



## Guiding Young Children Series: Discipline Without Punishment

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We hope you have read the first five fact sheets in the Guiding Young Children Series. Perhaps you have attended our series of parenting classes and discussion groups. As your discipline practices become more positive, you will enjoy parenting more and the atmosphere in your home will become more pleasant.

You may have wondered why we have not said much about spanking and punishing children. What about punishment? Aren't parents supposed to punish their children? Aren't children supposed to feel shame and guilt when they misbehave? Isn't punishment important to the development of a child's conscience and sense of right and wrong? What about spanking? Isn't a child who is not spanked spoiled? These are typical questions parents have about discipline.

Since learning about positive guidance, you can appreciate some important differences between discipline and punishment. **Discipline** teaches children self-control. Children learn the benefit of doing what is right. Discipline helps children develop a value system. For example, because of discipline a child speaks and acts honestly. The child knows how to be honest. The child knows why being honest is a correct and wise thing to do.



**Discipline uses praise and encouragement to teach correct behavior.**

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Discipline	Punishment
Teaches correct behavior.	Stops unwanted behavior for a short time.
Teaches values.	Creates fear of parents.
Develops self-control.	Develops sneaky behavior.
Uses praise and encouragement.	Uses pain and unpleasantness.
Teaches responsibility.	Builds resentment.
Builds self-esteem.	Damages self-esteem.
Promotes benefits of good behavior.	Encourages deceiving parents and others.

**Punishment** controls behavior by using pain or unpleasantness to stop the child who is doing something wrong. Punishment stops bad behavior for the moment. Punishment does not teach the behavior you want. Punishment does not cause good behavior. Punishment stops the unwanted behavior for a short time. Punishment teaches children to avoid being caught. Their behavior is directed toward avoiding punishment.

**Natural, social, or logical consequences** of the child's behavior teach children responsibility. When families cooperatively select rewards and penalties for family rules, children develop decision-making skills (See T-2328, *Encouraging Self Control* for examples of consequences).

Think carefully about rewards and penalties used as punishments compared to natural and logical consequences. Use positive discipline that teaches your values. Think about the goals you have for your child.

Rewarding good behavior can cause problems. You may undermine the child's self-control. For ex-

## Four Kinds of Punishment

The first two kinds of punishment, physical and spoken abuse, are not only methods that do not work; they are dangerous. They all too often lead to physical and emotional abuse of children.

**Physical punishment** includes slapping, spanking, switching, shaking, shoving, biting, pulling hair, washing a mouth out with soap, tickling, jerking or removing clothing, pinching, paddling, and using a belt, hair brush, ruler, fly swatter or other object to strike a child. Research consistently shows that physical punishment has negative effects on children. Spanking can lead to battering and child abuse. This form of punishment is not allowed in Oklahoma's licensed child care facilities, many schools, and youth shelters. Physical punishment teaches children that hitting is how adults solve problems. Children who are spanked learn to resent and to fear their parents. Harsh physical punishment can seriously injure a child emotionally, mentally, and physically. It can even cause death. To prevent these problems, use the positive forms of discipline you have learned. These include changing the setting, redirection, time out, and consequences.

**Spoken punishment** is shaming, making fun of, using cruel words, saying "I do not love you," put-downs, and threats. These punishments are psychological abuse and are not allowed in licensed child care in Oklahoma. Abusive language lowers a child's self-esteem. This causes more misbehavior. More punishment further lowers the child's esteem. To prevent this problem, use praise and encouragement instead of abrasive language.

Rewards and penalties tend to be severe, arbitrary, and confusing. The child does not know the rules in advance. The child has to misbehave to learn the rules. The rewards come and go with the parent's changing moods.

**Withholding Rewards** - The child is denied a pleasant experience because of bad behavior. The reward denied may be given for good behavior. Rewards are often things like candy, toys, or money. "You get no candy because you misbehaved." Using candy as a reward gives it extra value. Many parents do not want their children to value candy. The reward withheld may be a routine part of the child's life, like television or dessert. "No TV for you tonight because you were cranky today." This type of punishment confuses the child's routine and trust. It creates a feeling of disappointment.

**Penalties** - The child gives up something of value because of misbehavior. "You talked loudly so you will have to pay a fine with money from your allowance." The child may be required to do something considered unpleasant. "You were sassy today so do 20 push-ups." Penalties can teach children confused values. For example, using push-ups as penalties devalues the exercise and fitness they provide. Penalties parents make up on the spur of the moment tend to be severe. This builds fear and resentment. Penalties do not teach correct behavior. The child may resist paying fines or exercising independently. Use consequences instead of penalties to teach your child good behavior, responsibility, and values.

### Remember When

If you were spanked, punished, or verbally abused as a child, try to remember how you felt. Ask yourself the following questions:

- As a child, how did I feel about spankings and punishment?
- Did it make me stop doing something?
- Did I sneak around and try not to get caught?
- Did I brag about my spankings?
- Do I still brag about my spankings?
- Did I enjoy the attention that came with a spanking?
- Did I learn to dislike and fear the adult, school, or subject?

ample, if a child is honest, studies hard, or treats others politely, these behaviors will have their own rewards. They are enjoyable. The child feels good inside. If the parent adds a reward of money or candy, the child may feel manipulated. The child may wonder why the parent thinks the child needs more than the good inner feelings that come with correct behavior. Children benefit from affection and kind words. A material reward may be harmful.

### Avoiding Abuse

If parents find themselves using physical punishment, verbal abuse, withholding rewards, penalties, and other forms of punishment frequently, something is wrong. Their repeated punishment is not working. They need to make a change before things get worse. Change is difficult. Here are some steps that can make the change easier.

1. Admit that spanking and punishing is more effective in relieving the parent's frustration than in teaching the child self-control.
2. Realize that spanking is not what parents are supposed to do. Many parents spank their children because their relatives and friends think it is a good idea. The parents are giving in to peer pressure. Other discipline methods actually help the child develop a conscience.
3. Learn some good ways to express your anger. Parents usually spank and punish children when they are angry. Angry parents may not realize how hard they are striking the child or how cruel their words are.
  - Take a time out yourself.
  - Count to ten.
  - Listen to music.
  - Take a walk.
  - Call a friend.
  - Calm yourself before you try to calm your child.
  - Calm yourself before you discipline your child.

### Problems with Punishment

Punishment does not work for several reasons.

1. Punishment makes children hate themselves and others. They dislike themselves for getting the punishment. They dislike the one who punishes them. Punishment gives the child feelings of low self-esteem. Children learn not to trust but to fear others. They learn to fear those who are older, larger, or have authority over them. They may plan to get revenge when they are older, larger, or have authority. Bullies are not born that way. They learn how to bully from others.
2. The child may behave only to avoid punishment. The child's motive is self-protection. Children learn how to be sneaky and how to get away or to avoid being caught. They become defensive, dishonest and afraid. Their fear may affect their learning and problem solving. Children need and want to learn how to behave. When they learn why good behavior is best, they can think for themselves. They can do the right thing in a new situation. They know what to do and why, even when an adult is not present. If they make a mistake, they are less inclined to try to hide it. They trust their parent to listen and to act fairly.
3. Punishment makes children think there must be something wrong with them. If they think they are bad, they will act bad. They get punished. Children want attention. They will settle for punishment if they can not get attention for good behavior.
4. Children who see others spanked fear it will happen to them. The fear increases each time another child is spanked. Children feel responsible for other

### Why Parents Spank

Parents who spank their children rather than using other discipline methods usually say:

"Nothing else works."

"You've got to let them know who is the boss."

"You cannot let them get away with anything or you lose control."

"They asked for it."

"It clears the air."

"My parent spanked me and I turned out okay."

"People expect you to punish your children. That's a parent's job."

### Reasons for spanking which parents seldom give are:

When I am mad at someone else, I take it out on the child.

I do not stop to think of better ways to discipline.

I do not know a better way to discipline.

It relieves my feelings of frustration.

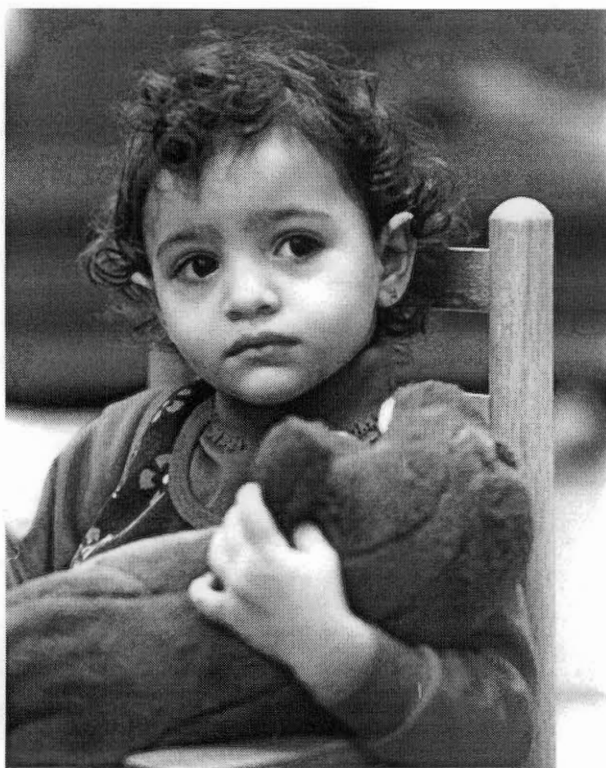
It is easier, quicker and requires less thinking than other discipline methods.

People expect you to punish your children. That is what parents are supposed to do. I want them to see that I am a responsible parent.

It makes me feel powerful and in control.

children's physical punishment. They fear that they will be next. Children may feel especially threatened when they do not see the reason for punishment. They do not know what to do to prevent more punishment.

5. Children who get spankings and punishment feel they have paid for their misbehavior and more. They misbehave again to get even. Parents and teachers punish them again. Their anger and resentment build. They plan revenge. Spankings short-circuit feelings of remorse needed to prevent future misbehavior.
6. Parents who use physical punishment are setting an example of using violence and physical power to control others or to solve conflicts. Children imitate their parents' behavior. They behave violently.
7. Parents have to find other discipline methods when the child becomes as tall and as strong as the parent or face possible physical abuse from their children.



**It is okay for children to know that adults are upset. It is not okay for children to see adults express anger by hitting someone.**

### **Instead of Punishing**

1. **Listen.** Ask the child the reason for the misbehavior before you punish. Allow the child a chance to explain. Children do not think like adults. The child's motive may have been good.
2. **Teach.** Tell the child why a particular behavior is wrong. Children are not mind readers, and they do not have the experience nor the understanding we sometimes think they do. They need to know why you disapprove.
3. **Set an example.** Show the child what behavior you expect in that situation. Do not assume children know what you expect of them or understand what you say. Act it out for practice. Behave that way yourself.
4. **Be flexible.** Listen to what your child says about your discipline methods. Listen to your own conscience. Do not use a method just because you said you would even when you know it is not a good idea. Admit your mistake, apologize, and change your behavior. This is what you want your child to do.
5. **Discipline in private.** Try not to correct a child in public. Try not to correct your child in front of anyone, even another family member. This embarrasses the child and causes resentment. The child

may continue to misbehave to save face. The child who is watching may misbehave to hide fear. Abusive parents may need another person present to help them control their behavior. Whenever a third party must be present during a visit with your child, you or your social worker should explain this so your child will feel more secure.

6. **Discipline respectfully.** Do not yell at your child. Walk over to your child. Move down to the child's eye level or place the child on your lap. Talk to your child softly and calmly so that only you and your child can hear.

### **Obedience**

Some parents spank or punish their children because they place a high value on immediate obedience. Their whole aim is for the child to mind. They want children to obey without questioning. The child becomes passive and loses a zest for life. The child does not become independent. Instead, the child may blindly obey or stubbornly resist other authority figures.

Most parents really want their children to become independent. An independent child will not always be obedient. Discipline does what punishment can not do. Discipline teaches children to be independent and obedient. A child will obey instantly in dangerous situations. The fear in your voice and your quick response will get results.

Children are not naturally bad. Children simply need guidance and discipline to help them know how to behave and to help them learn to do what is right. Discipline and guidance work better than punishment. Children develop well and family life is enjoyable when parents do more teaching and less punishing.

Parents who punish should be aware their children may be behaving worse when they think they will not be caught. Physical punishment should never be used "as a last resort." If you have reached that point, you are tired, frustrated, and angry. If you spank your child out of desperation, you are likely to be abusive.

Young children may need to be gently carried, guided, or led by the hand. By age three children can talk and listen to reason. They can remember rules and consequences. Children age seven and older need the dignity of controlling themselves. Hugs, pats on the back, and other signs of affection are appropriate for older children. At certain ages they may be embarrassed. They will prefer that you not touch them in front of their friends.

Never use an object to hit a child. Never ask one child to hit another. Never remove a child's clothing or ask the child to remove clothing for a spanking or other punishment. Never punish all of the children because of one child's behavior. These methods destroy self-esteem, build resentments, and lead to future problems for children.



## Recovery from Physical Punishment

Research shows that children can recover from abusive punishment. If you have been an abusive parent, there is hope. You can learn positive techniques. Your child will improve as you improve. If things do not improve for you and your child, get help. If your child has some serious problems, get help. If your child is violent or cruel to children, adults or animals, seek professional help right away. If your child has problems with stealing or truancy, get help. Other signs that you need assistance include constant trouble at school, church and child care. If teachers, child care providers, social workers, and counselors say your child needs professional help, ask them to help you find this help.

Raising children is hard work, and sometimes parents can get really upset by their children's behavior. It is okay for children to know that adults are upset. It is not okay for children to see adults express anger by hitting someone. Abusive parents usually have many problems with work, money, and family. They have trouble dealing with the stress in their lives. Getting help for yourself can help you recover from abusive behavior and build a better life for you and your child.

### If you want to learn more:

Videos available from the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service lending library:  
VT 356 Catch 'em Being Good  
VT 357 A Change for the Better  
VT 383 Ten Ways to Be a Better Parent  
VT 767 How to Control Your Child with Good Words

### For further reading:

- Bavolek, S. (1994). *Red, white and bruises: Spanking in the USA: What to do instead*. Eau Claire, WI: Family Development Resources.
- Cohen-Posey, K. (1995). *How to handle bullies, teasers and other meanies*. Highland City, FL: Rainbow Books, Inc.
- Dreikurs, R. (1994). *Logical consequences: The new approach to discipline*. NY: Dutton.
- Wilson, E. (1998). *T2328 Guiding Young Children Series: Encouraging Self Control*, Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University.

### References:

- Day, R., Peterson, G., & McCracken, C. (1998, February). Predicting spanking of younger and older children by mothers and fathers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60:1, 79-94.
- Fields, M. and Boesser, C. (1994). Chapter 10: Punishment Vs. Discipline. *Constructive Guidance and Discipline: Preschool and Primary Education*. pp. 181-194. New York: Macmillan.

### See How Much You Have Learned!

Place a check by the phrase that best completes the sentence.

1. Harsh punishment teaches children  
☐ a. self control.  
☐ b. to use violence to solve problems.  
☐ c. to respect their parents.
2. Effective discipline methods help children learn  
☐ a. to behave according to their ideas of right and wrong.  
☐ b. to be sneaky and not get caught misbehaving.  
☐ c. to fear their parents.
3. Child development educators think that children are born  
☐ a. bad.  
☐ b. good.  
☐ c. with the possibility of becoming either good or bad.
4. Parents who punish their children should  
☐ a. give the child a chance to explain.  
☐ b. give no explanation for the punishment.  
☐ c. give them extra privileges to show them that they love them.

Answers:  
1. b.; 2. a.; 3. c.; 4. a.

- Gartrell, D. (1997). More thoughts...Punishment or guidance? *Young Children*, 42:3, 55-61.
- Marshall, H. (1995). Beyond "I like the way." *Young Children*, 50, 26-28.
- Straus, M., Sugarman, D., & Giles-Sims, Jean. (1997) Spanking by parents and subsequent antisocial behavior of children. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 151, 761-767.
- Title 10 Children's Code, State of Oklahoma, 7001-1, Child Protective Services (12-12-96) OAC 340-75-3-10.3 p 3-5.
- vonBargen, N. (1991). *Corporal Punishment in Child Care*. DHS Pub. No. 88-20.

## A Record of My Discipline Practices and Their Effects\*

Complete this exercise one week after studying A Look at Discipline. Check the blanks that apply to you.

1. The way I usually disciplined this week was:

- ☐ Compare one child with another
- ☐ Explain reasons calmly
- ☐ Ignore misbehavior
- ☐ Isolate the child from others
- ☐ Let the child make choices and experience consequences
- ☐ Praise
- ☐ Prevent misbehavior before it occurs
- ☐ Remove privileges
- ☐ Scold
- ☐ Shame the child
- ☐ Show disapproval
- ☐ Spank
- ☐ Threaten and not follow through
- ☐ Threaten and follow through
- ☐ Yell and scream
- ☐ Redirect child's attention

2. During the past week I:

	More	Less	Same
Acted calmly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acted firmly with kindness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Let my child learn from consequences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used kind words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used unkind words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. The atmosphere in our home has changed to one of:

	More	Less	Same
Confusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cooperation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hostility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* Adapted from *Practical Education for Parenting* by Kent G. Hamdorf, Extension Specialist, Human Relations Family Development, Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, 1978.

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