

# 10 BASICS POINTS OF GOOD DISCIPLINE



for  
Women

*Children are not born knowing the rules of life. They learn to be good men and women by first learning to be good boys and girls. Expect mistakes, tantrums, pouting, and crying. How you respond is an important part of how they learn.*

## **1. Good discipline is not punishment**

*Discipline* and *punishment* are different. Punishment is supposed to make a person choose not to repeat bad behaviour. But, from punishment, especially physical punishment, children learn how the powerful make rules and the weaker must go along with it, or else. They might learn to avoid being honest about mistakes or to divert the blame on to others (“he did it, not me,” “it’s not my fault”). Because young children do not *choose* to mis-behave, they can feel like failures if punished over and over.

## **2. Good discipline teaches**

Punishment teaches what is wrong, but does not help a child learn what is right. The goal of discipline is to teach. It teaches self-control and socially acceptable behaviour. You encourage good behaviour by correcting misbehaviour and praising good behaviour. Discipline is an opportunity to model respect, patience, and good problem solving. In the long run, you teach them to decide all by themselves to do the right thing.

## **3. Good discipline is not a power struggle**

“Do you want to go to bed?” “No!” “But it’s 9 o’clock so you need to get to bed.” “YOU CAN’T MAKE ME!” You are in a power struggle. Where do you go from here? With small children, you *can* make them: you can pick him up and take him to bed. But is that going to work when he is 12?

## **4. Good discipline never involves physical violence or threats of violence**

Never, ever hit a child. If you find yourself using physical discipline like spanking, you may be getting yourself into power struggles, exercising your power as the bigger and stronger person. Re-assess your overall discipline strategy and look into ways to replace spanking. For example, try time ins or time outs, but no more than one minute for each year of the child’s age (i.e., two minutes for a two-year-old).

## **5. Good discipline does not involve insulting or demeaning comments**

For abusive parents, “discipline” means yelling, blaming, and putting the child down. This teaches a child he is a bad person, not a person who has exercised bad judgment or engaged in bad behaviour. Also, don’t put down one child by favouring or praising the other.

## **6. Good discipline does not involve anger and over-reactions**

Good discipline is a planned out strategy to encourage good behaviour and discourage bad behaviour. It is consistent and fair.

## **7. Good discipline uses clear expectations, clear consequences, and consistent “enforcement”**

1. define clear expectations which are reasonable for the age of the child...
2. ...and clearly linked to consequences that match the age of the child
3. use fair, firm, consistent follow-through



- \* sit down as a family and make a list of “house rules” to post on the refrigerator
- \* some rules are “don’ts” (e.g., no hitting, don’t go in a bedroom without knocking)
- \* some rules are “do’s” (e.g., bring your dishes into the kitchen when you finish eating)
- \* some hints for defining non-negotiable rules are on page 38
- \* what happens if someone breaks a rule? Decide now, also as a family
- \* “consequences” should help the child learn what is right and how to act responsibly

When someone breaks a family rule, give them a chance to do it right before you apply a consequence. Be consistent. If you enforce a rule one day, and let it slide the next, you teach the children they can sometimes get away with it, so they are likely to repeat the bad behaviour.

### **8. Good discipline is neither permissive nor punitive**

Some parents never discipline. The permissive parent lets kids do whatever they want, so he or she never has to enforce rules. With the punitive parent, children are too scared to step out of line. Neither style is good.

### **9. Good discipline solves problems**

Using good discipline, you should feel the atmosphere at home getting more relaxed. Then you’ll know you are on the right track. Children learn not only what is wrong, but what is right.

### **10. The best discipline is the kind you never have to use**

Using the “Everyday Essentials” of parenting (page 32) may help prevent the need for discipline in the first place. This may not work immediately, but over time it can.

- be a model of good behaviour: if you want “please and thank you,” use “please and thank you”
- be clear on the rules so they know what behaviour you do not want to see
- praise good behaviour 5 times for every 1 time you comment on misbehaviour
- when correcting misbehaviour, focus on the behaviour not the child
- when correcting misbehaviour, explain the logic behind your request or behind the rule
- keep your voice at a normal volume level and do not react out of anger, fatigue or other emotion
- don’t get into a power struggle: state the “given” and give some choices
- don’t have rules that are impossible to meet, or impossible for the age of your child
- you are the adult, you set the rules, you enforce the rules, you are in charge!
- if acting out is the only way to get your attention, expect children to act out



Thomas P. Phelan (2003). *1-2-3- Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2 to 12*. Child Management. (also available as a video)

Barbara Coloroso (2001). *Kids are Worth It! Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline*. Penguin Canada.

*What’s Wrong with Spanking?* (2004).

Available from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence:

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/index.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/index.html)

*Discipline is not possible with babies.  
They are too young to learn from discipline.*