



# JOURNAL

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## SPECIAL EDITION: SECTION 43 AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

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*Adapted from "Yes, You Can!" a booklet in the Parenting for Life series written by Holly Bennett and Teresa Pitman*

# Positive Discipline Ideas for Parents

*Adapted from “Yes, You Can!” a booklet in the Parenting for Life series written by Holly Bennett and Teresa Pitman*

## Check Your Discipline Methods

**H**ow can you tell if you are using positive discipline? You can evaluate your approach by asking yourself: Do I ...

- teach appropriate behaviour
- avoid violence or physical punishment
- allow my child to continue feeling positive about himself
- keep our parent-child relationship strong
- keep in mind my child’s stage of development, individual personality and needs

**Good discipline is based on a strong parent-child relationship, and here are some ways to enhance it:**

- **Loving touch.** Give your child hugs; cuddle up close while you read a story. Physical affection is always important to children, even when they get old enough to be embarrassed by hugs in public. Don’t embarrass them, but show your affection in small ways, like a pat on the back
- **Time together.** Spend some time alone with each child when you can give him your undivided attention. It doesn’t have to be a long period of time – maybe ten minutes a day as you are tucking him into bed
- **Respect your child’s feelings.** Even if they don’t seem very rational to you, they are real to your child. One mother said, “I used to get really angry when Jeremy was scared of monsters under the bed – until the day he killed a spider for me. My fear of spiders isn’t rational, either, but it sure doesn’t help if people make fun of me for it”
- **Be trustworthy.** If you make a promise – say to take the family swimming tomorrow – do your best to keep it. If you’re really not sure, it’s better not to make the promise
- **Apologize.** Nobody is perfect! Saying “I’m sorry” when you make a mistake or lose your temper will let your child know that you care about her feelings

- **Have fun together.** When you enjoy each other and play together, you rediscover how special your child is. Those good feelings will help you both handle the tough times

### Discipline that Teaches: Your Positive Discipline Tool-box

Of course, even with a strong relationship between parent and child, there will be plenty of discipline issues to deal with. The positive methods described below have been used and found effective by many parents.

If you have been relying on spanking or other punishments to control your child, he or she may be confused at first by these new approaches. You may feel that they aren't working, because the child's behaviour doesn't improve right away – in fact, it might even get worse at first. It will take time for you to learn to use these ideas effectively, and for your child to adapt to them, so don't give up. The rewards are worth it.

### Catch Her Being Good

How would you like to have a boss or supervisor who was quick to point out every mistake you made but never noticed when you did something well? Now think about how good a positive comment or a compliment can make you feel. Your child is just the same.

When you appreciate your child's good behaviour, it encourages him to keep trying. But to help your child learn, your praise should be specific. If you say to your son, *"You're such a good boy,"* he won't know what he's done that you approve of. Is he 'good' because he used his napkin, didn't fight with his sister at the table, or because he spilled soup on his shirt? He can't tell. He learns more if you say, *"You really remembered your table manners tonight, that was great."*

It's also important to be honest – children are very good at knowing when adults are 'faking it.' And overdone or phony praise can backfire: a child may become dependent on constant praise, or give up trying to do a good job because you seem delighted even with sloppy work. A simple, sincere word of appreciation, or a specific comment on the neatly made bed and tidy desk, will 'ring

true' with your child and help her to discover the satisfaction of a job well done.

Some positive comments you might use:

- *"That was a good idea you had to take turns with the ball"*
- *"You've been working hard in here - you got most of the toys picked up and all the clothes. Why don't I help you clean the rest of your room, and then we'll have lunch"*
- *"That was a really long wait at the bank. Thanks for being so patient"*

### Should you reward good behaviour?

For most children, the best reward is knowing they have pleased their parents. Reward programs can sometimes help children learn new skills or change their behaviour. But they must be used with care:

- Rewards work best if they are used for a limited time to help with a specific problem
- If the child is not capable of the desired behaviour, reward systems can be very stressful. For example, if a two-year-old is offered treats for using the potty – but really can't manage it yet – she may want the treats desperately and be very upset
- Structured reward programs (sometimes called 'behaviour modification') are often more successful if parents get some advice from an expert – perhaps a school counsellor or child psychologist

### Describe the Behaviour, Not the Child

When we're angry or disappointed, our reaction is often to criticize or make accusations: *"You're so inconsiderate!"* or *"How could you be so stupid?"* But hurtful comments don't help a child to learn from his mistakes. Children (and adults, too) learn from us better if we stick to the facts:

- what they did wrong
- the behaviour you expect or prefer
- how you feel
- When you correct your child's misbehaviour, you might say something like this:  
*"You may not play ball in the living room! Balls belong outside or in the basement"*  
*"You didn't let me know where you were, and I was*

*worried. You must call home before going to a friend's after school"*

### Real Life is the Best Teacher

You're getting your son ready to go outside and play in your yard. It's cold and there is snow on the ground, but he insists that he doesn't want to wear his mittens. What do you do? You might consider doing nothing! Pretty soon his bare hands will get cold enough that he'll come back in and ask for mittens. You could even say, as he goes out: "If you get cold, I have some mittens here in the closet."

That's called 'natural consequences.' Your child has made a choice – not to wear mittens – and then he gets to see how it works out. This kind of real-life experience is very often the best teacher.

Of course, as a parent, you have to protect your child from danger, so you can't let him do things that could hurt him. (If your two-year-old wants to play on the street, for example, you can't just let her experience the natural consequences!) You also have to prevent things that will hurt others or damage property.

*"We were having a real struggle every morning to get Tara to school on time. Finally I just let her go along at her own pace, without nagging. She was ten minutes late, and she had to stay in for recess to make up the time. After that, mornings were much less of a problem - she found out that being late wasn't very pleasant."*

We can't always allow children to experience the results of their choices. But often we move in too quickly, when allowing the child to try something might provide a better learning experience.

### Logical Consequences

Logical consequences help children understand the link between their behaviour and its results, and encourage them to take responsibility for 'fixing' their mistakes. Not all lessons can be learned from natural consequences. Some natural consequences are too dangerous to risk. Others may not be very effective: if your child jumps on

the couch and ruins the springs, she probably won't care about the damage as much as you do!

*"Megan wanted to paint, so I gave her paints, water, and plenty of paper. But when I came back, she was painting on the wall. As calmly as possible, I reminded her that she was only supposed to paint on paper. Then I put her paints away and told her she had to help me clean the walls. It probably took longer with her helping than it would have if I'd cleaned up alone, but I think it helped her learn about responsibility."*

In these situations, you might want to create some 'logical consequences' instead. Many parents withdraw privileges, like TV time or outings, to punish misbehaviour. That is one kind of consequence, but logical consequences are quite different.

How do logical consequences work? Imagine you have a family rule that bike helmets must be worn when biking - but your ten-year-old rides home from school bare-headed. You might say, "Chris, you know it's dangerous to ride your bike without a helmet. Since you've chosen not to ride safely, you will have to walk. I'm putting your bike in the garage until Monday. If you decide you're willing to wear the helmet, you can have it back then."

Thinking of an appropriate logical consequence can be a challenge. It needs to be something you can enforce. Sometimes parents will tell a child that if she runs in the store or yells at a friend's house, they will go home. But if you really need to get some shopping done, or really want to visit with that friend, it becomes too hard to follow through. Instead of logical consequences, you are left with empty threats. Then the child begins to think you don't mean what you say.

Logical consequences:

- should be closely related to what the child has done
- should help the child learn about responsibility
- should not be humiliating or painful
- should fit the child's stage of development

Whenever possible, logical consequences should also:

- be explained in advance
- happen right away, not hours or days later
- give the child a chance to try again after the consequence

Remember, too, that consequences are a way of learning, and learning doesn't have to hurt. Parents sometimes want the consequence to seem like a punishment. But the point of effective discipline is not to make children suffer – it's to teach them about the results of their behaviour.

If four-year-old Kylie dashes ahead into the parking lot, the consequence might be that she has to hold your hand: "because if you don't walk safely by yourself then I have to keep you safe." That may upset her – but even if it doesn't and she walks beside you happily, she is still learning about safety rules. You don't have to look for a harsher consequence.

Teaching with logical consequences requires more thought than simply punishing a child might, but it is much more effective.

*"Jessica, my 12-year-old, was always coming home late for supper, and I was getting really frustrated trying to keep hers warm or hold up the whole family until she got there. Now I just serve supper at 5:30, and if she doesn't come until later, she has to reheat it herself and eat alone. She's still late once in a while, but it's definitely improved."*

### Time-Out and Time-In

If your child is biting, hitting or fighting with other children, she might need some time out to calm down.

*"When David came home from school, he was like a bear – grouchy with everyone and picking fights with the younger kids. Finally I told him he needed a 'time out.' He went up to his room and after a few minutes I took him up a snack. Then he told me about the rough day he'd had at school. By the time he came down, he was okay again."*

Children, like adults, sometimes need to be alone. But children don't always recognize the signs, and may need help from their parents to take a 'time-out.' You can tell your child, "I think you need to be alone right now," and then look for the best way to achieve it. You can:

- suggest she go to her room or to another room in the house
- ask him to sit on a couch or chair
- suggest that she go for a walk or go outside "for some fresh air"
- walk out of the room yourself (perhaps taking any other children with you) and leave him alone

Some parents have a 'time-out' chair where the child is expected to sit. This may turn into a power struggle, as the parent tries to force the child to sit in the chair. It may be better for you to be the one who leaves for a few minutes so that it doesn't turn into a battle.

How long should a 'time-out' be? Remember that the goal is to help your child learn self-discipline and to manage his own behaviour. Because of that, it's often better to have your child decide how long he needs. You might say, "You can come out when you can play with Kanchana without biting," or "Tell me when you're ready to let other people talk, too, and we'll come back." If your child just walks into his room and comes right back out, that's okay. However, if his behaviour doesn't change, you may have to call another 'time-out' or look for a different solution.

You may find that your child goes to his room, gets interested in his toys or books, and doesn't come down for a long time. That's okay. He just needed some time alone. As he gets older, he'll learn to recognize that need by himself.

*"When we went to pick Bianca up from camp, the counsellor told me that Bianca had gone for a walk by herself almost every afternoon. She told me later that living with all those kids in one cabin really got to her sometimes, and going for a walk helped her deal with them."*

Sometimes what children need is not a ‘time-out’ but a ‘time-in’ – a little time alone with a parent.

*“I babysit two other kids during the day, and Noah doesn’t always get along with them very well. When he started pulling Rosina’s hair, I guessed he needed a little more time and attention from me. I put on a video for Rosina and Jeffrey, and sat with Noah on the couch. I gave him a hug and told him I knew it was hard to share me with the other kids. Pretty soon he went off to watch the video with the others, but it seemed to help. They didn’t fight for the rest of the day. Whenever he seems to be getting too rough with the other kids, I try to find a way to spend a little extra time with him, and it really works.”*

Time-in isn’t meant to be a punishment. It’s another way of helping a child get control of himself or feel more secure, so that he can behave better. It’s not always easy to know what will work with a particular child or in a particular situation. Sometimes you just have to try something and see what happens. For example, if your four-year-old has a tantrum and is lying on the floor yelling, you might sit close to her and try to help her calm down, perhaps by patting her back or talking gently. But if that seems to infuriate her more, you could try just walking away and leaving her alone – some kids cool down more easily without an audience.

### **You can have it when...**

One of the goals of disciplining children is to help them learn to be responsible. A positive way to encourage responsible behaviour is to link privileges or activities your child enjoys to completion of her work:

- *“When you finish clearing the table, you can watch TV”*
- *“When we get the vacuuming done, we’ll all go out for dinner”*
- *“Put your toys back on the shelf and then we’ll read a story”*

This approach is more positive, and usually more effective, than threatening to take away privileges. Think about what happens when you say “Because you didn’t clear the table after dinner, you can’t watch TV tonight.”

You know you will have a rather angry evening as you try to prevent the child from watching TV, and you’re already annoyed because you had to clear the table yourself. If you leave the dishes on the table and just remind the child that he can watch TV as soon as the dishes are cleared, both of you will feel happier.

When you use this technique, you are also teaching your child a self-motivating skill that she can use herself as she grows older: “I’m going to study this chapter, and then I’ll go for a bike ride.” It is important, though, that the reward is something that the child really wants. If you say, “When you finish clearing the table, you can have your bath,” the dishes may sit there all evening!

*“I was concerned that Kareem wasn’t doing his homework and I didn’t want him to end up with bad grades in school. So I decided that he had to show me his completed homework every night before he could go out with his friends or watch TV. It actually worked very well because I would ask questions about what he’d done and I think he got more interested in it that way.”*

### **Choices for Children**

Allowing young children to make simple choices often encourages them to be more co-operative, making life more pleasant for all of you. As the parent, you are in charge and you do make the final decisions. One of the skills children need to learn, though, is how to make good choices, so that they will be prepared for the more difficult decisions they will face as they get older. Your task as a parent is to offer gradually more complex choices that are within the guidelines you find acceptable.

#### **For example:**

- “Yesterday my preschooler said she didn’t want to go to the babysitter’s. I just asked, ‘Which of your animals do you want to take with you today?’ She picked out a teddy and headed off happily.”
- A three-year-old could choose to have brown sugar or raisins on his oatmeal (but not “anything

he wants” for breakfast if you’re only prepared to make oatmeal).

- A seven-year-old could choose what to wear to school from her drawer of winter clothes (but not her summer shorts or party dress).
- Three older children could get together and decide who will do the dishes, who will do the sweeping and who will put out the garbage (but all those tasks need to be done).

### From Choices to Negotiation

As children get older, they can be more involved in decisions. Negotiating is a very useful problem-solving skill that your child will use throughout her adult life. A simple way of negotiating is to let the child choose when he’ll do something (if that’s possible).

*“I felt like I was always nagging my son about his chores. Finally I said, ‘Matt, I really need you to cut the lawn. When could you commit to have it done?’ He said he’d get it finished by 7:30. He did, too!”*

Some families organize regular family meetings, and these are a good time for negotiating issues like rules, chores, and allowances. Children are much more likely to follow rules if they have had some input into them and understand the reason for them. And they sometimes come up with creative solutions that really work!

Choices should be:

- within the child’s capability
- within limits you find acceptable
- compatible with health and safety
- real – if you can’t accept one of the child’s options, don’t offer him that choice

Negotiating also means allowing for exceptions and being flexible. If your child normally goes to bed at eight o’clock, you might negotiate letting him stay up until nine for a special TV show or to go to a party. Part of the deal might be that he sets out his clothes and school supplies for the next day before he goes to bed, since he’s likely to be more tired in the morning.

When you treat your child’s opinions with respect and consideration, you set an example for her to follow with other people. Giving your children choices, involving them in decision-making, and negotiating with them will help them learn skills they will need as adults.

*“My son wanted to go to a movie alone with his friends. I felt they were too young. We talked it over, and made a deal – I drove them, and waited to make sure they got in okay. And I was waiting at the door when they got out. But they got to sit on their own.”*

### What Works for You?

Remember, to guide your child’s behaviour you can:

- Praise good behaviour
- Describe the behaviour you want
- Let natural consequences teach your child
- Use logical consequences
- Give time-out
- Give time-in
- Delay a privilege until responsibilities are met
- Offer a choice
- Negotiate an agreement.

There is no instant solution to every situation. Children are “a work in progress” and will make mistakes, just as you do. Positive approaches to discipline help them learn and you will feel good about the relationship you have with your family.

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