

Best way to Discipline your Child

We want our children to learn from their mistakes and not repeat them. So the natural thought is to send them to the “time out” corner or up to their room to “think about what they have done”. Except they don’t. And they are going to keep doing the same behaviour despite the punishment. So how do you know how to discipline your child?

Often, we equate the term “discipline” with punishment. But the word “discipline” comes from the Latin word “disciplina”, which means “teaching, learning”. That’s the key to correct our kids’ behaviour – giving them the tools they need to learn a better behaviour. When we discipline in a way meant only to punish and have the child “pay” for their mistake, it doesn’t help our child learn how to make the right choice next time. No one likes being ordered around – punishment can lead to power struggles and because our kids know this poor behaviour gets them attention, they’ll keep doing it.

When it comes to knowing how to discipline your child, we can focus on three key areas; giving them the positive attention they need and crave, taking time for training and setting limits and sticking to them.

1. Fill the attention Basket

Kids need attention, plain and simple. If we don’t keep that “attention basket” full with positive attention, kids will seek out any attention they can get – even negative attention. They’ll push our buttons with negative behaviour because to a kid, even negative attention is better than no attention at all. This doesn’t mean you have to be at your child’s side 24X7 – just taking a few minutes a day to spend one-on-one with your child, distraction-free and doing something they want to do, will reap immense rewards in their behaviour.

Take 10 minutes once or twice a day with each child playing a game they’ve picked or reading their favourite book. Let the phone ring. Stick the cell phone in the closet. When you fill your children attention baskets positively and proactively, your kids will become more cooperative and less likely to seek out attention in negative ways. Life is busy for everyone and finding extra time in the day may be daunting at first but think of this as an investment in your relationship with your children and in improving their behaviour. When it comes to knowing how to discipline your child, giving them what they need to avoid poor behaviours in the first place can have a great impact.

2. Take time for Training

As you think about how to discipline your child, it’s important to remember that the word discipline is rooted in meanings of learning and teaching. The best way to discipline your child is to help her make better choices. You can role play the behaviours, using a calm voice. “I’d really like to play with that tractor when you’re done.” “I’d like a snack, please.” Switch roles and pretend you’re the child and let your little one direct you through making better choices. Be encouraging when they do make the right choices. “I see you worked hard to clean up the playroom all on your own! That’s such a big help. I really appreciate it.” “Thank you for sharing the book with your brother. How kind!”

3. Set Limits and Stick to them

Kids thrive when they have structure and know their boundaries. Don't go overboard with hundreds of rules but focus on what's most important for your family. Be clear about the ground rules and what happens when someone breaks the rules – make sure that everyone understands the consequences ahead of time and that the discipline is related to the misbehaviour. If they forget to put away their dishes after dinner, they have to load and unload the dishwasher. Cleaning their room because they didn't do their homework isn't related. Most importantly, be consistent. Follow through every time with the agreed-upon consequences when kids push the rules.

Overall, remember that knowing how to discipline your child is rooted in helping them learn how to make the right choice, not punishment. Be firm and give them the attention, rules and boundaries they need.

