

Do's and Don'ts of Disciplining your Child

You can handle disciplining your child by remaining in control and managing yours and your child's behavior.

Many parents don't really take the time to examine how they discipline their children. Do you have a particular disciplining style? Have you ever thought about it? Often, parents discipline in the same manner that they were disciplined as a child. Do you assume that what worked for your parents should also work for you? Maybe it does work, but then again, maybe it doesn't.

Obviously, the discipline method you choose needs to be appropriate for the age of your child. While your three year-old might benefit from a few minutes time-out, your teenager will probably respond to a loss of privilege, such as her cell-phone or computer time.

You also need to fit the punishment to the crime. As your children grow, you may discover that every little mistake or misbehavior they exhibit may not always need to be punished. In other words, choose your battles. If your toddler insists on eating his bread before he finishes his vegetables, go ahead and let him. The point is to teach him to eat healthy foods.

He may not eat in the same manner as you, but if the end result is the same, what difference does it make?

The same idea can apply to your teenager. If he is well-mannered and responsible, does it really matter what color his hair is? If you recognize it as his need to show some independence and realize it is not an act of rebellion against you, you can let it go. Chances are, the less you protest, the quicker he'll go back to his natural color.

One of the worst mistakes parents can make is to develop the habit of yelling. Sure, it may work the first few times you lose control, but eventually, that is all that your child will see—your loss of control. If you lose your cool, how can you expect your child to learn to exercise control in his behavior? Once you've lost control, it is hard to get it back, and it is harder to keep your child's respect.

If you know you are about to lose control, try to distance yourself from the situation. Take a few minutes to calm down. If you feel you can leave your child alone, walk into the next room until you can calm down. If necessary, you can always put your toddler in a playpen for a few moments. If you can't leave her alone, take a few deep breaths, and repeat to yourself that "This too shall pass."

One of the best ways to handle discipline is to try and anticipate problems before they occur. If your toddler repeatedly dumps her hair bows out of the box you keep them in, then move the hair bows and the box to a place she can't reach. If your teenager is in a particularly rebellious stage, try not to be combative in your own behavior. Allow her to choose from several choices, and try to avoid ultimatums. Give her options, instead. Don't look at discipline as a reinforcement of who is the boss. Discipline should never be a battle of wills.

Keep in mind that different children will respond and behave in different ways. While one child may be characteristically quiet and mild-mannered, another child may be willful by nature. Some children, who initially were thought to just have behavior problems, are later diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Instead of focusing solely on disciplining, try to focus on managing yours and your child's behavior. Sometimes children act out simply to gain attention from their parent, whether that attention is good or bad. This doesn't mean you need to give your child your undivided attention twenty-four hours a day, but it does mean that you need to be more in tune to your child's specific needs.

If you have spent a good part of the day busily taking care of household needs and you haven't been able to spend much individual time with your child, maybe all your child needs is a little extra attention from you. Before you send her to time-out, spend some time doing something she enjoys.

Finally, disciplining shouldn't be about just punishing your child. Instead, you should use the discipline to teach your child a behavior lesson. Help her learn from her mistakes, and be sure to praise her when she avoids the unwanted behavior. You want to reinforce the good things she does. As you manage your responses to her, she should learn to manage her own behavior in a more acceptable manner.