



## **POSITIVE DISCIPLINE**

Recently, I was reading a memoir that a son had written about his father, One memory that the son shared was that when he and his siblings were truly misbehaving, the harshest approbation that his father had was, "That behavior is not worthy of you." What a wondrous sentence! The father in just a few short words was unequivocally berating the behavior, while at the same time upholding the value of the person. He had struck discipline gold.

At our school we view discipline as a system of guidelines in which children can operate safely. Through these guidelines, children learn to control their bodies and emotions and develop appropriate social behaviors. Child guidance through positive discipline is a process of assisting children in understanding and using constructive behaviors. A trusting relationship must be established between staff and child. Discipline is built on mutual respect and trust. Our goal is to encourage appropriate forms of behavior, not to punish for inappropriate behavior. Remember, the root of the word discipline is "to teach" not "to punish"

Many of the same techniques that we use in school can be used effectively at home. In fact, having consistency in the different areas of a child's life can reinforce the lessons we are all trying to teach.

One of the most important things we do is to establish a safe environment. Preschoolers move quickly and love to climb and explore. When there is room, they love to run. And they need a certain amount of personal space to avoid negative interactions with their peers. Proper room set up can avoid conditions where negative behaviors are subconsciously encouraged. As a matter of fact, when we find ourselves having to repeat a certain direction multiple times, we immediately look to change the environment. So take a close look at your home including the exterior, garage, and yard. You may be able to avoid some accidents as well as some confrontations. Fix, repair, toss, or lock up anything that might be a danger to your child. It also is important to be on the lookout for dangerous situations while running errands or visiting others with your children. Having a safe place to play and appropriate toys to play with can save you from saying "NO," making your job as a parent much easier.

Each day in school has a structure that the students become familiar with and gives them comfort. Within each section of the day, all sorts of different and exciting things occur. But the overall structure varies little. And it is not a secret. It is pictorially displayed and early in the morning we review the daily schedule so that everyone knows what to expect. So to at home, preschoolers need a consistent routine and a reasonable bedtime. Their small stomachs and high energy levels frequently need nutritious snacks and meals. Establishing consistent times for eating, napping and playing helps children learn how to pace themselves. Balance the day

with active times, quiet times, times to be alone, and times to be with others. Take care of basic needs to help prevent frustrating situations with a cranky and whiny child.

Consistency is another important aspect of discipline. You might think that letting your crying child have a cookie before dinner "just this once" is pretty harmless. After all, you've all had a long day and it's just too hard to argue. But giving in to a child's demands encourages her to pitch another fit the next time she's not getting her way. It's important to set limits and follow through on them again and again.

Sometimes, preschoolers act out because they lack communication skills -- and it's a surefire way to get your attention. That's why you should always let your child know you're pleased whenever he does something that you like or remembers to follow one of your rules (such as putting his coat on the door hook when he comes inside). By doing this, you'll teach him that good behavior will also get him the attention he craves from you -- and he might just keep it up. Children can often experience strong emotions -- strong enough that they cannot control them and can even become frightened by the intensity. If this happens in school, we encourage children to "calm their body down". This is not a traditional "time out". They are not confined to a chair or an area of the room. They can come and go as they please. But often, they will find a quiet space in the classroom and lie down. If we think it will help, we will stay with them and talk to them in a soothing voice, but often this is counterproductive. When children learn that they can tame those big emotions and control their reactions, it is a major developmental milestone.

When a child is stuck in an undesired behavior, redirection is the first active form of discipline we attempt. In using redirection, a teacher helps guide a child's energy and attention from a negative behavior or situation to a positive one. The teacher helps the child "problem solve" while avoiding conflict and possible aggression. With younger children who are not yet using language, a teacher who notices two children tugging on the same toy might offer one child another toy or change the focus of both children by singing or starting a new activity. Fight the urge to yell at your child when he acts up, because your tone will either make him upset or curious. For example, if he's climbing up on the sofa arm, gently move him onto the floor and start reading a book or playing with a toy together. Redirecting his attention not only puts a quick end to unwanted behavior, but it also teaches him over time that some things, like climbing on certain furniture, are off-limits.

An oft-repeated core belief of our school is that children are capable and need to be active participants in their learning. Discipline is no different. Positive discipline is about helping children develop their thinking skills, social and life skills, and the belief that they're capable. You can't tell them they're capable. You have to let them experience it. We will often approach children with the phrase, "What's the problem?" This cues them to express in words what is happening and begin to think about a solution. After they explain, we might say, "What can we do about it?" Again, we don't offer a solution, but attempt to guide them to one. If it's bedtime and your child isn't responding to the routine, give him choices. You can say, "I know you don't want to get dressed right now but it's time to get dressed. Do you want to do wear the red shirt or the blue one? And sometimes the best, but hardest form of discipline is to do

nothing. We often observe children enter a conflict, but hold back on intervening. As the children get older and have seen us model conflict resolution skills for them, they can often come to a resolution independently. That is when you know that the lessons are being internalized and your hard work is beginning to pay off.

If you say the word "No!" to your child all the time, he may start to tune you out -- or worse, begin using it himself when he doesn't want to do something. In addition, saying no doesn't tell a child what TO DO. Children think in pictures much more than adults do, so if you say, "No hitting", the picture in your child's head is of hitting, thereby reinforcing the exact behavior you are trying to discourage. Save 'No!' for situations when safety is involved. If he's reaching for the oven door, for instance, you should quickly say "No!" in a stern voice. But when his behavior isn't dangerous, phrase your command in positive words: Instead of saying "No! Stop running!" try: "Use your walking feet."

As children reach the age of three, they typically begin to develop an understanding of "cause and effect" and the concept of consequences. Language is used more often to guide children's behavior. Teachers help children label their feelings and teach them to use language rather than inappropriate physical actions. Asking them what the problem is and really listening to their answer is key. Many people use a 75/25 rule, which calls for listening 75% of the time and talking 25% of the time. And don't lecture. Autonomy and self-confidence flourish when parents are asking the child things instead of telling them all the time.

When it comes to discipline, patience is key. Parents will sometimes complain about how they tried a discipline strategy again and again, but it didn't work. But remember, you are planting the seeds of discipline. Don't expect a tree to grow overnight.