

Disciplining

How do you keep a 1-year-old from heading toward the TV? What should you do when your preschooler throws a fit? How can you get your adolescent to respect your authority? Approaches that work with your stubborn toddler won't be very effective with your rebellious teen. Find out here how to vary your approach to discipline to best fit your family. We highly recommend watching Super Nanny for discipline techniques.

Ages 0 to 2

How do you discipline a child this age? Knowing that babies and toddlers are naturally curious, the best way to discipline a young child is to eliminate temptations. Keep his environment relatively free of no-nos - items such as TVs, stereos, jewelry, and especially cleaning supplies and medications should be kept well out of his reach. When your crawling baby or roving toddler heads toward an unacceptable or dangerous play object, calmly say, "No," and redirect him by either removing him from the area or engaging his attention with an appropriate activity.

Timeouts can be effective discipline for toddlers when simply redirecting their attention won't work. A child who has been hitting, biting, or throwing food, for example, should be told why that behavior is unacceptable and taken to a designated timeout area - a kitchen chair or bottom stair - for a minute or two to calm down (longer timeouts are not effective for toddlers).

And don't forget, children learn by watching you. Make sure your behavior is role-model material. You will make a much stronger impact on your child if he sees you putting your belongings away, too, rather than if you just tell him to pick up his toys while you leave your stuff strewn across the kitchen counter.

Ages 3 to 5

As your child grows and can begin to understand the connection between actions and consequences, make sure you begin to establish the rules of your family's home. It's important to explain to kids what you expect of them before you punish them for a certain behavior. For instance, the first time your 3-year-old uses crayons to decorate the living room wall, you should discuss why that is not allowed and what will happen if it's done again. Explain to him that he will have to help clean the wall and will not be able to use his crayons for the rest of the afternoon. If he crayons on the walls again a few days later, you should remind him that crayons are for paper only and then enforce the consequences.

The earlier parents can set up this kind of "I set the rules and you're expected to listen or accept the consequences," the better for everyone. While it's sometimes easier for parents to ignore occasional bad behavior or fail to follow through on some threatened punishment, this risks setting a bad precedent. Consistency is the key to effective discipline. It's important for parents to decide together what the rules are and then be consistent in upholding them.

At the same time you become clear on what behaviors will be punished, don't forget to reward good behaviors. Discipline is not just about punishment. Parents need to remember to recognize good behavior. For example, you could say, "I'm proud of you for sharing your toys at playgroup." This is usually more effective than punishing a child for the opposite behavior - not sharing. And be specific when praising your child; don't just say, "Good job!"

If your child is displaying an unacceptable behavior that just won't go away no matter what you do, consider setting up a chart system. Put up a chart with a box for each day of the week on the refrigerator and decide how many chances you'll give your child to display the unacceptable behavior before some punishment kicks in or how long the proper behavior must be displayed before it is rewarded. Then simply keep track by monitoring on a daily basis. This will give your child (and you) a concrete look at how he's doing. Once this begins to work, don't forget to praise your child for learning to [control misbehavior](#) and especially for overcoming any stubborn problem.

Timeouts also can work well for children this age. Establish a suitable timeout place that is free of distractions and will force your child to think about his behavior. Remember, getting sent to your room may have meant something in the days before computers, TVs, and video games were stored there. Don't forget to consider the length of time that will best suit your child. Experts say 1 minute for each year of age is a good rule of thumb to follow; others recommend using the timeout until the child is calmed down (to teach self-regulation).

Ages 6-8

Timeouts and consequences are also effective discipline strategies with this age group. Again, consistency is crucial, as is following through. Make good on any promises of discipline or else you will risk undermining your authority. Kids have to believe that you mean what you say. This is not to say you can't give second chances or allow your child a certain margin of error, but for the most part, you should follow through with what you say. Be careful not to make unrealistic threats of punishment ("Slam that door and you'll never watch TV again!") in anger, since not following through could weaken all your threats. If you threaten to turn the car around and go home if the squabbling in the backseat doesn't stop, make sure you do exactly that. The lost day at the beach is much less valuable than the credibility you'll gain with your kids.

Huge punishments may take away your power as a parent. If you ground your son for a month, he may not feel motivated to change his behavior because everything has already been taken away.

Ages 9 to 12

Kids in this age group - just as with all ages - can be disciplined with natural consequences. As they mature and request more independence and responsibility, teaching them to deal with the consequences of their behavior is an effective and appropriate method of discipline. For example, if your fifth grader has not done his homework before bedtime, should you make him stay up or help him finish? Probably not, since you'll be missing an opportunity to teach him something about life. If he doesn't do his homework earlier, he'll go to school without it the next day and suffer the resulting bad grade. It's natural for you to want to rescue your child from his mistakes, but in the long run you'll be doing him more of a favor if you let him fail sometimes. He'll see what behaving improperly can mean, and will probably not make those mistakes again. However, if your child does not seem to be learning from natural consequences, you should set up your own consequences to help him modify his behavior more effectively.

Ages 13 and Up

By now you've laid the groundwork. Your child knows what's expected of him and knows that you mean what you say about the consequences of bad behavior. Don't let down your guard now - discipline is just as important for teens as it is for younger children. Just like the 4-year-old who needs you to set a bedtime and stick to it, no matter how he whines, your teen needs to know his boundaries, too. Make sure to set up rules regarding homework, visits by friends, curfews, and dating and discuss them beforehand with your teenager so there will be no misunderstandings. Your child, although he will probably complain from time to time, will realize that you are in control. Believe it or not, teens still want and need you to set limits and enforce order in their lives, even as you grant them greater freedom and responsibility.

When your teen does break a rule, taking away privileges may seem to be the best plan of action. While it's fine to take away the car for a week, for example, be sure to discuss with your child why coming home an hour past curfew is unacceptable and worrisome.

It's also important to give a teenager some control over his life. Not only will this limit the number of power struggles you may have with him, it will help him to respect the decisions you must make for him. With a younger teen, you could allow him to make his own decisions concerning school clothes, hair styles, or even the condition of his room. As he gets older, his realm of control might be extended to include an occasional relaxed curfew.

A Word About Spanking

There is perhaps no more controversial form of discipline than spanking. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) disapproves of spanking under any circumstance. Here are some reasons why the AAP encourages parents to avoid spanking:

- Spanking teaches children that it's OK to hit when they're angry.
- Spanking can physically harm children.
- Rather than teaching children how to change their behavior, spanking makes them fearful of their parents and teaches them merely to avoid getting caught.

In the case of children who are looking for attention by acting out, spanking may inadvertently "reward" children by giving them attention - negative attention is better than no attention at all.

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Disclaimer: These guidelines are to help the caretaker with treatment at home. However, if you are ever concerned about your child's health, you should see a physician in person.