

OUR CHILDREN AND DISCIPLINE

Firstly, what do we mean by discipline?

Let's be clear, there are two kinds of discipline: positive and negative.

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE has a positive effect on children. It shows them how to improve their behaviour without making them feel that they themselves are bad. We need to remember the behaviour is not the child.

NEGATIVE DISCIPLINE focuses on what children are doing wrong. It relies on children's fear of adults' power, and is often unfair, harsh and inconsistent.

There's another negative approach that is also unhelpful, although it may not be harsh. In other words there is an over-indulgent approach that can be adopted by a parent which sets no boundaries, and can make a child selfish and disrespectful. This in turn, tends to make the parent resentful and nobody wins.

So how do we, as parents, make sure that when we discipline our children we are having the best effect? There is no magic formula, but here are some tips for positive discipline.

1. Make a point of noticing when your child does something positive and praise them immediately.
2. Children need guidance. Be aware of the difference between guiding and criticising. Guiding separates the child from the behaviour. It shows respect, and encourages co-operation.
3. Set limits and be consistent. There is no need to restrict your child with lots of rules, but he or she does need to know where they stand, and what is acceptable behaviour.
4. Think about the limits imposed on you as a child. How did they make you feel? How did you behave?
5. When you tell a child to do something, frame it as a positive, because the brain can't process a negative. For example, if I say to you '..don't think of a pink elephant on a green bicycle ..' what do you think of? Exactly! So if you want your child not to sit so close to the television, say 'Please can you sit further away from the TV'.
6. Use 'Time Out' as an opportunity for everyone to calm down, and try to use it when you are still (reasonably!) calm. Your child needs to understand that if their behaviour is unacceptable, they will be sent to sit somewhere for a set amount of time. It works best when it is a short amount of time and a set time.

A child's bedroom is not the best place for Time Out, firstly because it should be boring and secondly because the child should not associate their bedroom with feeling unhappy. Make sure you explain the idea of Time Out clearly to the child. Give one clear warning before it is used and be consistent. When Time Out is over, praise the child for taking it well, without mentioning the bad behaviour that required Time Out in the first place. Then invite your child to do something enjoyable with you.

7. Think about some family rules and include the children in the discussion. As they get older it is fair, and easier for children to accept rules if they have some sort of initial involvement. This doesn't mean lots of restrictions and boundaries but clear guidelines that will not make a happier family life.

8. Finally, don't be too hard on yourself! There will be days when you are stressed yourself, and less able to remain calm and discipline in a positive way. Explain to your children, if they are older, why you are on a 'short fuse' and never be afraid to apologise to them if you know your behaviour was unreasonable. Ultimately they will respect you for it and you will be a great role model for them. (626)

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