

Punishment vs Discipline

How were you punished as a child?

Just because it's always been done that way, does not always make it the right way.

As parents we may periodically need to reevaluate our child-rearing methods, especially checking for those destructive practices we may be following simply out of habit.

Raising children is the most important job you will ever have.

Why Do We Punish Our Children?

As caring, loving parents, we take the raising of our children seriously. We often think about the long-term results of what we are doing with our children. A typical comment from parents who see a wild, out-of-control three-year-old is "He's going to be a handful when he is a seven-year-old!" We acknowledge that the road a child is on, even as a toddler, can set him up for troublesome behavior patterns as he gets older. This is so very true. A child who has received little discipline in the younger years will not suddenly transform into an angel when he turns seven. Instead, things will usually go from bad to worse, and from worse to impossible. As parents, then, we often chose punishment. We punish our children today to have a better tomorrow. Some of the reasons we punish:

1. To stop misbehavior - We see a child breaking a rule or hurting another child and our first instinct is to put a stop to the action. As good parents we try to stop behavior problems when they occur. This kind of punishment is more a reflex action. But often, when the immediate goal is to just stop a behavior, we get so emotionally involved in the issue that it is difficult to make a rational decision about the best course of action.
2. To Teach Children Right from Wrong – As our children mature we hope that they will understand and accept the concept of right from wrong. We try to foster an inner discipline that will guide them in making the right decisions. When we punish our children, it is with the intention of teaching a lesson. We know that the day will eventually come when our children must go out into the world without us. We want to make sure that they go with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to make good decisions when we are not there to guide them.
3. To Make Children Understand Who Is In Charge – When our children are disrespectful, sassy, or rude, we punish with the intent of showing them who

is in charge. Sometimes this is a conscious decision based on the desire to gain control of the relationship. Sometimes, though it is a reactionary response based on the fact that our ego is being trampled upon.

4. We Get Frustrated and Don't Know What Else to Do – We have in our mind's eye a vision delightful, smiling children sitting on the couch side by side. The reality is usually a very distorted image of this picture - kids fighting over a toy that nobody likes anyway. In our frustration to bring reality closer to our vision, we lash out and punish to try and force things to go our way. We love our kids and want them to behave, but sometimes we get so frustrated that we don't know what to do other than punish them.

What is "Punishment" and Why Doesn't It Work

To punish: "to cause to undergo pain, loss, or suffering for a crime or wrongdoing."

To punish implies the infliction of a penalty on a wrongdoer. Punishment puts a strain on the parent-child relationship. It doesn't teach them right from wrong, doesn't put the parent in charge, and doesn't really fix anything. Some typical methods of punishment are:

1. Yelling, Nagging, Threats, and Lectures

A common method of trying to control a child is with your voice. Children learn that empty threats, yelling, and nagging while they aren't fun, rarely result in anything serious. When a parent uses their voice as a method of control too often, their children become "parent deaf."

2. Spanking

Spanking does nothing to teach a child to develop inner discipline. A child's focus is on the spanking itself, not on review of the behavior that led to it. After a spanking, a child does not sit in their room and think, "Gee I sure messed up, but I really learned something." Instead a child typically, is thinking, "It's not fair! She doesn't understand! I hate her!"

Spanking is seen as punishment for a crime, payment for a debt. In other word, once paid, they have a clean slate. Spanking gets in the way of allowing a child to develop a conscience. The guilt that follows a misbehavior is a prime motivator for change. Spanking takes away guilt because the crime has been paid for.

Spanking makes the parent feel better. When we get angry, we move onto "fight or flight mode." Our adrenaline increases and we have a primitive need

to strike out. Hitting releases this negative energy and helps us feel better. Some parents report that in the heat of the moment it's hard to stop hitting and they don't even realize how hard they have hit. When you are very angry, you have several options. One, you can leave the room to cool off. Two, you can clap your hands. Clapping your hands quickly and firmly ten times or more while stating your case: "I am very angry at you right now. Stop this fighting!" This technique definitely gets your child's attention, releases some of your anger, and is much more effective than a smack would have been.

Parents who spank sometimes come to rely upon spanking as their primary source of discipline. If you give yourself permission to spank, it becomes a quick fix for all kinds of problems. It blocks off the effective use of other more productive skills.

Spanking gets in the way of a healthy parent-child relationship. Children look up to their parents as protectors, teachers, and guides.

Spanking is not an effective form of discipline. Hitting a child typically stops a behavior because of shock, fear, or pain. But most children will repeat the behaviors.

Spanking does teach a lesson. The lesson is "When you don't know what else to do—Hit!" "When you are bigger, you can hit." Or "When you're really angry, you can get your way by hitting." It is common knowledge that children who frequently hit, are more likely to accept violence and are more likely to hit. Children who are spanked often have more resentment, anger, and lower self-esteem.

3. Bribes and Rewards. The problems with bribes and rewards is that they are not setting your child up to deal with the real world. They create false expectations in children that carry over into adulthood. They don't learn to do things for the sense of accomplishment that comes from a job well done.

Discipline – What it is and Why It Works

Discipline: "training that develops self-control and character." There are productive ways to deal with a child's misbehavior, defiance, belligerence, and other discipline problems. There are positive ways to teach right from wrong, and help a child learn important lessons that will lead to a happier life. **The main strategy involves**

preparing in advance for misbehavior. All children will misbehave. Most children will misbehave in the same ways. When parents have planned their methods for dealing with the misbehavior, there are sure to be powerful, healthy results.

1. Using well-thought-out rules and routines keeps children on track, this preventing many of the situations that may lead to misbehavior. Parents sometimes say that this idea has merit but is difficult to carry out. It may take some time to create good rules up front, but they will save you from having to deal with many small issues day after day.

Step 1. Make a list of the repeated misbehaviors.

Step 2. Create a simple rule for each of your top issues.

Step 3. Decide on an appropriate consequence for each rule when it's broken.

2. Talk less, act more. Parents hinder their effectiveness by talking too much. They follow up all the talking with very little action. Parents who follow this pattern teach their children NOT to listen to them and even worse, they teach their children to ignore them, fight them, and nag them.

3. Appropriate use of Time-out.

Stopping a misbehavior.

Giving a child the time and space to cool off and calm down.

4. Natural Consequences. Experience is a wonderful teacher....Don't wear your mittens-You will get cold hands; Be rude and bossy to your friend- and you may lose that friend etc. Natural consequences permit children to learn through their own actions (or lack of actions). Children, in essence, become their own teacher.
5. Logical Consequences. There are times when we cannot allow a natural consequence to occur because it would be too severe. Logical consequences are those that you arrange or enforce as a result of your child's actions or lack of actions. Logical consequences are most effective when a child can clearly see the connection between the behavior and the consequence.
6. Behavior Baseball. Three strikes-You're out. One of the major frustrations of parenthood is when you have to deal with the same problems over and over again. Ex. Six year old not taking care of her Guinea pig.

- When you've tried making a clear statement of fact: Ginger needs food and water and a clean cage every day to be happy.
- When you've tried Grandma's Rule: After you feed Ginger, you may have your breakfast.
- I gave clear instructions and used a regular routine: Ginger needs to have food and water every day before breakfast
- I kept it brief. Ginger is hungry.
- I gave a choice: Do you want to take care of Ginger now or after lunch?

After all of this, there was still an ongoing problem.

The consequence for the month of June was Ginger's cage moved to the basement rec room. Then consequence for the month of July was: Sell Ginger.

A few Pointers:

Use this technique for major repeat problems and use it for one issue at a time.

Use realistic time periods, rules and consequences.

Don't bargain over strikes.

It's OK to give reminders, after all you do want your child to succeed.

7. Problem-Solving Together. Involving children in looking for solutions to problems encourages them to think for themselves and explore their own ideas. The key is to remember that you are working together with your child to arrive at a solutions.
8. Patience, Practice, and Persistence.
9. Be patient with yourself. These are all guidelines.

Excerpts from the book: Kid Cooperation, Elizabeth Pantley