

Keeping your cool!

When a parent responds to a child's behavior with anger, the focus of that child's attention shifts.

No longer is he paying attention to his own behavior and it's outcomes. Now he is paying attention to the adult's behavior, and an opportunity for the child to learn has been lost. In this angry situation, punishment is much more likely to be the end result. Discipline can only come from a place of calm and thoughtfulness.

It's possible to help your child learn to manage her emotions and behaviors, even if you're finding it difficult to manage your own:

1. Remember: anger is normal. It's the way that we express it that's helpful or harmful.
2. Learn to catch yourself early and take calming actions: give yourself a time-out, go for a walk, call a friend...
3. Examine the cause of the anger and your expectations of your child.
4. Talk to a counselor if you need someone to help you figure out the issues in #3.
5. Learn parenting skills. Being a parent is tough. Nobody is born knowing how to do it! A great resource for parenting education is the blog: <https://www.parentingforbrain.com/>
6. Be kind to yourself. Just like your child is learning and growing, so are you!

Punishment vs. Discipline

What's the difference? Does it matter?

When discussing parenting, many people use these terms interchangeably, but there are actually big differences between the two. Discipline means to teach, instruct, or train. It focuses on the future and how a child can learn new behaviors. Punishment means to inflict some type of pain as a penalty for past behavior. The belief is that the fear of future punishment will prevent that behavior from being repeated.



someone pain when you're feeling frustrated - even if you love that person.

- **Punishment teaches about timing, not traits.** Behavior change brought about by punishment can be "context dependent." A child that is punished hasn't learned why a

different behavior would be a better idea; they've only learned to improve their timing so they don't get caught. Their behavior can come to depend on whether or not they think they'll get punished for it, instead of choosing behavior that's brings them closer to being the kind of person they hope to become.

If the intent of both punishment and discipline is to change a child's future behavior, it's important to ask, "Do they both work equally well?" As it turns out, in the long run, they don't.

The Problems with Punishment

Research shows that physical, emotional, or verbal punishments aren't effective at correcting a child's behavior. This can include actions such as hitting or other ways of causing physical pain or using words that are intended to cause emotional pain or shame.

- **Punishment teaches fear.** Children that are punished (or threatened with punishment) learn to be afraid of the pain that's coming. They also learn to be afraid of the person that causes the pain. A relationship that includes fear can't include trust.
- **Punishment teaches violence.** It demonstrates that it's okay to hurt someone to get what you want. It shows that it's alright to cause

- **Punishment can cause lasting physical and mental damage.** Data shows that children that are physically or verbally punished are more likely to misbehave. They then get hit or yelled at more often, which then makes it more likely they'll misbehave. This vicious cycle creates "toxic stress" that floods a child's system with damaging levels of stress hormones. This profoundly harms a child's developing brain, growing body, and budding spirit. Learn more about toxic stress and children's health at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We're here to help! Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk.

Discipline : Future Focused

Kids have a lot to learn: how to read and write, how to navigate the internet, how to manage money, how to take care of their health, how to build strong relationships... In addition to all the skills they need to learn to lead happy and healthy lives, they also need to know how to manage their emotions and behaviors.

They best learn how to do this when the relationships with their caregivers are built on care, compassion, trust, and respect. The ways in which the adults in their lives respond to both “good” and “bad” behaviors will impact children’s behaviors in the future.

Discipline for Today...

- **Don’t just worry about whether your kids are listening to you, worry that they’re watching you.** Do you hit, yell, take things that aren’t yours, speak disrespectfully... Model the behaviors that you want your children to copy. If you know this is hard for you, talk to one of Sawtooth Mountain Clinic’s Behavioral Health Consultants. Reaching out for help shows your child, “I love you, and I want to be the best parent I can be. I’m talking to someone that will help me learn how.”
- **Give them the gift of your attention.** This says to them, “I see you. I hear you. You are important to me.” It also teaches them that they don’t have to misbehave in order to be noticed.
- **Catch them being good, and let them know you love them even when they’re misbehaving.** When they’re behaving well, be specific about the behavior that you’re reinforcing - that way they know exactly what to do again. (ex. Thanks for putting your toys in the toy box.) When they’re misbehaving, remaining calm and kind even in the face of their anger sends the message of your unconditional love.
- **Listen to their words and for possible deeper meaning behind them, and watch for the signals in their behaviors.** Let them finish telling you about their view of a situation before you jump in with comments or suggestions. Notice if there are patterns to their misbehaviors. Talk it through and help them find other ways for them to get what they need.
- **Set reasonable limits and stick to them.** Make sure your family’s rules and expectations are clear, consistent, fair, realistic, and age-appropriate.

...and for Tomorrow.

- **Know when to let it be.** If your child gets plenty of loving attention for good behavior, isn’t in any danger, and isn’t endangering anyone else or their belongings, sometimes it’s best to just let them experience the logical outcome of their actions. Caution: Don’t follow that up with an “I told you so” kind of remark. Responding with gentle compassion when things don’t work out the way they want will keep their attention focused on the results of their behavior and not on your disapproval.
- **Plan ahead for tricky situations.** If you know that there’s an activity or environment that might make good behavior difficult, discuss it with your child first. Plan together expected behavior and ways that they cope. Make sure that your expectations are appropriate. Is your child hungry, tired, uncomfortable, or overstimulated? Get their physical needs met before you expect them to keep their emotions and behaviors under control.
- **Redirect unwanted behavior.** Sometimes boredom or anxiety can masquerade as misbehavior. A little distraction or redirection can go a long way.

For tips on health and effective discipline for different ages/stages, visit: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx?trk=tk>

Tricky Time-Outs

At it’s most basic, a “time out” is removing your child from a situation that may be reinforcing misbehavior, or it can allow some quiet time to for your child to calm down and regroup. Problems can arise though, when time-outs are used as punishment, such as when they last a long time, require the child to sit without moving or facing a corner, have to be done in front of others so the child will be humiliated, are carried out in a locked or confined space, or when they are accompanied by a reprimand.

For two interesting perspectives on Time Outs, visit: <https://www.parentingforbrain.com/discipline-vs-punishment/>

<https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/p/parenting-blog/time-out->