



Hitting Harms, Hugging Helps

Discipline That Works



NATIONWIDE
CHILDREN'S

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DISCIPLINE THAT WORKS

Discipline is important for all children. Discipline teaches children to do what is right and to get along with others, even when adults are not watching. It helps children to be safe and keeps others safe.

The latest research confirms that hitting teaches children to use aggression and violence to solve their problems. Hitting may cause fear, anger, embarrassment or a desire to strike back. It also risks really hurting a child and makes the parent look out of control.

This brochure describes other ways to discipline a child without spanking. When considering any of these, remember some basic rules when speaking with your child. Always be sure to get down to your child's level, make eye contact and be kind but firm. Consider your own actions and feelings when disciplining a child. Calm down and walk away if you can, or count to ten to gain control of your emotions. Be aware of your own behaviors. Children will copy what they see and hear.

Remember, kids are kids. Set realistic expectations and be consistent with rules and consequences. Look for good behavior, and reward your child when you see it. Every day, give your child hugs, praise, and encouragement.



THE FOLLOWING ARE WAYS TO DISCIPLINE WITH LOVE:

Distraction

Purpose: Distraction helps to redirect the child's attention. Distraction works best for infants and toddlers who are too young to reason. Infants and young toddlers have a short attention span. They can usually only focus on one thing at a time.

How is it used?

- If your child is touching or playing with something he shouldn't, remove it and put something else in his hands to play with or explore. You may also try moving the child.
- To distract children from an annoying activity or from arguing with each other, invite them to help you or play a game. Examples include looking for how many red things they can find or seeing how many animals they can name in one minute.
- As you distract your child and direct his attention to something new, you may choose to ignore the unwanted behavior, or make a simple comment such as "No touching that."
- Remember, teaching is usually more effective than nagging or yelling. Positive attention is better than negative attention. When the child is being good, give him praise and attention. Children will find a way to get the attention they need. They can do it with positive or negative behavior. The choice is yours.

Time Out

Purpose: Time out gives the child time to cool down. It is not to punish the child. Time out works best for children age 3. It is effective in reducing behaviors such as tantrums, arguing, hitting, throwing or breaking things. Time out does not work if used too often, if the time out period is too long, or if the time out place is wrong.

How is it used?

- The child should know in advance that if bad behavior doesn't stop with one reminder, there will be a time out to cool down and to think about how to correct the behavior.
- When the behavior occurs, give one, and only one, reminder to stop.
- If the warning doesn't stop the behavior, stay calm and tell the child she needs a time out. Guide her to the time out location.
- When the time out is over, praise the child for calming herself down. Briefly talk about the unwanted behavior and how she could handle herself better next time.

Time Period:

The time out should last one minute per year of the child's age (3 years = three minutes, 8 years = eight minutes). The time out should last no longer than ten minutes for older children. The timing starts when the child calms down.

Time Out Location:

A good location is a chair in the corner. Do not use the bedroom or a busy place where there is television, music, people or toys. Do not talk to the child during the time out.

Sticker Charts

Purpose: Sticker charts help create new habits such as taking asthma medicine without complaining or stop hard-to-break habits such as thumb sucking and whining. Sticker charts work best for preschool and young school-age children. They require time, attention and patience from parents.

How are they used?

- Choose the behavior you want to stop or start.
- Create a chart or calendar and explain how the system works to the child. You can engage the child by letting them decorate the chart.
- Whenever the child goes an agreed upon amount of time without doing the bad behavior, or every time he performs the new or good behavior, place a check or a sticker on the chart or calendar.
- Decide together and in advance how many checks or stickers it takes to get a reward and what the reward will be. Examples of rewards include small gifts, later bedtimes, or a family outing. Avoid using food as a reward.
- In addition to stickers, checks and rewards, give the child lots of praise.
- Do not get angry if the child fails. Encourage him to try harder the next time.
- Start small. Make goals reasonable so the child can succeed.



House Rules

Purpose: House rules allow a family to agree on rules and punishments together. House rules work best for school-age and teenage children. To be effective the children need to be involved in setting up the rules and punishments. Parents must follow through with punishment.

How are they used?

- Sit down with the child and develop rules that are important for your family. These could include curfews, chores, fighting, talking back, bad language, homework or telephone use. You can probably think of other ideas. Remember, there can be rules for parents, too!
- Avoid trying to make rules for everything.
- Choose the punishment for breaking the family rules. Make sure the punishment is reasonable.
- When the rule is broken, calmly remind the child of the rule and the punishment. Make sure the punishment is carried out.
- Always be willing to listen to the child's reasons if she feels the rule was unfair in a certain case or if she feels that breaking the rule was beyond her control. Once in a while, she will be right.
- Most of the time, even when the child protests, the rule was fair and the child had control over her actions. The punishment should then be enforced without the parent feeling the need to justify it. As a parent you can say something like "I'm glad you told me how you feel about this, but I disagree with your excuse and the rule stands."



Logical Consequences – Explain “Why”

Purpose: Logical consequences teach the child that unwanted behaviors result in natural, negative outcomes. Logical outcomes work best with some toddlers and preschoolers, school-age children and teens. Logical outcomes do not work if the outcomes are acceptable to the child, or if the parent keeps the child from suffering the unpleasant outcome. Logical outcomes should not be used if the outcomes could hurt the child.

How is it used?

- Clearly state the expected behavior. Examples could include: “Put your dirty clothes in the laundry.” “Wear a helmet every time you ride a bike.” “Do not leave your toys in the living room.”
- Clearly state the outcome: “If you ride without a helmet, the bike is taken away for a week the first time, a month the second time and for good the third time.”
- If the child breaks the rule, calmly enforce the outcome. Avoid getting into arguments or giving long explanations.

It is important to fully understand the risks of hitting as a form of discipline. There are resources at Nationwide Children's Hospital to help you with discipline.

Resources Include:

**The Center for Family Safety and Healing
at Nationwide Children's Hospital**

Phone: (614) 722-3278

www.FamilySafetyandHealing.org

Franklin County Children Services 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline

Phone: (614) 229-7000

www.franklincountyohio.gov/children_services

The Center for Effective Discipline

Phone: (614) 834-7946

www.stophitting.com

If you would like more information on this topic, please talk with any health care provider.

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