

# DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

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You are probably too familiar with feeling irritated after your child did something they weren't supposed to. For example, they spilled their cereal bowl all over the brand-new carpet or you hear them fighting with their sibling over the remote control. You get calls from your child's school that they got in trouble again or was not present for school. You are battling with your child to finish their homework, always on their phone or not wanting to go to bed. If you experienced frustration, anger, exhaustion you are not alone! It's really is hard to discipline our children. However, you just took a first step as a caretaker reading this to support yourself and your child. Now let's begin to rethink our ideas of discipline and begin disciplining our children in a way that is nurturing, full of respect while maintaining clear and consistent boundaries. This guide is not the magic solution that will work in every moment but it's a start.

## RECLAIMING THE WORD "DISCIPLINE"

Take a moment to think, what is the goal of discipline? What do you want to accomplish when your child misbehaves? Is the objective to punish your child? Probably not. However, when we are angry, irritated, impatient, frustrated or unsure it can make us feel that way. So, what *really* is the goal of discipline? Let's define what the word discipline means. The formal definition "discipline" derives from the Latin word *disciplina* which was used in the eleventh century meaning to teach, learning and giving instruction. In the English language "discipline" has meant "to teach".

Returning to the question of what is the goal of discipline, it's not to punish or give consequences, but to teach. A punishment might stop the behavior for a short amount of time, but teaching can offer your child long-term skills. The goal is to reframe from the idea that discipline is a punishment but rethinking discipline as an approach that teaches and builds skills for our children in the most loving and nurturing way.

Discipline is also about meeting your child where they are at developmentally. It is important to always consider your child's developmental capacity, temperament, emotional style and the situational context.

## LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM GOALS

There are two primary goals for effective discipline.

- Short-term goal: Cooperation
  - We want our child to cooperate and as parents help them behave in ways that are acceptable and avoid behaviors that are not.
- Long-term goal: Skill development
  - Helping your child develop a sense of emotional regulation, self-control and a moral compass to be thoughtful and conscientious even when authority figures are not present

## HELPING YOUR CHILD FEEL FELT

- **Communicate comfort:** by getting to their level, giving them a loving appropriate touch, nod of head, or empathetic look
- **Validate:** acknowledge their behavior and feelings even if you don't like the behavior
- **Stop talking and listen:** Don't try to explain, lecture or dismiss your child's feelings. Just listen, look for the meaning and emotions your child is trying to communicate.
- **Reflect what you hear:** Once you listen, repeat and reflect what you heard allowing your children know you heard them.

## EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLINE

Discipline is not a one-size-fits all solution. Every child is unique and no one approach will work for every situation. Here are eight basic principles of discipline derived from the book, *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture your Child's Developing Mind* (Siegel & Bryson, 2016)

1. Discipline is essential.
  - Setting clear and consistent boundaries
2. Effective discipline depends on a loving and respectful relationship between adult and child
  - Discipline should never include physical pain, threats, humiliation or fear.
  - It should feel safe and loving.
3. The goal of discipline is to teach.
  - Encouraging cooperation and helping our children think about their actions by being creative and playful.
  - Setting limits and have a conversation to develop awareness
4. Pay attention to kids' emotions
  - Pay attention to the emotions behind a child's behavior
  - Children usually misbehave as a result of not handling "big" feelings and not having the skills to handle them.
5. When children are upset, throwing a fit, that's when they need us the most.
  - Showing our children that we are there for them in their worst is how we build a sense of trust and safety.
6. Wait until our children are ready to learn.
  - The worst time to teach a child discipline is when they are upset or out of control.
  - The first step is to help them calm down and regain control of themselves.
7. Connect with them to help them be ready to learn.
  - Similar to when we soothe our children when they are physically hurt, when they are emotionally upset, validate their feelings and provide empathy and comfort.
8. After connecting, we redirect.
  - Once they feel more connected to us, they will be more ready to learn, redirecting them and talk about their behavior.
  - Setting redirecting and setting limits allows children to gain insight into themselves, empathy for others and the ability to identify mistakes they make and make things right.

Source:

Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2016). *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture your Child's Developing Mind*. Bantam Books.