

# What is the best way to discipline my child?

## The American Academy of Pediatrics

As a parent, one of your jobs is to teach your child to behave. While this can take time, try not to get frustrated when your child does not behave. Instead, learn effective ways to discipline your child.

## Strategies That Work

When your child does not listen, try the following:

- **Natural Consequences** These are the times when you let your child see what will happen if she does not behave (as long as it does not place her in any danger). For example, if your child keeps dropping her cookies on purpose, she will soon have no more cookies left to eat. If she throws and breaks her toy, she will not be able to play with it. It will not be long before she learns not to drop her cookies and to play carefully with her toys. When you use this method, don't give in and rescue your child (by giving her more cookies, for example). Your child will learn best when she learns for herself.
- **Logical Consequences** These are the times when you will need to step in and create a consequence. For example, tell her that if she does not pick up her toys, you will put them away for the rest of the day. When you use this method, it is important that you mean what you say. Be prepared to follow through right away. You do not have to yell and scream. Be firm and respond in a calm way.
- **Withholding Privileges** is when you tell your child that if she does not cooperate, she will have to give something up she likes. The following are a few things to keep in mind when you use this technique:
  - Never take away something your child truly needs, such as a meal.
  - Choose something that your child values that is related to the misbehavior.
  - For children younger than 6 or 7 years, withholding privileges works best if done right away. For example, if your child misbehaves in the morning, do not tell her she can't watch TV that evening. There is too much time in between, and she probably will not connect the behavior with the consequence.
  - Be sure you can follow through on your promise
- **Time-Out** This is a technique that works well when a specific rule has been broken. It works best for children from 2 to 5 years of age, but can be used throughout childhood. Follow these steps to make a time-out work.
  1. **Set The Rules Ahead of Time** Decide which 2 or 3 behaviors will cause you to implement time-out and explain this to your child. You may have to repeat this often.
  2. **Choose A Time-Out Spot** This should be a boring place with no distractions, such as a chair. Remember, the main goal is to separate the child and allow her to pause and cool off. (Keep in mind that bathrooms can be dangerous and bedrooms may become playgrounds.)
  3. **Start The Time-Out** Give your child one warning (unless it is aggression). If it happens again, send her to the time-out spot right away. Tell her what she did wrong in as few words and with as little emotion as possible. If your child will not go to the spot on her own, pick her up and carry her there. If she will not stay, stand behind her and hold her gently but firmly. Then, without eye contact, say, "I

am holding you here because you have to have a time-out." Do not discuss it any further. Do not respond to pleas, promises, questions, excuses, or outbursts (such as foul language). It should only take a couple of time-outs before she learns to cooperate and will choose to sit quietly rather than be held down.

4. **Set A Time Limit** Once your child can sit quietly, set a timer so that she will know when the time-out is over. A rule of thumb is 1 minute of time-out for every year of your child's age (for example, a 4-year-old would get a 4-minute time-out). But even 15 seconds will often work. If fussing starts, restart the timer. Wait until your child is quiet before you set the timer again.
5. **Resume Activity** When the time is up, help your child return to play. Your child has "served her time." Do not lecture or ask for apologies. Remind her that you love her. If you need to discuss her behavior, wait until later to do so.

## Tips To Make Discipline More Effective

You will have days when it seems impossible to get your child to behave. But there are ways to ease frustration and avoid unnecessary conflict with your child.

- **Be Aware of What Your Child Can and Cannot Do** Children develop at different rates. They have different strengths and weaknesses. When your child misbehaves, it may be that he simply cannot do what you are asking or he does not understand what you are asking.
- **Think Before You Speak** Once you make a rule or promise, stick to it. So be sure you are being realistic. Think if it is really necessary before saying no.
- **Don't Give In** If your child throws a temper tantrum because he can't have a piece of candy and you give it to him so he will stop, he will learn that this is a way to get what he wants. Do not encourage bad behavior by giving in.
- **Work Toward Consistency** Try to make sure that your rules stay the same from day to day. Children find frequent changes confusing and may push the limits just to find out what the limits are.
- **Pay Attention To Your Child's Feelings** For example tell your child, "I know you are feeling sad that your friend is leaving, but you still have to pick up your toys." Watch for times when misbehavior has a pattern, like if your child is feeling jealous. Talk with your child about this rather than just giving consequences.
- **Learn From Mistakes—Including Your Own** If you do not handle a situation well the first time, try not to worry about it. Think about what you could have done differently, and try to do it the next time. If you feel you have made a real mistake in the heat of the moment, wait to cool down, apologize to your child, and explain how you will handle the situation in the future. Be sure to keep your promise. This gives your child a good model of how to recover from mistakes.

## Why Spanking Is Not the Best Choice

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend spanking. Although most Americans were spanked as children, we now know that it has several important side effects.

- Even though spanking may seem to "work" at first, it loses its impact after a while.
- Because most parents do not want to spank, they are less likely to be consistent.

- Spanking increases aggression and anger instead of teaching responsibility.
- Parents may intend to stay calm but often do not, and then regret their actions later.
- Spanking can lead to physical struggles and even grow to the point of harming the child.

It is true that many adults who were spanked as children may be well-adjusted and caring people today. However, research has shown that, when compared with children who are not spanked, children who are spanked are more likely to become adults who are depressed, use alcohol, have more anger, hit their own children, hit their spouses, and engage in crime and violence. These adult outcomes make sense because spanking teaches a child that causing others pain is OK if you're frustrated or want to maintain control—even with those you love. A child is not likely to see the difference between getting spanked from his parents and hitting a sibling or another child when he doesn't get what he wants.

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