

Discipline Strategies Appropriate for Young Children



Discipline is not punishment. Discipline guides, teaches, and encourages healthy choices. It helps children learn how to behave appropriately for their age and developmental level. Children should never feel threatened or afraid. They should be taught with respect and love.

BIRTH-AGE 3.

Very young children need good supervision, firm and kind removal from what they should not do, and guidance to direct them to things they can do.

Very young children do not have the reasoning skills to avoid situations that require some type of intervention to guide and protect them.

Children may cry and throw tantrums because they are sick, hungry, thirsty, too hot, too tired, too stimulated, or neglected. It is up to adults to nurture children and prevent discomfort by meeting a child's physical and emotional needs. When challenging behavior does occur, supervision, distraction, and redirection are basic ways to discipline a young child.

AGE 3-8.

Authorities on discipline and young children seem to consistently recommend the following disciplinary strategies for children starting at age 3:

1. **Limit Setting.** Consistently setting limits helps children feel calm and safe.
 - Reduce your expectations to those that are most important. (Be gentle with your friend.)
 - Give one limit at a time. Keep it short and clear.
 - Give positive, polite instructions. (Please put away your toy right now.)
 - Phrase requests positively. (Please use a soft, quiet voice, instead of Stop yelling.)
2. **Ignoring.** Some behavior that is not dangerous to the child or others should be ignored (e.g., whining, arguing, pleading, swearing, or tantrums). If you do not ignore some of these behaviors, you will constantly be correcting and giving the child attention for negative rather than positive behavior. Ignoring a child is often hard to do. Some guidelines to follow when you are trying to ignore behaviors follow:
 - Avoid discussion or eye contact.
 - Move away from the child, but stay in the room.
 - Choose which behaviors you *can* ignore.
 - Distract the child by doing something he or she will want to do with you (I see an elephant in this book).
 - Praise positive behavior (I like it when you tell me with words why you are angry rather than screaming at me).
3. **Time-out.** Time-out is one method some families use to help children calm down and regain self-control, and also to give adults time to regain their self-control. Not all child development

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DISCIPLINE- HANDOUT 3

professionals agree that time-out is good for children. Never use time-out with children under the age of 2. For families who choose to use time-out, these guidelines are recommended:

- Be selective in using time-out, or it loses its meaning to the child.
- Choose a location where the child can get under control and calm down.
- Decide on the types of challenging behaviors for which time-out is appropriate.
- Choose and tell the child the length of the time-out. Suggestions are age 3, no more than 3 minutes; age 4, no more than 4 minutes; age 5 no more than 5 minutes.
- Don't time the time-out until after 2 minutes of quiet behavior. It is important to give the child practice in calming him or herself and regaining self control.
- For children who test the limits and won't stay in time-out, accompany time-out with the loss of a privilege. (No bike riding today.)
- Use "if" and "then" warnings and be sure to follow through. (If you don't stay silently in time-out for 3 minutes, then no TV tonight.)
- When time-out is over, look for opportunities to teach the child. (Martin, let's talk about a better way to let Luke know you are angry with him, rather than fighting.)

4. *Teaching Consequences.* Sometimes a child can learn not to repeat negative behavior when adults help him or her understand what might happen as a consequence of an action. When the safety of the child (e.g., play with matches and get burned) is at stake, this method should never be used.

Examples of consequences would be:

(1) Child continues to throw the ball in the street after being told not to, and the ball

rolls down the sewer. (2) Child colors on the wall, and parent takes away the crayons. (3) Child won't stop crying for a toy in the store, so parent takes the child home.

Always explain to the child what the connection is between the behavior and the consequences.

5. *Loss of Privileges.* When a child is old enough to understand a privilege (something appropriate to the child values) will be taken away if negative behavior continues, this can be a learning experience:

- It offers the child a choice to exercise self-control or lose a privilege.
- It teaches a child that choices or actions have consequences.

It is not fair to take away a privilege if the child has not been forewarned of the consequences. It is important to think about the developmental level of the child to determine the appropriateness of what privilege will be lost. For example:

AGE 3:

Repeatedly throws sand at other children. Loses privilege to stay in the sandbox.

AGE 4:

Drops sister's doll in the toilet. Loses privilege to play with sister's toys.

AGE 5:

Spits on older brother. Loses story at bedtime.

AGE 6:

Rips up a sibling's puzzle. Must stay indoors while siblings ride their bikes.

AGE 7:

Talks back disrespectfully. Loses time to watch favorite TV show.

