



The first goal of discipline is to protect your child from danger. Another important goal is to teach your child an understanding of right from wrong. Reasonable limit setting keeps us from raising a “spoiled” child. To teach respect for the rights of others, first teach your child to respect your rights. Begin external controls by 6 months of age. Children don’t start to develop internal controls (self-control) until 3 or 4 years of age. They continue to need external controls, in

gradually decreasing amounts, through adolescence.

## **GUIDELINES FOR SETTING RULES**

1. **Begin discipline after 6 months of age.** Young infants don’t need any discipline. By the time they crawl, all children need rules for their safety.
2. **Express each misbehavior as a clear and concrete rule.** Examples of clear rules are “Don’t push your brother” and don’t interrupt me on the telephone.”
3. **Also state the acceptable or appropriate behavior.** Your child needs to know what is expected of him or her. Examples are “Play with your brother,” “Look at books when I’m on the telephone,” or “Walk, don’t run.”
4. **Ignore unimportant or irrelevant misbehavior.** Behavior such as swinging the legs, poor table manners, or normal negativism is unimportant during the early years.
5. **Use rules that are fair and attainable.** A child should not be punished for behavior that is part of normal emotional development, such as thumb sucking, fears of being separated from the parents, and toilet-training accidents.
6. **Concentrate on two or three rules initially.** Give highest priority to issues of safety, such as not running into the street, and to the prevention of harms to others. Of next importance is behavior that damages property. Then come all the annoying behavior traits that wear you down (such as tantrums or whining).
7. **Avoid trying to change “no-win” behavior through punishment.** Examples are wetting pants, pulling their own hair; thumb sucking, body rocking, masturbation, not eating enough, not going to sleep, and refusal to complete schoolwork. The first step in resolving such a power struggle is to withdraw from the conflict and stop punishing your child for the misbehavior. Then give your child positive feedback when he or she behaves as you’d like.
8. **Apply the rules consistently.** After the parents agree on the rules, it may be helpful to write them down and post them.

## **DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES (INCLUDING CONSEQUENCES)**

1. **Techniques to use for different ages are summarized here.** The techniques mentioned here are further described after this list.

-From, birth to 6 months: no discipline necessary

- From 6 months to 3 years: structuring the home environment, distracting, ignoring, verbal and nonverbal disapproval, physically moving or escorting, and temporary time-out

-From 3 years to 5 years: the preceding techniques (especially temporary time-out) plus natural consequences, restricting places where the child can misbehave, and logical consequences

-From 5 years to adolescence: the preceding techniques plus delay of a privilege, "I" messages, and negotiation via family conferences

-Adolescence: logical consequences, "I" messages, and family conferences about house rules; time-out and manual guidance can be discontinued

2. **Structure the home environment.** You can change your child's surroundings so that an object or situation that could cause a problem is eliminated. Examples are gates, locks, and fences.

3. **Distracting your child from misbehavior.** Distracting a young child from temptation by attracting his or her attention to something else is especially helpful when the child is in someone else's house or a store (for example, distract with toys, food or games).

4. **Ignore the misbehavior.** Ignoring help, to stop unacceptable behavior, that is harmless, such as tantrums, sulking, whining, quarreling, or interrupting.

5. **Use verbal and nonverbal disapproval.** Mild disapproval is often all that is required to stop a young child's misbehavior. Get close to your child, get eye contact, look stern, and give a brief "no" or "stop."

6. **Physically move or escort ("manual guidance").** "Manual guidance" means that you move a child from one place to another (for example, to bed, bath, car, or time-out chair) against his will and help him as much as needed (for example, carrying).

7. **Use temporary time-out or social isolation.** Time-out is the most effective discipline technique available to parents. Time-out is used to interrupt unacceptable behavior by removing the child from the scene to a boring place, such as a playpen, corner of a room, chair, or bedroom. Time-outs should last about 1 minute per year of age and not more than 5 minutes.

8. **Restrict places where a child can misbehave.** This technique is especially helpful for behavior problems that can't be eliminated. Allowing nose picking and masturbation in your child's room prevents an unnecessary power struggle.

9. **Use natural consequences.** Your child can learn good behavior from the natural laws of the physical world; for example, not dressing properly for the weather means your child will be cold or wet, or breaking a toy means it isn't fun to play with anymore.

10. **Use logical consequences.** These should be logically related to the misbehavior, making your child accountable for his or her problems and decisions. Many logical consequences are simply the temporary removal of a possession or privilege if your child has misused play" or "When you finish your homework, you can watch television." the object or right.

11. **Delay a privilege.** Examples of work before play are "After you clean your room, you can go out and

12. **Use "I" messages.** When you child misbehaves, tell your child how you feel. Say, "I am upset when you do such and such." Your child is more likely to listen to this than a message that starts with "you." "You" messages usually trigger a defensive reaction.

13. **Negotiate and hold family conferences.** As children become older they need more communication and discussion with their parents about problems. A parent can begin such a conversation by saying, "We need to change these things. What are some ways we could handle this? What do you think would be fair?"

14. **Temporarily discontinue any physical punishment.** Most out-of-control children are already too aggressive. Physical punishment teaches them that it's acceptable to be aggressive (for example, hit or hurt someone else) to solve problems.

15. **Discontinue any yelling.** Yelling and screaming teach your child to yell back; you are thereby legitimizing shouting matches. Your child will respond better in the long run to a pleasant tone of voice and words of diplomacy.

16. **Don't forget to reward acceptable (desired) behaviors.** Don't take good behavior for granted. Watch for behavior you like, and then praise your child. At these times, move close to your child, look at him or her, smile, and be affectionate. A parent's attention is the favorite reward of most children.

## **GUIDELINES FOR GIVING CONSEQUENCES (PUNISHMENTS)**

1. **Be consistent.** Mean what you say and follow through. (Also, say what you mean.)
2. **Correct with love.** Talk to your child the way you want people to talk to you. Avoid yelling or using a disrespectful tone of voice. Correct your child in a kind, but firm way. Sometimes begin your correction with "I'm sorry I can't let you ...."
3. **Apply the consequence immediately.** Delayed punishments are less effective because young children forget why they are being punished. Punishment should occur very soon after the misbehavior and be administered by the adult who witnessed the misdeed.
4. **Make a one-sentence comment about the rule when you punish your child.** Also restate the preferred behavior, but avoid making a long speech.
5. **Ignore your child's arguments while you are correcting him or her.** This is the child's way of delaying punishment. Have a discussion with your child at a later more pleasant time.
6. **Make the punishment brief.** Take toys out of circulation for no more than 1 or 2 days. Time-outs should last no longer than 1 minute per year of the child's age and 5 minutes maximum.
7. **Follow the consequence with love and trust.** Welcome your child back into the family circle and do **not** comment upon the previous misbehavior or require an apology for it.
8. **Direct the punishment against the misbehavior, not the person.** Avoid degrading comments such as "You never do anything right."

### **CALL OUR OFFICE**

During regular hours if

- Your child's misbehavior is dangerous.
- The instances of misbehavior seem too numerous to count.
- Your child is also having behavior problems at school.
- Your child doesn't seem to have many good points.
- Your child seems depressed.
- The parents can't agree on discipline.
- You can't give up physical punishment. (Note: Call immediately if you are afraid you might hurt your child.)
- The misbehavior does not improve after 1 month of using this approach.

### **Recommended Reading**

1. Edward R. Christophersen: Little People. Westport Publishers, Kansas City, MO 1988.
2. Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay: Parenting Young Children. American Guidance Service, Circle Pines, Minn., 1989
3. Michael Popkin: Active Parenting. Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1987.
4. Jerry Wyckoff and Barbara C. Unell: Discipline Without Spanking or Shouting. Meadowbrook, Deephaven, Minn., 1984.

## **THINGS TO CHECK WHEN TIME-OUT DOESN'T WORK**

1. Be sure you are not warning your child one (or more) times before sending him/her to the time-out chair. Warnings only teach your child that she/he can misbehave at least once (or more) before you'll use time-out. Warnings only make things worse, not better.
2. All adults who are responsible for disciplining your child at home should be using the time-out chair. You should agree when and for what behaviors to send your child to time-out. (You will want new sitters, visiting friends, and relatives to read and discuss the time-out guidelines.)
3. In order to maximize the effectiveness of time-out, you must make the rest of the day ("time-in") pleasant for your child. Remember to let your child know when she/he is well-behaved ("Catch 'em being good") rather than taking good behavior for granted. Most children would prefer to have you put them in time-out than ignore them completely.
4. Your child may say "Going to the chair doesn't bother me," or "I like time-out." Don't fall for this trick. Many children try to convince their parents that time-out is fun and therefore not working. You should notice over time that the problem behaviors for which you use time-out occur less often. (Time-out is not supposed to be a miserable experience.)
5. When you first begin using time-out, your child may act like time-out is a "game." She/he may put him/herself in time-out or ask to go to time-out. If this happens, give your child what she/he wants –that is, put him/her in time-out and require your child to sit quietly for the required amount of time. Your child will soon learn that time-out is not a game. Your child may also laugh or giggle when being placed in time-out or while in time-out. Although this may aggravate you, it is important for you to completely ignore your child when she/he is in time-out.
6. You may feel the need to punish your child for doing something inappropriate in the chair (e.g. cursing, spitting). However, it is very important to ignore your child when she/he behaves badly in time-out. This will teach your child that such "attention-getting" strategies will NOT work. If your child curses when out of the chair (and it bothers you), be sure to put the child in time-out.

7. T.V., radio, or a nice view out the window can make time-out more tolerable and prolong the length of time your child must stay in the chair by encouraging him/her to talk. Try to minimize such distractions.
8. You must use time-out for major as well as minor behavior problems. Parents have a tendency to feel that time-out is not enough of a punishment for big things and thereby discipline inconsistently. Consistency is most important for time-out to work for big and small problems.
9. Be certain that your child is aware of the rules, that if broken, result in time-out. Frequently, parents will establish a new rule (e.g., "Don't touch the new stereo") without telling their children. When their children break the rule they don't understand why they are being put in time-out.
10. Review the time-out guidelines to make certain you are following the recommendations. If your child is getting off the chair frequently, be sure to give one swat on the bottom and place your child back on the chair without talking.
11. When your child is in time-out:
  - don't look at him/her
  - don't talk to him/her
  - don't act angry
  - don't stay in the room if possible
  - do remain calm
  - do follow the written guidelines
  - do find something to do (read magazine, watch T.V., listen to stereo, phone someone or your therapist) when your child is crying and talking out loudly in time-out.

## **BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN: MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS AND OTHER CARETAKERS**

Behavior problems are the number one referral concern of parents who take their children to mental health professionals. Typical statements by parents of noncompliant children include, "my child won't mind", or "he doesn't mind unless I yell at him", or "I've got to threaten him before he'll mind". Parents find themselves getting angry at their children when their children don't mind. In turn the parents may yell or spank excessively out of frustration. Sometimes the parents will quit giving their children commands, or they will allow noncompliance to go by because the frustration and effort in trying to get the children to obey is too great. The following guidelines are provided to assist parents and other caretakers in managing children's non compliance.

- 1. Observe your child's behavior closely to make sure that the noncompliance is not a symptom of another problem.**
  - A. If your child generally starts to comply after you give a command, but then becomes distracted or goes off task before he completes doing what you requested, then your child may have a deficit in attention.
  - B. If your child generally doesn't obey when you give a command from across the room or when there are noisy distractions, but will mind when you are near to him, then your child may have a hearing problem.
  - C. If your child often seems confused about what he is suppose to do in response to your command, then your child may have a learning or a memory problem.
  - D. If your generally compliant child suddenly becomes excessively noncompliant, then physical or emotional factors may be effecting his behavior.
  - E. If the child minds very well for one parent or caretaker, but not for another (where all caretakers are issuing similar requests), then the noncompliance is not likely a symptom of a physical problem, learning difficulties, or deficits in attention.
- 2. Make commands brief, direct, and specific.**
  - A. Avoid lengthy commands and commands that involve multiple steps.
  - B. Avoid "question" commands. If you ask a question (e.g., "would you pick up your toys?") then you must be willing to accept a "no" response. "Let's commands (e.g. "let's pick up our toys") suggests that you are going to be doing what you want the child to do. A direct command leaves no questions as to who does what (e.g. "you need to put your toys away now").
  - C. Avoid ambiguous word such as nice, clean, or careful in your command. "Play nicely" is not so clearly understood as "give your brother the crayons". "Clean up your room" is less clear than "put all the toys in the toy box". "Be careful outside" is more ambiguous than "stay in our yard".
- 3. Make sure you have the child's attention when you give a command.** Attention is achieved by establishing eye contact or by touching child. Be near the child when you give the command.
- 4. Be sure that your child is able to do what you tell him to do.**
- 5. Use a firm voice in giving the command.** Do not shout, but increase the loudness of your voice to beyond conversational level.

6. **After you give the command, count silently to five.**
  - A. If the child has started to follow the command, give specific praise and attention (e.g. "I like it when you mind", "you are so helpful when you do what I tell you to do", or simply "thank you for minding").
  - B. If the child has overtly defied you or has not started to comply, punish the child by placing him in time-out. Say, "You did not mind. Time out.)
  - C. If the child starts to comply but then goes off task, thank the child for minding and redirect the child to the task.
  - D. If the child protests, but complies with the command, give praise for the compliance and ignore the complaints.
7. **Handle noncompliance matter-of-factly.** Recognize and tell yourself that **every** child is noncompliant sometimes. Like changing diapers, cleaning up after accidents, and taking care of a sick child, noncompliance is something that is not especially fun to deal with but you have to deal with it anyway. The more objective and unemotional you are in consequence noncompliance the more success you will have in keeping noncompliance to a minimum.
8. **Do not give a command unless you are prepared to consequence the child's actions.** If compliance is not required, ask the child a question (e.g. "will you help me?") or give the child choices (e.g., "which of these three shirts would you like to wear?").
9. **Recognize that your behavior and your child's behavior are influenced by situations and events outside of the specific interaction you are having with your child.** For example, when your child is tired or not feeling well, noncompliance may likely increase. Under these circumstances it is better to make fewer demands on your child and to physically guide them through actions rather than to punish episodes of noncompliance. For example, if your child is tired and cranky, it is better to help him put his pajamas on than to give him a command to put them on. Similarly, when you are feeling stresses related to events such as your work, health or marriage, you may react to noncompliance with more anger and greater emotion. Work to alleviate the stresses that interfere with compliance.



## DEALING WITH A NEGATIVE, STUBBORN TODDLER

**DEFINITION:** Negativism is a normal phase most children go through between 18 months and 3 years of age. It begins when children discover they have the power to refuse other people's requests. They respond negatively to many requests, including pleasant ones. In general, they are stubborn rather than cooperative. They delight in refusing a suggestion, whether it's about getting dressed or taking off their clothes, taking a bath or getting out of the bathtub, going to bed or getting up. Unless understood, this behavior can become extremely frustrating for parents. Handled appropriately, it lasts about 1 year.

Consider the following guidelines for helping you and your child through this phase.

1. **Don't take this normal phase too personally.** By "no" your child means "Do I have to?" or "Do you mean it?" A negative response should not be confused with disrespect. Also, it is not meant to annoy you. This phase is critical to the development of independence and identity. Try to look at it with a sense of humor and amazement.
2. **Don't punish your child for saying "no."** Punish your child for what he does, not what he says. Since saying "no" is not something you control, ignore it. If you argue with your child about saying "no," you will probably prolong this behavior.
3. **Give your child plenty of choices.** This is the best way to increase your child's sense of freedom and control, so that she will become more cooperative. Examples of choices are letting your child choose between a shower or a bath; which book to read; which toys to take into the tub; which fruit to eat for a snack; which clothes or shoes to wear; which breakfast cereal to eat; and which game to play, whether inside or outside, in the park or in the yard. For tasks your child doesn't like, give her a say in the matter by asking. "Do you want to do it slowly or fast?" or "Do you want me to do it, or you?" The more quickly your child gains a feeling that she is a decision maker, the sooner she will become cooperative.
4. **Don't give your child a choice when there is none.** Safety rules, such as sitting in the car seat, are not open to discussion, although you can explain why the rule must be followed. Going to bed or to day care also is not negotiable. Don't ask a question when there's only one acceptable answer, but direct your child in as kind a way as possible (for example, "I'm sorry, but now you have to go to bed."). Commands such as "do this or else" should be avoided.

5. **Give transition time when changing activities.** If your child is having fun and must change to another activity, he probably needs a transition time. For example, if your child is playing with trucks as dinnertime approaches, give him a 5-minute warning. A kitchen timer sometimes helps a child accept the change better.
6. **Eliminate excessive rules.** The more rules you have, the less likely it is that your child will be agreeable about following them. Eliminate unnecessary expectations and arguments about wearing socks or cleaning her plate. Help your child feel less controlled by having more positive interactions than negative contacts each day.
7. **Avoid responding to your child's requests with excessive "no's."** Be for your child a model of agreeableness. When your child asks for something and you are unsure, try to say "yes" or postpone your decision by saying "Let me think about it." If you are going to grant a request, do so right away, before your child whines or begs for it. When you must say "no," tell your child that you're sorry and give your child a reason.

**Call our office during regular hours if:**

- You or your spouse can't accept your child's need to say "no."
- You or your spouse have trouble controlling your temper.
- Your child has several other discipline problems.
- This approach doesn't bring improvement within 1 month.
- You have other questions or concerns