

Help!



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discipline my child?

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When you think about discipline, I wonder what springs to mind. Perhaps it brings back memories of the way you were treated as a child. These can be good or bad, but whatever our experiences we know that discipline is key in helping children grow into well-balanced and responsible human beings.

What is 'discipline'?

Discipline is not the same as punishment. Good discipline includes being a positive role model, setting a good example, negotiation and compromise, instruction, providing boundaries, guidance, advice, and helping your child set realistic goals. There are lots of different ways of disciplining a child and if you restrict yourself to simply reacting against behaviour you don't like, you will be missing lots of opportunities to bring positive, loving discipline into their life. Introducing sanctions or punishing your child is only a part of the disciplining process and should only be done in ways that are fair and never abusive.

Above everything else, children need to know they are loved

unconditionally, even when they are behaving badly! This will help in developing a healthy self-esteem which is very important for your child's emotional wellbeing. Parental love can be demonstrated in a variety of ways dependent on culture and background, however positive approaches can be learned with good outcomes. Examples of this are spoken words of praise, encouragement and affirmation, and also demonstrative behaviour such as hugs and cuddles.

We cannot be prescriptive here because every child responds differently and the way love is expressed changes as a child grows. But one thing is certain; lovingly disciplining your child will give them a great start in life and help them feel secure and confident.

The law

Under UK law a child is a child up to the age of 18 and legislation protects children from cruel and abusive treatment by their parents or carers. For example, it is against the law for a parent to use physical punishment on their child that causes bruising, either by hitting or using an implement to inflict injury. It is also against the law to use any form of physical punishment when the child is being looked after by someone else, such as a child minder or foster carer. The law recognizes that children are not the property of their parents to do with as they wish, but are individuals in their own right who should be nurtured, valued and respected. In Scotland it is illegal to punish children by shaking, hitting on the head, or using an implement. The new legislation is not confined to banning specific types of behaviour mentioned. In addition when a court is looking into physical punishment a child has received it would consider all the circumstances.

The biblical perspective

The bible teaches that children are a gift from God and should be valued and appreciated as such. Children can be hard work but all parents are responsible for the way they bring

up the children entrusted to them. Ephesians 6 verse 4 talks about parental responsibility in this way:

‘...now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice...’

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The purpose of discipline from a biblical perspective is always restorative, and this is the model every parent should use with their children. Delivery is all important and as this passage indicates, overbearing discipline and harsh words or even looks can cause a child to clam up and feel resentful. Remember also that in the Bible Jesus is portrayed as a good shepherd (John 10). He knows and understands his flock; he gently leads and guides them (not by the scruff of the neck) and is prepared to lay down his life for them. Every parent or carer should be seeking to follow this example.

Boundaries

We all know that children behave poorly at times. They have a natural inclination to test the boundaries and challenge limits put round them. This defiance is a normal part of child development and is one way a child begins to experience his or her individuality. However, if no limits are placed on a child and if a parent never says "No!" how can a child learn the difference between right and wrong?

Children need to be free to play. Although we sometimes think of freedom as the absence of any kind of restriction, in reality, true freedom – for children as for the rest of us – is being able to live a free and full life within secure boundaries. These obviously change as a child grows and what is appropriate for a toddler will not be appropriate for a teenager. However, establishing firm boundaries with young children will help them as they learn what is acceptable. Parents need to respond appropriately to their child's growing independence in the teenage years and on into adulthood when they aren't going to be around.

Consistency

Young children should never be left on their own or in the care of other young children. It is also important they have routine and predictability. They need to know that "No!" means "No!" and that if they disobey there will be consequences. Rewarding good behaviour is, generally, more effective than punishing the bad, and so parents should place a greater emphasis on the positive. Praise and encouragement are powerful tools for developing good habits. But whether good behaviour is being encouraged or the bad discouraged, consistency is vital. Where two parents or other family members are sharing the care and upbringing of a child they need to agree and then stick to what they have decided. If one is soft and the other strict, the child can become confused and they may even try to manipulate one parent against the other to get their own way.

Similarly, if someone else looks after the child, they too need to understand the boundaries that have been set by the parents so they can be reinforced. Because young children need consistency, frequent changes of carer are likely to be unsettling for them.

Diversity

There are lots of different ideas about how to be a good parent. These can vary within families, ethnic groups and communities. British society acknowledges and affirms cultural diversity but children, whatever their cultural background, always have a right to be protected. Anything that causes harm to a child, whether part of a cultural or faith tradition or not, is never acceptable. Some practices that may be culturally acceptable in some countries are banned by law in the United Kingdom, and indeed in many other countries. Child abuse linked to faith and belief such as accusations of witchcraft or spirit possession is also a serious concern which will cause police and children's service to investigate in order to safeguard children from these cultural practices.

It is vital that places of worship do not teach, carry out or encourage abusive practices, whether in the family home or at religious meetings. There have been recent high profile prosecutions against adults who have subjected children to appalling abuse following accusations that they are witches or possessed by evil spirits. Whenever such practices come to light, they will always be investigated by the authorities who will take action to protect the child.

If it is proven that a parent or carer has knowingly allowed abuse to take place, it is likely that criminal proceedings will be brought against those responsible.

Prayer

Many places of worship quite legitimately regard prayer as an integral part of the life of their faith community. However, great care must be taken with any prayer ministry involving children. Children can be subjected to emotional abuse if they are coerced into receiving personal prayer against their will and, worse still, if they are frightened by shouting and/or aggressive behaviour towards them. Guidelines on praying for children can be found on the CCPAS website (www.ccpas.co.uk/articles)

The practicalities

- Get to know your child, their personality, likes and dislikes. There is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to parenting. What is effective with one child may not necessarily work with a brother or sister.
- Listen to your child and respect their right to have an opinion, although you may, as their parent, disagree.

- Be as positive as you can even when you don't feel like it. Praise is an effective way of reinforcing good behaviour. Ignoring behaviour you don't like means that it's less likely to be repeated and, although this isn't always possible, it's often more successful than just saying "No!" or getting into a battle of wills.
- Keep the rules as simple as possible and make sure your child knows what is off limits. Choose your battles and save confrontation for the really important issues.
- Be consistent, otherwise your child is likely to become confused. (See 'Consistency' page 4)
- Reason with your child (when they are old enough to understand). Remember to speak kindly and gently. If you feel angry don't rush straight into a confrontation; give yourself (and your child) time to calm down before talking to them about the issue that has led to the disagreement.
- Provide your child with opportunities for positive activities to keep them busy and interested.
- For persistent, unacceptable behaviour agree some sanctions, but make sure that the child knows and understands why they are being applied. These need to be geared to the age and development of the child and should take account of both the unacceptable behaviour and the child's character. They might include 'time out', 'grounding' (not being allowed to go out to play) or denial of privileges. Children should never be locked in a room, denied food or other basic necessities, or treated in a harsh or cruel way – whatever they have done.
- Always remember it's the behaviour that is bad not the child. It is important, however, to help your children develop personal responsibility for their actions. There are some children who have special needs and they may have a medical condition that causes them to behave in the way they do. In these situations it's always best to get professional medical advice and help in dealing effectively with your child's behaviour.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. The people responsible for pastoral care at your place of worship or the youth and children's workers may be aware

of other parents struggling with similar issues and may be able to advise you themselves or direct you to someone who can help. You can also find useful articles on the CCPAS website to advice on particular issues.

The ten key points:

1. Get to know your child
2. Listen to your child
3. Be as positive as you can
4. Keep the rules simple
5. Be consistent
6. Reason with your child
7. Provide positive opportunities
8. Agree sanctions with child
9. The behaviour is bad – not the child
10. Ask for help

The bible teaches that children are a gift from God and should be valued and appreciated as such. '...now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice...'

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Useful contacts

CCPAS

0845 120 45 50
info@ccpas.co.uk
www.ccpas.co.uk

NSPCC

0808 800 5000
help@nspcc.org.uk
www.nspcc.org.uk

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA):

020 7704 2261
info@afruca.org
www.afruca.org

Care for the Family:

029 2081 0800
mail@cff.org.uk
www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Family Lives:

0808 800 2222
parentsupport@familylives.org.uk
www.familylives.org.uk/

The Victoria Climbié Foundation:

020 8619 1191
info@vcf-uk.org
www.victoria-climbie.org.uk

This is one of a series of **Help!** leaflets published by CCPAS.
For our full range of resources and for more information
visit our website www.ccpas.co.uk



CCPAS
PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ.
Tel: 0303 003 11 11
Email: info@ccpas.co.uk Web: www.ccpas.co.uk