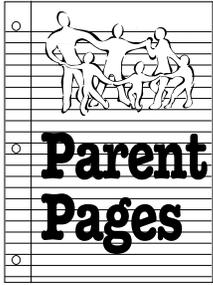


Discipline Means Helping Children Gain Self-Control



Most parents and teachers agree there are four important goals for healthy development in the early years of a child's life:

1. Each child should develop a positive self-image; that is, children should see themselves as competent people, generally able to do what is expected of them.
2. Children should be encouraged by the adults who care for them to be curious, to ask questions and to explore the world in which they live.
3. Children should be helped to develop language skills - to talk clearly and listen carefully.
4. Children should begin to develop the ability to be self-disciplined - to control their own behavior.

A four-year old once paid her parents the nicest compliment they had ever received when she said to them, "Sometimes you say `no' to me; sometimes you help me say `no' to myself; but all the times you love me." Perhaps this statement from a highly verbal child describes the key to good discipline. We want children to feel they are good people, worthy of our love and respect, although we may not like or allow some of the things they do.

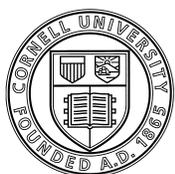
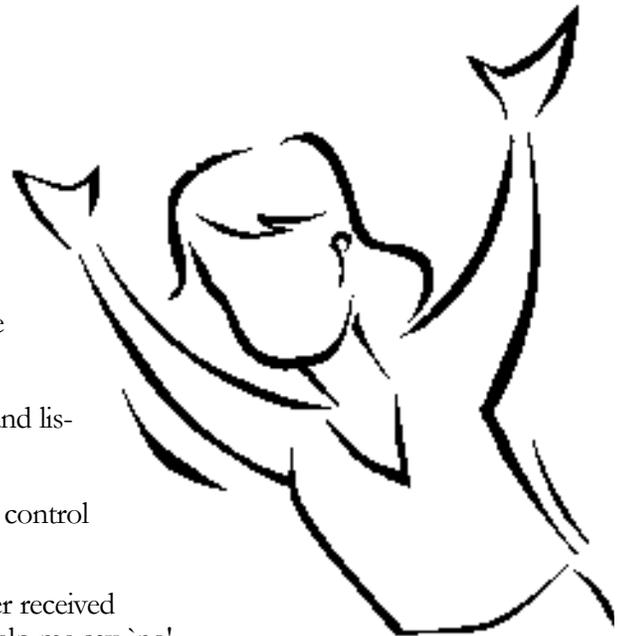
The behavior of young children can be frustrating and confusing to adults, particularly to adults who have had little previous experience with very small human beings. Sometimes children want to be independent and grown-up, but they also want to be babies and to be taken care of like babies. They want to be able to decide things for themselves, but they are frequently unhappy with decisions they have made.

Sometimes children want to do the "right" thing, but grownups they live with are too busy, too stressed or too taken up with their own problems to give the slow, careful guidance children need if they are to grow into self-disciplined people. All children need to know that even when they make the "wrong" decision, perhaps breaking rules or throwing tantrums, the adults who are important to them still love them, choose to be with them, and will give them another chance.

Of course it's easy to say this, but more difficult to believe it when faced with a child who is behaving in a way that seems just plain unpleasant. It is reassuring to many parents of preschoolers that most children exhibit challenging behavior in one, a few, or many of the following areas before they are five years old:

- ◆ biting
- ◆ swearing
- ◆ defiance of adults
- ◆ fighting
- ◆ noisiness
- ◆ messiness
- ◆ extreme shyness
- ◆ restlessness
- ◆ fearfulness

~Continued~



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**Here are some suggestions that may be useful to adults
who want to help children develop the ability to discipline themselves:**

1. Tell them what they can do, rather than what they can't.

"Paint the paper," not "Don't paint the table."

"Yell outside," not "Don't yell inside."

"Here's some clay you can pound," instead of ""Don't pound the piano."

2. As children get used to listening, adults can use more words to explain the reasons for directions.

"You may not paint the table, but you may paint as many papers as you like."

"It makes it hard for us to hear each other if people yell inside. Keep your voice quiet in the playroom - we can yell outside later."

"Banging the piano so hard might break it, but you can pound this clay as hard as you like."

3. Children should be offered a choice only if the adult means to accept their decision.

"Let's go in for juice now," not "Would you like to go in for juice now?"

"Time to rest now," not "Are you going to rest now?"

"Here's a place for you," not "Would you like to sit here to listen to the story?"

4. Adults should use only words and a tone of voice that will help children feel sure of themselves and comforted, not frightened or ashamed.

"Please keep the food on your plate," not "Quit messing!"

"Tell her you want the toy," not "If you hit her I'll hit you."

"Biting hurts - you must not bite people," not "Dogs bite. If you bite, you'll have to live in a doghouse."

5. Avoid trying to get children to do something by comparing them with other children.

"Let me help with your boots," not "Johnny can put his own boots on. Are you a big boy like Johnny?"

"I'm sorry that hurt you," not "Susie didn't cry when she bumped her head."

"Finish washing your hands now," not "Billy finished washing his hands and you're still doing it."

6. Use the adult voice as a teaching tool.

When noise in a group of children mounts, the adult should lower his own voice first. Then she can whisper or speak to the nearest child and have something so interesting to say that the child will be quiet and listen. It's surprising how quickly the other children will crowd around to hear, too. Of course, sometimes this doesn't work at all.

When the adult wants to tell more than one child something, she should move to each child as she speaks to him, and get down to the child's level. Never stand in one place and bellow instructions. In fact, never stand in one place and bellow anything.

If children in a group have a hard time listening, the adult can put a firm but friendly arm around them, or take their hands to help them stay still long enough to hear what is being said.

7. Distraction works best when the adult offers children the same kind of activity as the one they have chosen for themselves.

A child who is jumping off the bookshelves into the block buildings can be shown a place to jump without bothering other people. But a puzzle or sitting-still activity will not be appealing.

A child who is sitting in a corner sucking a thumb is more likely to want to sit on a lap and listen to a story than to join a group of children playing house.

A child who is swearing frequently and loudly is more likely to be diverted by nonsense sounds and silly language than by being told, "That isn't nice." For instance, to a child who says "damn" an adult can say "dams, lam, pam, wam, cam."

In conclusion, perhaps it must be said that any adult can force, frighten or bribe a child into behaving in an obedient, conforming fashion. Helping children develop the ability to make and carry out wise decisions about their own behavior is perhaps the most difficult task confronting parents, teachers and caregivers.