

Teach your children well: discipline do's and don'ts

Parents, teachers need to be consistent with discipline

"Society holds everyone together, and without these conditions, our ideals, values, and the basics of right and wrong are lost. Without society's rigid rules, anarchy and savagery can come to light."



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On Education

This fundamental theme from William Golding's novel "Lord of the Flies" reinforces the importance of discipline.

Both parents and teachers share a common bond: the responsibility of practicing discipline. Setting guidelines and boundaries that are supported by appropriate and reasonable consequences must be consistent in order to be effective.

Discipline starts at home. Parents are responsible for the initial setting of guidelines and boundaries. Their job is to implement and support appropriate and reasonable consequences when rules are broken and conduct is unacceptable. Parents teach their children the differences between right and wrong. Methods of communication and demonstration of respect are learned from environment, meaning that kids will imitate what they see their parents doing. Having the ability to obey and follow rules is created within a parent-child relationship.

Once children are ready to go to school, they can use their prior knowledge of how to conduct themselves within a classroom setting. Teachers need to be firm, yet nurturing when it comes to discipline. Similarly to parents, teachers are responsible for setting the tone of behavior in their classrooms. The creation of guidelines and boundaries must be clear to students. These rules and regulations are often posted in unobstructed view as a reminder of what is and is not acceptable within classroom perimeters.

Setting the rules is one aspect of discipline. Enforcing the consequences of breaking the rules is important. Kids want to see discipline in action in order for it to be meaningful.

Repeated threats without any follow-through of punishment is ineffectual. Students want to know that if they do something against the rules, necessary and fair consequences will follow.

Kids, regardless of their age, want to know what they can get away with in terms of their behavior and conduct. They consistently test the limits to see how far they can go. Although their experimentation with adult threshold levels is often a cause for headaches, kids need to get in trouble so they can learn from their mistakes.

Consistency is the key. If certain actions are allowable sometimes, but are cause for punishment other times, confusion arises — for both the child and the enforcer of discipline. The same unacceptable behaviors need to be enforced with reasonable consequences every time they occur. When parents and teachers are inconsistent with their methods of discipline, maintaining order, respect, and acceptable behavior is near to impossible.

When kids are not disciplined, they tend to be bratty, obnoxious, rude and disrespectful. These types of students often have difficulty in social situa-

tions, and find themselves getting into more trouble at school than others. Unfortunately, there are parents and teachers who fear being disliked by their children and students. Nobody benefits when adults are reluctant to enforce discipline.

Discipline is often associated with the concepts of spanking, yelling or physical force. Effective discipline involves communication with suitable words and process of thought. Screaming, yelling, and fighting sometimes happen at home when escalating emotions overpower a confrontational situation. However, these methods are usually unnecessary.

People have a tendency to speak down to children, whether they are 4 or 15 years old. "I'm

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the adult, you're the child" is a common phrase in disciplinary situations. There are times when a child, and sometimes an adult, needs to be spoken to as a child. Demonstrating respectful communication methods increases the potential for positive

behavior while reducing the need for consequences associated with discipline.

Although discipline and boundaries are important for children, find out in next week's column why children need freedom and opportunities to learn responsibility. Vicki Isacowitz is a secondary English teacher who has been educating students since 1996. She is co-founder of Clever Minds Educational Services, providing tutoring for students in grades K-12. For more information, or to comment on her column, please call 584-1791 or e-mail: vicki@cleverminds.org.