clivegrahamcoaching.com)