

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is a necessary part of parenting yet it makes most parents feel uncomfortable

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Discipline these days is based on consistency. Old disciplinary phrases such as 'spare the rod and spoil the child', 'teach them a lesson' or 'set children straight' are enough to send shivers up the spine of any reasonable-minded parent.

Children develop best in a stable environment where they are valued, loved and listened to. They prefer an orderly environment rather than a chaotic one. And they need someone in that environment who will help them learn to be safe and sociable. This is where discipline comes in.

Discipline is a necessary part of parenting, yet it is often misunderstood. It is usually associated with punishment – smacking, humiliation and other types of censuring action. Positive discipline

teaches children about appropriate behaviour and helps them develop a sense of other. It also encourages them to take responsibility for their own actions. It doesn't involve physical harm or verbal put-downs. However, it does require firmness and a willingness to treat children with respect, even if they don't always respond to us in kind.

SOME POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IDEAS

- **Have** clear limits and boundaries for children. Rules need to be clear and specific. 'Be home by six o'clock' is more effective than 'don't be late'.
- **Stop**, think and go against your first impulse when children misbehave. If you feel like losing your cool with your children take a walk, phone a friend or even count to ten before interacting with them.
- **Don't let your moods** dictate your response to children's poor behaviour. It's easy to be lenient when we feel good and harsh when we are in a bad mood.
- **Warn** children once when giving instructions or directions. Repeated requests or threats only encourage 'parent deafness' in children.
- **Act** rather than talk when children don't stick to the limits or refuse to cooperate. Rather than nag or coax children into doing the right thing implement a consequence that is related to their misbehaviour. For instance, children who constantly come home late can stay home next time and toddlers who leave toys around can lose them for a while.
- **Set consequences like a good cop.** You want children to be mad at themselves rather than you so be careful with the way you set consequences. Calm and cool is the way to go.
- **Encourage** children at every opportunity. Children who are difficult to deal with generally lack self-confidence and doubt their self-worth so they need constant encouragement.

Remember, consistency rather than severity is the key to effective discipline.