

Parenting Tools:

- Discipline vs. Punishment -



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Parenting Tools: *Discipline vs. Punishment*

Discipline is one of the toughest and most rewarding aspects of being a parent. Since children at age seven develop sensitivity to adult evaluation, care a lot about fairness, and desire to assume more responsibility, it is important that our children see their discipline as a teaching and growing opportunity. As a parent, discipline is an opportunity for you to guide and build character in the children that God has given you to raise.

We would all agree that children are going to misbehave, and, when they do, parents need to respond. Unfortunately, many times parents react with punishment and penalties when they could respond with appropriate on-the-job teaching and correction that would be of lasting benefit to the child. That's what discipline is all about—learning. Below are a few concepts for parents to understand concerning discipline:

1. Consider discipline a privilege, not a chore.

Consider discipline something you get to do, not something you have to do. What could be better than having the opportunity to give your kids direction or teach them a valuable lesson that could help them avoid some long-range disaster or contribute to their character development? Proverbs 29:17 says, "Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul."

2. Keep self-discipline the goal.

The highest form of discipline is self-discipline. Therefore, your goal should be to teach your kids how to discipline themselves. As soon as possible, encourage them to set their alarm clocks, dress themselves, be ready to head out for school on time, make their

lunches, and feed the fish, etc. In other words, start allowing kids to do things for themselves just like you've taught them. This doesn't mean you don't do things for your kids at all, but rather that you don't do things for them that they are capable of doing for themselves. Be sure you recognize and verbalize how your child's contribution promotes the well being of the entire family. Remind your children that God helps us along the way. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline" (International Standard Version).

3. Use discipline for correction.

There is a difference between applying discipline with negative consequences and applying punishment with penalties. By applying discipline with negative consequences, you emphasize the positive lessons to be learned along with corrective measures to help the child learn, without attacking or belittling him or her. With punishment and penalties, however, the emphasis is often placed on the child himself, rather than the lesson to be learned from the mistake. The problem with this is that the child can feel lumped together with the bad things he or she has done, which, in turn, can lead him or her to feel bad about him or herself. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." By teaching our kids to see correction as a learning opportunity, we teach them to appreciate discipline as a good thing.

If you're trying to grow a family where kids behave themselves and get along with everyone in the family, don't jump down their throats every time they mess up. Instead, you might say, "Hey, this is not how we treat members of our family, and we've talked about this several times. I think this calls for a negative consequence" (use

this term after you've taught your child what a negative consequence is). Then, ask your child, "What negative consequence do you think would help you learn to treat your sister with respect?" Let your child think it through and make a suggestion. If you need to alter your child's suggestion, alter it. Then, enforce it.