

# POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

APPROPRIATE GUIDANCE FOR YOUR CHILD

C H I L D R E N ' S H O M E S O C I E T Y O F C A L I F O R N I A

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**Every parent and caregiver struggles at one time or another with how to set limits and guide children's behavior. The goal of positive discipline is to teach children to develop safe, socially responsible behavior that promotes self-respect and respect for the feelings and property of others.**



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**Remember that discipline and punishment are not the same. Discipline is guidance and teaching that promotes self-reflection and positive behavior. Punishment is a penalty imposed in reaction to unacceptable behavior. Positive discipline is more effective than punishment because desirable behaviors that last a lifetime must come from within the child rather than be imposed by an external force. Setting limits helps children understand that rules help us live together in a respectful way.**



### ★ GUIDELINES FOR SETTING LIMITS

- Rules are a list of appropriate or inappropriate behaviors. Younger children often struggle with remembering rules. Instead, try grouping things into three categories, or expectations. For example, "We are safe, we are healthy, and we are kind." This allows children to problem-solve and create their own behavior limits as situations arise. For example, if a child pushes someone you might ask, "Is pushing kind?" These rich conversations allow children to reflect on their behavior and learn.
- Always explain why a rule or expectation is important, because this will help children understand the value in changing their behavior. For example, "When we play in the sandbox, it's important to keep the sand near the ground so that it does not get in someone's eyes. That would hurt."
- Make sure children understand that they are always accepted, loved, and capable. Instead of focusing on the child, focus on the inappropriate behavior. For example, "Hitting hurts me. If you feel angry and need to hit something, you can hit a pillow. If you need help, you can ask me to help you."
- Keep rules simple and specific. When a rule is broken, state the rule and direct the child toward correcting the mistake. For example, "Climbing on the counter is dangerous. If you need something you can't reach, please ask for help."
- Power struggles often increase stress. Focus on labeling emotions, describing what is happening, and using a calm tone of voice with minimal body movement. Keeping a calm presence helps children regulate their own behavior.
- Only offer choices when it is appropriate. For example, asking "Do you want to take a nap?" implies there is a choice and offers the child a chance to refuse the nap. Instead, ask "Do you want to take a nap before or after having a snack?"
- Avoid overusing the word "no" and save it for when you really need it. Try offering an acceptable alternative instead. For example, if a child asks for a cookie too close to lunch time, say, "You may have a cookie after we finish lunch."
- Offer children a chance to change their behavior with a reminder, and then follow through if needed. "The next time you throw sand, you will have to leave the sandbox." Redirect the child toward acceptable activities.



### ★ PROBLEM-SOLVING

Involve children in solving problems by asking them to brainstorm solutions when challenges arise. Point out the effects of the different solutions, and help the child decide on a course of action. With older children, problem-solving can also be used to create family or group rules or expectations. When children develop problem-solving skills and help set limits, they are more likely to follow them.



Teaching problem-solving skills takes time, but the results are long-lasting.

## ★ CONSEQUENCES ★

### Natural Consequences

Help children understand that behaviors and choices have consequences. Natural consequences — what naturally results from actions — can be powerful teaching tools. For example, if you stand in the rain, you get wet and you are more likely to remember your umbrella next time. When possible and safe, use natural consequences to help children learn to manage their own behavior. Gently point out what happened and why. For example, "If you break your toy, you have no toy."

### ★ SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

Use the following tips and techniques to guide the behavior of children and help them learn to express themselves in healthy and positive ways.

- Make sure your expectations for your child are developmentally appropriate for their age and ability.
- Model desirable behavior. Your children will learn from your example.
- Notice when things are going well. "Thank you for sitting quietly with a book while I was talking on the phone. Would you like me to read with you now?" Commenting on appropriate behavior helps children learn what is expected.
- Be consistent. Consistency provides structure and a sense of stability. It also allows children to be familiar with expectations and to anticipate what is expected of them.
- The environment can affect a child's behavior. Make sure surroundings, materials, and toys are safe and appropriate.
- Maintain a balance between quiet and active play.
- Spending time outside is a natural way to de-stress and release energy. Make outdoor play or neighborhood walks a part of each day.
- Build independence by providing children choices and decision-making opportunities whenever possible. For example, "Would you like to draw or read a book?"
- Establish rules and expectations that are respectful of children.
- Always acknowledge and label children's feelings. Behavior is often a result of feelings. When children learn to explain their feelings or ask for help, they are more able to control their own behavior.
- Establish regular routines for busy times like meals, getting ready in the morning, and going to bed. Providing structure helps children understand expectations and feel safe.

### Logical Consequences

When natural consequences are not appropriate or safe, set a logical consequence — something that is related to the behavior. If a child does not stay in the yard to play, the natural consequence may be that they get hurt. But that isn't safe! So, a logical consequence for leaving the yard would be having to play inside the house instead. You could say: "When you leave the yard I'm afraid you could get hurt, so I need you to stay inside the fence. If you leave the yard again you will need to play inside." Then, follow through with your actions. Make sure the consequence is respectful of the child and is reasonable to follow. For example: "Walls are not a space for drawing. Let's get some soap and water and I'll show you how to clean the wall. Then you can color on paper at the table."



## TO LEARN MORE

### BOOKS

**RAISING GOOD HUMANS: A MINDFUL GUIDE TO BREAKING THE CYCLE OF REACTIVE PARENTING AND RAISING KIND, CONFIDENT KIDS**  
Hunter Clarke-Fields, MSAE

**HOW TO TALK SO KIDS WILL LISTEN AND LISTEN SO KIDS WILL TALK**  
Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

**RAISING YOUR SPIRITED CHILD, THIRD EDITION: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS WHOSE CHILD IS MORE INTENSE, SENSITIVE, PERCEPTIVE, PERSISTENT, AND ENERGETIC**  
Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, Ed.D

**POSITIVE DISCIPLINE: THE CLASSIC GUIDE TO HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP SELF-DISCIPLINE, RESPONSIBILITY, COOPERATION, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS**  
Jane Nelsen, Ed.D