

# Effective discipline: A healthy approach

Disciplining a child is one of the most important roles of a parent, and perhaps one of the most difficult, but healthy discipline is part of a comforting family environment. Effective discipline at home provides a foundation for self-discipline throughout life. It helps your child grow up to be happy and well-adjusted. Effective and positive discipline teaches and guides children. It doesn't just force them to obey.

How children should be disciplined depends on their age, stage of development, personality and many other factors, but there are some basic principles to help guide parents.

The Canadian Paediatric Society strongly discourages the use of physical punishment on children, including spanking.

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## What are the goals of discipline?

- Discipline protects your child from danger.
- Discipline helps your child learn self-control and self-discipline.
- Discipline helps your child develop a sense of responsibility.
- Discipline helps instill values.

## What makes discipline "effective"?

- **Respect:** Children should be able to respect their parents' authority and also the rights of other people. Discipline that's harsh, such as name-calling, shouting and humiliating, will make it difficult for a child to respect and trust a mother or father.
- **Consistency:** Discipline that's not consistent is confusing to children, no matter how old they are. If parents are inconsistent in the way they discipline their children, children may find it hard to respect them. Inconsistency, such as sometimes giving in to tantrums, can also reward children for these unwanted behaviours and make it more likely that they will be repeated.
- **Fairness:** Children need to see discipline as being fair. The consequences of their actions should be related to their behaviour. If your child throws food on the floor, make sure he helps you clean up the mess. Make sure it is cleaned up before he does something else. When the mess is cleaned up, the consequence is over.
- **You:** As a parent, you have a unique bond with your child. If you teach your child discipline with respect, and make sure that it's consistent and fair, you'll have lasting positive effects on your child.

## **How can parents prevent behaviour problems?**

- Give your child many opportunities for physical activity and exercise. Some children need to run off some of their energy.
- Give your child choices about what to do. He will appreciate the chance to make decisions.
- Instead of saying “No”, give her something more interesting to do. This is called distraction or redirection. For example, if she is climbing a fence, you can say “Come and play on the swings.”
- Make sure your child has toys that are right for his age. Toys for young children should be simple. Don’t give them too many at once.
- Become familiar with behaviour that is appropriate for your child’s age. A toddler who accidentally spills a glass of water is not misbehaving. It’s normal.
- Children 2 years of age and younger have trouble remembering and understanding rules. Keep medicines and dangerous items out of their reach.
- Prioritize the rules that you do make. Give top priority to safety, then to correcting behaviour that harms people and property, then onto behaviour such as whining, temper tantrums and interrupting. Concentrate on two or three rules at first.
- If your child is tired and cranky, be understanding and calm to help her settle down. This is especially important before naps or bedtime. Having a short quiet time (with no activity) can prevent bad and irritating behaviour.
- Ignore little things. Before you raise your voice, ask yourself, “Is this important?”

## **What can parents do to promote good behaviour?**

- Spend time alone with your child each day.
- Be comforting. Give your child hugs, cuddles or a gentle pat on the back.
- If children are sad or angry, respect their feelings. Try to understand why they are sad or angry.
- Do things that are fun. Laugh together.
- If you make a promise, do your best to keep it. It is important that children trust their parents, and they will want you to trust them, too.
- Always look for opportunities to praise your child for good behaviour.

### **For more information:**

[Effective discipline for children](#)

[How to use time-out](#)

**Source:** Developed by the CPS Psychosocial Paediatrics Committee. Revised November 2003.

**Posted January 2004**

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