

DISCIPLINE: TEACHING WITH LOVE

WHAT IS DISCIPLINE?

"Next to love, a sense of discipline is a parent's second most important gift to a child."

~ T. Berry Brazelton, M.D.,
Touchpoints

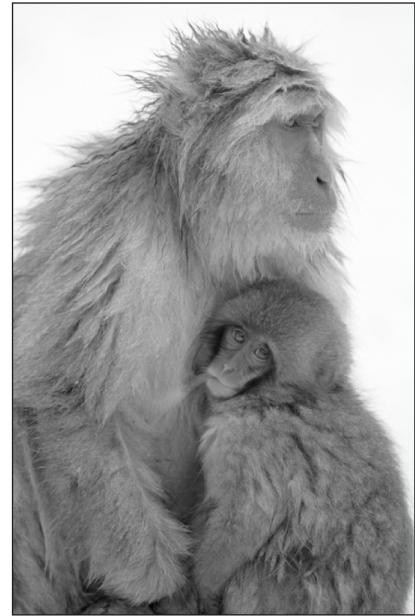


Photo by Howard G. Buffett

When you think of the word "discipline," many thoughts go through your mind. If you have an older toddler, you may think of disciplining her. You may think about how you were disciplined as a child. You may think about punishments you received as a child.

Just as with other areas of parenting, we bring to "discipline" our past experiences. Remember, we learn to parent by:

Our experiences (how we were parented)
Trial and error with our child
Gathering other information (watching others, reading materials, talking with others)

As parents, especially new parents, we have dreams, hopes and goals for our children. What kind of adult do you want your child to become? Do you want him to be honest? Hard working? Responsible? Safe? Happy? Have values? Looking at your child now, you know it will be a long road to grow him into an adult.

What does "discipline" mean? The word "discipline" means "to teach" or "to disciple." As parents, part of our responsibility is to help our child grow into an adult. Just about everything you do during the day with her is part of this teaching process or the "discipline" process. When you talk to her, listen to her, play with her, give her your undivided attention, care for her, say "no" to her and provide consequences for inappropriate behavior for her, you are "teaching" your child.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF DISCIPLINE?

By nature, your child is very curious. Exploring is the way she learns about herself and her world. She is also aware that she cannot control herself. She wants to please you, because you are the most important person in her life. She wants to behave according to the standards you have set.

In their book, *Discipline from Birth to Three*, Jean Warren Lindsay and Sally McCullough list what your child learns through discipline:

- To live within our cultural values.*
- To get along with other people and respect their rights.*
- To learn new skills and perform expected tasks.*
- To feel good about himself and succeed in achieving a satisfying life style.*
- To learn to be self-disciplined.*
- To learn NOT to hurt others or herself.*
- To learn NOT to damage or destroy the things around her.*

In his book, *Touchpoints*, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton stresses the goal of self-discipline in your teaching process. When you discipline, you are teaching your child to be in control of his own behavior.

This comes in three stages:

- trying out the limits by exploration,
- teasing to evoke from others a clear sense of what is okay and what isn't and
- internalizing these previously unknown boundaries.

“TO DISCIPLINE” IS AN ONGOING PROCESS

You will not be able to teach your child everything she must know to be an adult in one week. It will be a long process and will change as she grows.

Your child is unique. No other child is just exactly like her. This makes parenting more of a challenge. No one has raised a child exactly like yours. You will need to be the expert on your child. You will know her better than anyone else and will know how to teach her to be the best person she can be.

The standards you set for your child need to be related to her stage in development as well as her temperament. Different children will require different methods of discipline. Appropriate expectations for your child may not be right for another child.

AGES AND STAGES - DISCIPLINING WITH LOVE

NEWBORN - SIX MONTHS

MEETING NEEDS . . . Newborns come with many needs. They are totally self-centered. Teaching your baby at this age involves meeting her needs and providing a loving environment. When she is cared for, she will begin to develop a trust in the people around her and learn that they will care for her. This care can be an exhausting task, but it is important to meet her needs as completely as possible.

As a parent, you have needs as well. It's important for you to take care of yourself and be satisfied with your life. You will be more ready to meet your baby's needs if you feel good about yourself.

Part of the challenge of parenting is the frustration it may bring. Some positive ways to handle this

frustration are to get away occasionally by yourself or with a friend or talk with others about your feelings. Many young mothers may have a feeling of isolation or being "trapped" with the care of a new baby. These are normal feelings. You are now responsible for another person.

Sometimes in frustration, parents may "lose their cool" with their child. In the past few years a newly recognized injury to children has been identified and described. This injury is often referred to as shaken infant syndrome.

Young infants have very weak neck muscles and only gradually develop the strength to control their heavy heads. At this age their brains are smaller than their skulls. This extra room allows for the rapid growth of the brain. If they are shaken, the brain will wobble back and forth, which may cause brain damage and bleeding of the brain. This damage can be permanent or even fatal. Even the "playful tossing" of a baby up in the air is not safe for these same reasons.

All parents feel frustration in parenting. Many parents seek out other parents with similar age children to discuss challenges and share experiences.

BEGINNING ROUTINES . . . During the early weeks of your baby's life, he will begin to show signs of falling into a routine. He will want to eat and sleep at about the same time each day. If you can be in tune and watch for his signals, it will help you develop a routine of care for him in the next few months. You are beginning to set limits for him by understanding his signals and structuring his day.

When your baby can anticipate and expect the same routine each day, he will feel secure and cared for. This routine will also help you to plan your days.

AND ENJOYING YOUR BABY . . . You will find great joy in watching your baby grow and develop. She seeks a relationship with you and will show her pleasure in this relationship with smiles, nuzzles into your shoulder, looking for your attention and later, very wet kisses. You can build on this trusting relationship as you continue teaching her about living in a world with other people.

WHAT ABOUT SPOILING?

Many parents ask *"Won't I spoil my baby if I go to him every time he cries?"* Sometimes parents think that if they go to their baby each time he cries, they are teaching him to cry even more to get attention. **BABIES DON'T WORK THIS WAY!** When he cries it is important that you respond promptly as often as you can.

You cannot spoil a child at this age. You want to send him the message that he is loved and cared for. Your baby has many needs these first few months. When these needs are met by you, it is the beginning of a trusting relationship.

Sometimes you'll do everything you can to help your baby be comfortable, and she'll still cry. Always remember she is not crying to upset you. She isn't crying because you've spoiled her. She's crying because it's the only way she can tell you that she needs you.

SIX MONTHS - 12 MONTHS

ON THE MOVE . . . Your baby is on the move. He is learning new motor skills almost every day. He will roll, scoot, rock back and forth, crawl and eventually walk. He is very proud of his success and wants you to share in his delight.

He has also learned to throw toys, bang things together and put everything possible in his mouth. He wants to practice these skills all the time! He feels good about himself with each new accomplishment. Have fun with your baby in this play.

VERY CURIOUS . . . With each new learned motor skill, your baby will want to use it in exploration. All of the "pretty things" she could only look at before, she now is driven to learn about. She learns about them by grabbing, mouthing, throwing and banging.

Your baby has no understanding of what she should or should not do at this age. She only knows that she needs to explore because that's how she learns about the world. If you can make her environment safe for her to explore and have fun with this curiosity, she will be encouraged and find excitement in this learning. She will then be on the road to a lifelong love of learning that will continue on into the school years.

Childproofing your home will help encourage your baby to explore in safety and ease some anxieties you may have. On the other hand, if

your child hears "No" many times during his day, he will not feel good about exploring. He will gradually lose his curiosity and as a result will learn less about the world. It will be important to save "No" for the big issues.

Start out by crawling through your house at his level. Remove everything that may harm him or that you do not want damaged.

Get locks for all cabinets. (Keep one cabinet in the kitchen just for your baby. He will love you for it!)

Check your electric cords and get them out of the way as much as possible.

Cover all unused electrical outlets with special plastic covers.

Many houseplants are poisonous. Put them up if possible.

Childproofing now will save you many "No's" in the days to come. You and your baby will enjoy each other more!

SETTING LIMITS . . . With this drive to learn through exploration, you will encounter times when you need to set limits for your baby. She cannot control her curiosity and looks to you for guidance and safety.

She becomes aware that the world is very big, and this is a scary thought! Giving her limits will provide a structure for her world. Within this structure, she can explore with confidence and security.

How can I set limits?

Child-proofing is a way to prevent dangerous situations.

Ignoring some behaviors to save the "No" for big issues. Pulling socks out of the sock drawer is annoying, but safe.

Distracting or redirecting your baby from things you don't want her to have or do.

Choosing to say "No" for a few big issues. You will make choices on what will be your standards for your household and family. These "No's" will need to be consistent.

For an example of these methods, let's talk about the buttons on the TV. This is surely an area of exploration for your baby and provides a reward in seeing the TV picture appear and disappear. She has also seen you "play" with the TV many times.

Child-proof: You may be able to block off the TV with another object to make the buttons inaccessible to your baby.

Ignore behavior: You may decide that this is not a big issue for your household. You allow your baby to explore the buttons within reason.

Distract: This may be used in combination with ignoring the behavior or saying "No" by offering your baby other toys or activities each time she plays with the buttons on the TV.

Say "No": If you have decided that this will be a "No" for your household, you have set a standard. Each time your baby plays with the buttons on the TV, you will need to set a limit by saying "No" and removing her from the TV buttons. The key is to be consistent. You will need to follow through every time. This is easier to do when you are well rested and in a good mood. It is much more difficult to do at the end of the day when you are tired. If you are not consistent, your baby will test you to see if this is the time you will let her touch the TV buttons. Understanding your standards and making them hers is a long process and will take much patience on your part.

Now you may be thinking: *"I am consistent, but the other adults in the household are not."* She is able to understand that different people have different standards.

AND MAINTAINING ROUTINES . . . This high energy time of exploring may make eating and sleeping a challenge for your baby. She is too busy "doing things" to take time off for food or rest.

It becomes increasingly important to maintain routines. With so many things rapidly changing in her life, keeping things the same will give her comfort. Limiting between meal snacks, offering healthy food choices and expecting a mess may help to keep mealtimes pleasant.

Put your baby to bed each night at the same time and in the same bed. Develop a routine before tucking her in for the night. A warm bath, being held for a bottle, a story book and some "snuggling" are all enjoyable for both parent and child. These routines will give her a sense of security and trust in the people she loves the most.

ONE YEAR - TWO YEARS

As your baby gains confidence in her new motor abilities (walking, climbing and soon running), she is also becoming more independent. This struggle toward independence will take many months. She wants to control herself but is not mature enough to do this. You can support her desire for independence by getting rid of any limits you don't really need. Limits that are needed, such as no playing in the street or on the basement stairs, must be consistent and firm.

Even when limits are set or simple directions given, she still won't remember them for long. Her memory is only beginning to be developed. Children at this age respond to their immediate environment. Directions given from a distance are often useless. Her exploration is fun for her and very rewarding; however, you are still responsible for teaching her by setting limits.

Some days her exploration may take her from one forbidden object to another. It's hard to keep up with her. If you can't remove the forbidden object from her environment, it will be most helpful for you to get up and walk across the room (for the tenth time) to move her from the forbidden object. If you yell from a distance, she probably won't understand or simply will ignore the yelling. She has little understanding of "right" and "wrong" and needs your patience and continued guidance.

A result of the struggle toward independence is an inner turmoil. Your child may resist almost every suggestion or request. A normal part of his behavior at this age is to throw temper tantrums. What can I do?

Stay out of the temper tantrum. Only your child can learn to control his turmoil.

It is not your fault that he is having a temper tantrum.

Take a time out. Pick up your child and hold him quietly or put him somewhere safe to throw his temper tantrum.

Walk away. Walk out of sight until the tantrum lessens or has ended.

Offer reassurance. When the tantrum has ended, hold your child and comfort him by saying, "It's terrible being so upset, isn't it? I'm sorry I can't help you more. I love you, but learning to control your temper is your job."

IMITATION . . . Your child may learn things through imitation. She will imitate you and others. You are an important person in her life and she wants to be like you. She will imitate both the things you want her to do and the things you don't want her to do.

In her struggle toward independence, she will want to do things that seem important. If she sees you change the DVD, she doesn't realize she shouldn't do the same things. She did not intend to damage the DVD. Part of the discipline process is making it easy for your child to behave.

Because she wants to imitate you, it is also easy to encourage manners such as "please" and "thank you." When she hears you say them to her, she will want to use them also.

AND APPRECIATION . . . Your baby, soon to be toddler, has a distinct personality. He is able to say a few words and wants to carry on "nonsense" conversations with you. He is busy learning all he can learn each minute of his day. Appreciate his zest for life!

WANTING ATTENTION . . . Your child wants and needs your approval and wants to know that you really care about him. One way he knows this is from your kind tone of voice and the conversations that you enjoy together. Take the time to bend down to his level and look him in the eye when he excitedly struggles to tell you some "big news." It will help him feel loved and very treasured. When you have something important to tell him, it is also a good idea to get on his eye level. He may be more willing to stop and listen with this approach.

AND NOT WANTING TO SHARE . . . Your two year-old enjoys playmates. This is a good situation for him to learn self-control. If your child is aggressive during group play, he may not know how to control his behavior. He will need you to stop him until he can stop himself. Explain to him before he goes into the group that other children don't like to be pushed or have toys taken away from them. Tell him that when he begins to do this, he will have to leave. Be sure to follow through. Afterwards, talk about the job he must learn to do: controlling himself.

Sharing is not something that comes easily to a two-year-old. Discuss sharing toys before a playmate comes to play. Let your child decide which toys she will share, and let her help put her other ones away. At this age, young children are too busy learning what "mine" means to understand about sharing.

TECHNIQUES THAT WORK

ENCOURAGING

Many parents spend a lot of time correcting bad behavior. When children are behaving well, they deserve parental attention and appreciation. They will learn that good behavior is a way to be noticed.

From infancy on, spend time with your child even when he is happily playing by himself. Tell him, *"I like the tower you built."* Or simply sit quietly and watch him play.

DIVERTING ATTENTION

This works well for infants and toddlers as they are easily distracted. Diverting attention from an activity you disapprove of by substituting another plaything or leading the child to another activity is an easy way to avoid a meaningless struggle with a child who is too young to understand and learn from other methods. Your baby has found your car keys and is happily teething on them. You need to use them or don't want her to have them. If you take them away, she may scream. Offer another teething toy in its place as you take the keys from her.

USING POSITIVE STATEMENTS

Tell your child what you want them to do rather than what you do not want them to do. Change "Don'ts" to "Do's." Instead of *"Don't pull the cat's tail,"* say *"The cat likes to be petted like this."*

Use "No" sparingly. If your days are filled with many "No's" for your toddler's behavior, she is probably not going to respond. Your goal for using "No" is to get her to react by stopping and at least looking at you. Use it only a few times a day for the really big issues. Your tone of voice must say that this is important and I mean what I am saying.

GIVING CHOICES

When children are allowed to make small choices, they are learning the skill of decision making. They feel independent and important and you are preparing them for big decisions in the future.

"Which shirt do you want to wear today—the red one or the blue one?" Choices become more at around 12-15 months.

PLANNING AHEAD

You make preparations or have structured the environment so that problem behavior is avoided. Identify some problem times during your day or week and look for ways to help your child behave.

Shopping trips, especially the grocery store, may be difficult to manage with children. Keep the trips short. Involve your child in the looking process. Make sure your child is rested and well fed. Bring along small toys to entertain him.

Talking on the telephone may also be a problem time. Your child can see you right there next to him, but he is not getting your attention. He is confused and frustrated. He does not know how to wait! Keep your conversations short. Use the telephone while he is napping. Give him a play phone to use.

Waiting for an appointment may be another problem time. If possible, plan for other childcare arrangements for your appointments. Bring along toys, snacks or books for the wait. Understand how difficult it is for your child and be more tolerant during this time.

Children like to be told what will happen next. Letting a child know in advance what to expect eases transitions and reduces resistance. This will become more important as your child plays more independently. For example when he is busy at play, you let him know it will soon be time to eat.

ALLOWING CONSEQUENCES

Allowing your child to experience the consequences of his behavior can be more meaningful than any action you could take. Helping him learn from a particular misbehavior and the consequence will give him understanding.

Consequences may be natural—a child who refuses to eat may be hungry before the next meal.

Consequences may be logical—a toddler who repeatedly goes on the street will not be allowed to go outside for a period of time. Logical consequences are used when the natural consequence would compromise the child's health or safety.

In the consequence the child may learn from the inappropriate behavior. If your child writes on the wall with marker, she could also help to scrub the wall clean again. Sometimes it is difficult for parents to allow a child to experience consequences!

USING TIME-OUTS

A time-out may be used to separate fighting children or calm an over-excited child. It is a time to get oneself back in control. The parent calmly explains to the child that he must rest away from the stimulation environment. A child may need to be held in order to calm him. The goal is not to punish the child, but to help and support him so he can get back in control.

A baby will "ask" for a time-out by fussing or crying when his environment becomes too stressful. As his mother picks him up, she senses his needs and turns to shield him from the stressful environment.

Over stimulation or too much excitement for a toddler may be expressed by crying, "acting out," hitting, biting or throwing toys. He has lost control of his behavior and may need help to regain it.

ESTABLISHING STRUCTURE

Structure comes in the form of daily routines and an awareness of the limits that need to be set for your child. From infancy on, when she can anticipate and expect the same routine each day, she will feel secure and cared for.

As she develops and begins to explore an ever widening world, she will feel confident and safe in their structure. She will still protest the limits, but you know she needs your guidance.

WHAT ABOUT SPANKING?

People disagree a great deal on whether to spank or not to spank a child. We need to take a look at what is accomplished by spanking.

Spanking or hitting a child won't make her behave. She may stop doing something, but that is only part of the solution. The goal is for her to internalize the standards you have set for her, not be fearful.

In addition, physical punishment has some very real disadvantages. (1) Your child gets the idea that hitting people is all right and that it's OK to settle things by force. (2) Spanking or hitting may cause you to lose control. You may find yourself spanking or hitting too hard.

How you feel about yourself influences how you respond to your child. If things are going well, you will probably be more patient and tolerant and you won't take your frustrations out on your child. These are normal feelings. Be aware of them. But if it gets to the point where you are yelling and hitting your child because of your own frustrations, think about getting help.

TOUCHPOINTS DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES

1. Discipline is teaching, not punishment.
2. The goal is to develop self-control.
3. Children experience guilt and need to redeem themselves.
4. Children need a face-saving approach.
5. Every "no" needs a "yes."
6. Parents need to take their own feelings into account.
7. Parents need to try to understand the meaning of the behavior.
8. A firm, consistent response to misbehavior shows caring.
9. Parents should share responsibility with the child to find solutions.
10. A loving and understanding approach is powerful