

## Young Children and Discipline

In many parents' opinion, there are two times when setting boundaries and dealing with discipline are the most difficult—early childhood and the teenage years. In both periods, your children will test you to see how much they can get away with, if you'll actually enforce the rules you've set, and if they can break rules without you knowing. To make these times easier, start by setting a good example early in your child's life.

- Approach discipline as a method of teaching, rather than punishing, your child. Your kids will be more open to learning and changing their ways if they don't feel threatened, shamed, or punished.
- Before 12 months of age, distraction is the best way to discipline your child. Do whatever you can to refocus his attention on something else.
- Once your child reaches two years of age, it's time to start talking about which behaviors are right and wrong, and why. This requires negotiating with your child, pointing out why a behavior is wrong, alerting your child to the consequences of her behavior, and talking specifically about what's right and wrong so she begins to internalize these messages.
- Instead of denying that you've been inconsistent, admit when you've made a mistake, and talk about how both kids and adults need to follow rules and boundaries.
- Talk with other parents about your experience. Young children can be difficult to discipline, and other parents may be able to offer advice and share their experiences with young kids and discipline.
- If you have a parenting partner, discuss your views on discipline and boundaries, and make sure that you are sending consistent messages to your child. This will make it easier for your child to learn your family's boundaries and will make the use of discipline more effective as a teaching tool.



When your child reaches school age, start paying attention to behavior in school as well as at home. By staying in close contact with your child's teacher, you can make sure that the boundaries are consistent in both places.

- If your child is having disciplinary issues, make an appointment to speak with her teacher to discuss the problem behavior.
- Be patient in working with difficult behaviors—it can often take a long time for children to learn new things like raising their hand in class, sitting still in a chair, or doing homework every night.
- If your child is having behavioral issues at school, talk to your child's teacher or a school counselor about how you might be able to make positive changes.
- Maintain consistent, high expectations for your child, and make sure to enforce any consequences you've agreed upon, so that your child connects his actions with the consequences.

Setting boundaries and enforcing discipline can be especially frustrating with young children, but don't give up. Setting a good example and teaching your child to live with boundaries are important in kids' development. And remember—just like any other phase, this one will pass

