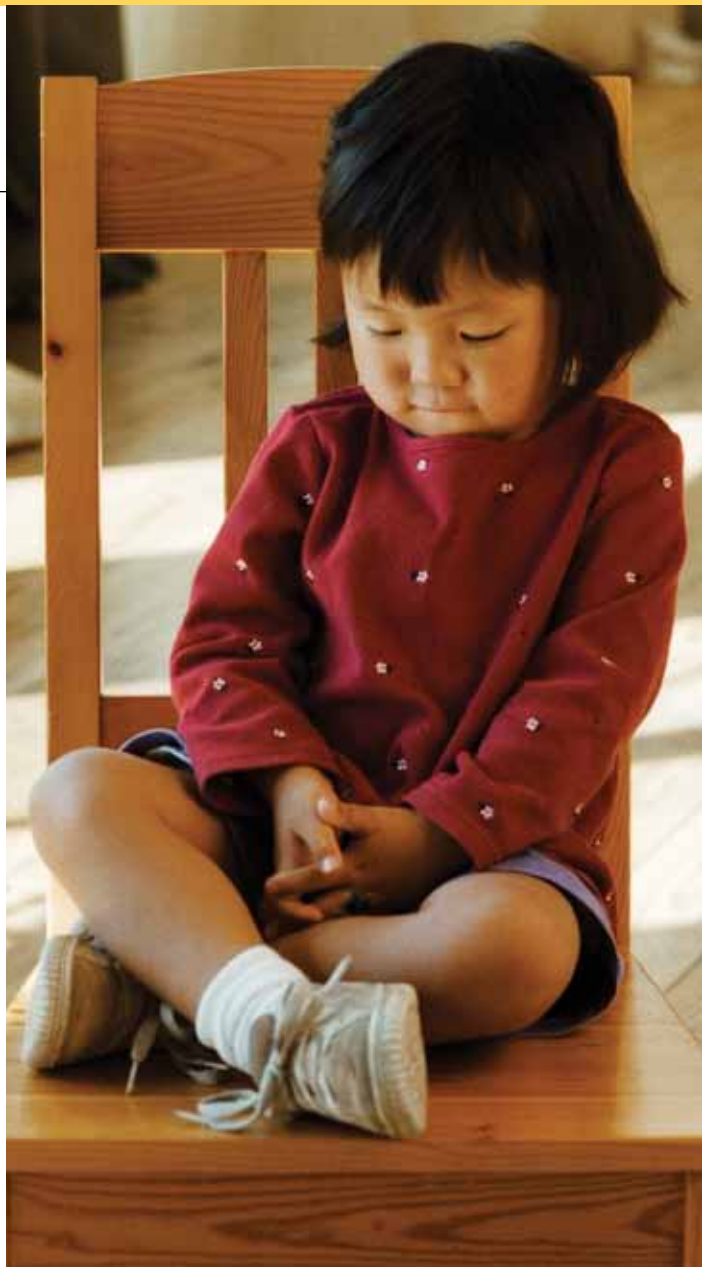
Discipline



What is Discipline?

To discipline means to teach. Discipline is not punishment. Discipline means providing guidelines and support for young children while they are learning how to manage their emotions, deal with disappointment or frustration, and form relationships with other people. Effective discipline means teaching children to behave in ways that support the values of their family, society and culture.

Discipline is not something to do after a child misbehaves, but is an ongoing way of interacting with a child that encourages good behavior, discourages bad behavior, and yes, addresses misbehavior when it occurs.

Why Discipline Matters

Discipline has long-term benefits for parent and child.

- Research shows that a discipline style of "limit setting" is associated with positive outcomes for children. Such a style is characterized by paying attention to children's feelings, using appropriate distractions, explaining the reasons for a limit to the child, and helping the child succeed in staying within the limits set.
    - When parents used limit setting, their children were better able to wait for something they wanted, better able to get along with peers, and more confident in social situations.

The best kinds of discipline build trust.

- Research also shows us which discipline methods don't work. Several studies have found that harsh tactics such as spanking are not effective. Such methods do not support a child's developmental progress towards self-control.
    - Sensitive, yet firm limit setting as a discipline method does much more than simply change a child's behavior. It also builds trust and respect for consequences.

What Parents Can Do

Be Consistent

First, remember that whatever the age of your child, it's important to be consistent when it comes to discipline. If you don't stick to the rules and consequences you set up, your children aren't likely to either.

Consider your child's age:

- **INFANTS:** During the first 18 months, focus on teaching your child how to interact with the things and people in his world. Babies and toddlers are naturally curious. When possible, plan ahead and remove fragile items that your baby might be curious about or that are dangerous.
- **TODDLERS:** At this age, children begin to differentiate themselves from their caregivers and will start to assert their own decision making. This is a good time for parents to step in with guidance and teaching.
- **PRESCHOOLERS:** This is when children become more aware of actions and consequences. Communicate the rules and expectations of your home and family. Follow-through is important and consistency is the key!

Remember that there are three ways to discipline:

1. ENCOURAGE GOOD BEHAVIOR

- Use praise, rewards, and modeling.
- Model desired behavior and acknowledge your own errors to teach children what is expected of them and teaches them, and that it is ok to make mistakes.
- Set clear rules and explain why these rules are important. Be sure the child knows what to expect before disciplining for an unacceptable behavior. Set these boundaries and expectations early, before challenging situations arise.
- Make requests in short, easy to understand phrases.



2. PREVENT MISBEHAVIOR

- Offer choices: One of the way children express their independence is by making choices. For example, allow your child to choose his own clothing or snack. This gives him a sense of control and reduces the likelihood of disagreement.
- Distraction: This is simply re-directing a child's attention from an undesirable behavior to something else. Though it is critical to observe cues and respect emotions, distraction can be very effective, especially with toddlers and preschoolers.
- Children are more likely to misbehave when they are hungry, tired, or feeling left out, so try to anticipate your child's needs.

3. RESOLVE PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

- **Time-out:** Many parents have reported that time-outs are an effective discipline choice. This is especially true for behaviors that are intentional or when the time-out has been an agreed upon response to a repeated behavior.
- As with most parenting techniques, time outs are less about the action itself and more about how the time out is perceived by the child. The goal is to provide clarity about the act of misbehavior while showing sensitivity within the parent-child context

Discipline is one of the most important parts of parenting.

Dealing with a misbehaving child is really just one very small part of discipline, and a child who others may call "well-behaved" is probably not a child who is frequently punished. Rather, he is likely a child whose days are filled with communication with his parents and caregivers and a child who understands limits and expectations. Thought of this way, discipline is simply another step in preparing your child for future happiness and success, and an essential part of the parent-child relationship. It doesn't have to be unpleasant, and it can make family life more fun and joyful.