

Effective Discipline Techniques for Parents: Alternatives to Spanking

Many families consider spanking an effective form of discipline for children who are misbehaving. However, due to concerns about the impact of spanking on their child(ren) and the potential for spanking to appear as a form of child maltreatment, parents often seek other options and alternatives. When considering alternative methods of disciplining children it is important to make a distinction between punishment and discipline.

Discipline vs. Punishment: Discipline is defined as a positive method of teaching a child right from wrong. Punishment is a form of discipline. Punishment may be physical--as in spanking, or psychological--as in verbal disapproval, isolation or loss of privileges. In some respects, punishment represents one end of a very broad spectrum of discipline techniques.

Discipline is a tool to help children learn self-control and take responsibility for their own behavior. Children who are raised in a way that stresses positive discipline will understand their own behavior better, show independence, and respect themselves and others. When punishment is the basis for discipline, the person who punishes the child becomes responsible for the child's behavior.

Parenting Styles: An authoritative or democratic style is a positive approach to effectively discipline children. This method involves establishing basic guidelines for children, focusing on problem-solving techniques, parent-child communication about mistakes and mutually determining how amends should be made. Authoritative parenting teaches children responsibility and how to make choices. Misbehavior is managed with an appropriate consequence rather than an arbitrary punishment.

Alternatives to Physical Discipline

- **Role Modeling.** Most children learn behaviors by observing their parents' actions. Parents, therefore, must model the ways they want their children to behave. Remember that if a parent often yells, screams, or hits, the child will likely do the same.
Setting Rules. Rules should be reasonable, fair, realistic and explained to child(ren) along with the consequences of not following them. A minimum set of rules should be established with attention given to the child's age and developmental level. Appropriate consequences allow a child to redeem him/herself and relate to the misbehavior. A child should be allowed to negotiate what the consequence will be; thus building self-esteem and cooperation skills. Children may feel less resentful and angry if they are allowed to help decide the consequence of their negative behavior.

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What You Need to Know...



- **Encourage and Reward Good Behavior.** When children are behaving appropriately, tell them so! Children can be rewarded through tangible objects, privileges, increased responsibility and verbal praise.
- **Creating Charts.** Using charts to monitor and reward behavior is an interactive way for a child to learn appropriate behavior. A child's "progress chart" may create improved cooperation and increased self-esteem. Charts should be simple and used for one behavior at a time with a designated time frame in mind.
- **Time-Out.** Time-out involves removing a child from a situation following a negative behavior as a means to calm down, establish control, end inappropriate behavior, and reenter the situation in a positive state. Effective time-outs include an explanation of what the inappropriate behavior is and why the time-out is needed. The child should be told how long the time-out will last and when it will begin. The amount of time should be determined based on the child's age and developmental level.

For more information, contact Mental Health America of Wisconsin at 414.276.3122, or via Email: info@mhawisconsin.org.

Mental Health America is a United Way of Greater Milwaukee Agency.



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