

Discipline Goals

Helping Your Child Feel Lovable & Capable

Promoting a Sense of Being Lovable

1. Attending to the child. Being observed or attended to, especially by their parents, indicates to children from earliest infancy that they are important. Infants experience this careful attention when their needs are acted upon promptly, contingently and gently. The following principles can be helpful in teaching parents how to attend to their children successfully.

Brief Attention Immediately. Children, especially toddlers, look to their parents every few minutes for signals of safety and interest. If the caregiver does not respond to the first bid for contact, children may increase the bid by starting negative behaviors. By watching for children's first bid, making eye contact, perhaps touching the child and commenting on their activity for 1-2 seconds, they are likely to be satisfied and return to play.

Special Time. Guaranteed time that the caregiver spends attending to an individual child without any interruptions is experienced by children as a kind of "unconditional love", especially when the adult remains interested but nonjudgmental and nondirective. This time should,

1. Be given to each child every day regardless of behavior
2. Be called "Special Time" or some other simple label so the child realizes he got it.
3. Be the child's choice (within reason) for the activities.
4. Involve interactive activities between the caregiver and child rather than passive (watching TV).
5. Be the caregiver's choice of time of day. It can vary day to day.
6. Be a consistent, short length of time (10-15 min) to prevent boredom or avoidance, managed by a timer.
7. Not to be saved up for another day. Children need daily attention.
8. Be without interruptions of any kind from siblings, other adults or phone calls.
9. If the parent wishes to spend more time it should be separated from "Special Time" by several minutes.
10. If the child refuses as a test, the parents should say they want 'Special Time' anyway and just follow the child around.
11. If the child is aggressive, he or she should receive time out or the selected consequence without stopping the timer.

2. Active Listening. After the first year of life, it becomes more important for the adult to find out children's needs, wants and feelings directly by asking and listening to them. This listening is most effective when done without judging either the content or emotions of the children's message. Matching the child's affect by acting angry with the child demonstrates nonverbally the listener's understanding of the child's feelings.

3. Conveying positive regard. How adults speak to children is central to the children's developing sense of being lovable. Following are some principles that help convey to children that they are held in positive regard.

Label the act, Not the child. Use "I" statements, like "I don't like it when toys are all over the floor. I am afraid someone might get hurt" instead of "You need to pick up those toys right now before someone gets hurt."

Specific Feedback. Children need frequent feedback about their behavior (every 5 minutes for preschoolers). More effective if kept using "I" messages that are simple and specific with emotion consistent to the message. "I like this clean room. You cleaned up the blocks, the cars and all the Lego's". This avoids comparisons to siblings or other children.

Emotional Congruence. Adults need to communicate with children in emotional tones consistent with the message and their true feelings; otherwise it is confusing for the child. Too much elaborate praise can make the parent less believable. Saying "please don't go in the street" quietly to a toddler heading that direction is not going to be effective in a dangerous situation.

Assisting Transitions. Children have little choice in the sequence and timing of their activities. Give them warning about a change in routine or activity. Use a timer to help.

Show respect. Children should be acknowledged for their contributions and parents can model appreciation and courtesy by thanking them. Use specific examples and feelings. "Thank you for helping me fold the towels. It makes me happy that you like to help." Another way adults model respect is by apologizing when appropriate. This is best done later when the adult is calm. This teaches children that their feelings matter and gives children a chance to experience forgiveness.

Helping Your Child Feel Capable

- 1. Routines.** Routines help children develop a sense of security.
- 2. Models.** “Actions speak louder than words” Toddlers copy every detail they see in adults. “Do as I say, not as I do” doesn’t work with young children.
- 3. Instruction.** Instruction in what the rules are and how to do things well is effective when it is clear, simple and direct. It should avoid judgment and vagueness. Let the child know *who* wants *what* done *when*. “I want you to put away your blocks before bedtime”.
- 4. Progressive Expectations.** Discipline should include progressively increasing expectations appropriate to the child’s developmental progress. The pieces of behavior that lead toward the desired result should be acknowledged separately, and expectations of success should increase gradually so children have an ongoing level of success. Having low expectations or demands, may make the child feeless capable and can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- 5. Choices.** The opportunity to make choices teaches the skill of decision making and also respects individuality and autonomy. Choices can be overwhelming for a child, however if they are too complex, emotionally charges or inappropriate to the child’s abilities. Parents should offer choices when there is time to choose, things to choose from that are acceptable to the parent, and selections that are relevant to the child (what socks to wear).
- 6. Praise & Rewards.** Motivation by positive feedback, especially self-given, is preferable to criticism or punishment. A smile, increased attention, praise or material rewards all serve to reinforce a child’s actions. For some children, this is enough. Other children may need concrete results to help them attain and maintain positive behavior patterns (stickers, extra privileges, toy, etc.). Adults reward themselves daily (cup of coffee, taking a break, chocolate). Concrete rewards should be accompanied by attention, praise and good feelings. Praise should be given in small, specific forms (I like the way you shared your cookie with your brother). Rewards should be small, immediate, and appropriate to the situation. The ultimate goal of self praise is promoted by asking the child to assess their own performance as well as by modeling specific praise.
- 7. Appropriate Consequences.** Consequences can change behavior more quickly than simple, positive praise. The following are different types of consequences.

Natural Consequences. Much of a child’s behavior results in natural consequences and instruction. These are particularly effective because it is completely impersonal and without interfering emotions. If a child runs too fast on a slick surface, gravity instructs them when they slip and fall. If a child spends his allowance on a toy, there is no money left for candy. Remember, children do need protection from some natural consequences, like danger (playing in the street), social disgrace (overt sexual exploration), and their own impulses (hitting or biting).

Logical Consequences. When caregivers provide consequences, they need to be logically related to the offense, graded in degree, given with emotional congruence, and given

promptly. A child, who repeatedly throws a toy, may need to have the toy taken away for the remainder of the day.

One Request, Then Move. The simplest consequence for children is losing the freedom to do a task at their own speed. Because adults know children can understand, they assume that verbal mediation is effective without action. Parents actually teach children to ignore their requests when they give repeated commands without following up with action.

“One request, then move” improves most behavior of young children. Parents should observe what children are doing, wait for a break in their activity (TV commercial), get their attention by words or touch and give the instruction clearly. If the child does not do as requested in 10 seconds, the parent should go toward the child, grasp an arm if necessary, and shepherd him/her to the task without speaking further. The adult should perform the task with or without the child participation. As long as the adult does not talk, the child has the experience of complying. If the child helps with the task, this should be acknowledged. It is essential that adults limit their requests to ones they are willing to complete and may need to limit the number and times of the requests.

Threats vs. Promises. Using the above one request limits the problem of accelerating consequences. Often the parent makes a request that the child ignores, then the parent threatens a consequence. The child continues to ignore the request and the parent increases the consequence. Threats tend to be vague, fear-promoting and unclear as to what needs to happen to avoid the consequence. Instead of threats, parents should make promises that are clearly stated, with congruent emotion, specific and with logical consequences. This way, the child chooses the consequence when they ignore the request or continue the misbehavior. For example, a child who takes a toy from a sibling, can be promised that if it happens again, he will not be allowed to play with any toys for a set period of time. It is crucial that parents follow through consistently with promises.

Time Out. Just as attention is powerful positive feedback for a child, removal of attention is an effective aversive consequence. It can be used as early as 9 months of age. Time out serves to stop a behavior, convey disapproval, give both parties time to regain composure and decrease the likelihood of repeated misbehavior.

1. Only 2-3 priority behaviors should result in time out; often only aggression to people or things.
2. Only one warning should be given; NO warning for aggressive behavior.
3. A brief statement of the offense should be given.
4. Time out should be in a non-interesting, but non-scary place, preferably a straight-backed chair near the adult if the adult can refrain from interacting.
5. Time out is best when brief (1 minute/year of age to maximum of 10) and a timer used that child can hear.
6. If the child leaves the chair, he or she should be replaced without talking, and restrained, if necessary. Toddlers can be placed in playpen or crib.
7. After the time out, the child's first positive or neutral behavior should be attended to; no lectures or discussion of the offense. Comforting child is ok. ***If the child was asked to perform a task, they should go back to that task immediately.***

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