

TRANSPARENTSM TOOLBOX

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Discipline is a difficult task of parenting. During times of family transition, discipline can become even more challenging. The previous structure of the family is shifting and children's behaviors are more negative because of their emotional reaction to the changes. There are techniques of effective discipline which are useful to all parents.

Firm Limits—"No" means NO. A limit should be like a brick wall which no amount of begging, pleading, crying, whining, yelling, or stomping can penetrate. It should be used cautiously by parents and only in situations when it can realistically be enforced.

Teaching, not Shaming—When children behave inappropriately parents need to respond with discipline that teaches the child how to behave differently next time.

- Help the child to identify what they did that they were not supposed to do.
- Help the child identify what they could do differently next time.
- Let child know you believe they can make a better choice next time.
- Punishment given as an impulsive reaction to the child's actions does nothing toward eliminating the negative behavior.

Encourage Desirable Behaviors—Increase attention on behaviors that you want to see more of through encouragement.

- Provide encouragement immediately.
- Get on the child's level and make eye contact.
- Smile and use a warm tone of voice.
- Choose a short message that specifically names the desirable behavior.
- Make it meaningful to your child by thinking about the kind of positive attention your child would like best: verbal or non-verbal; in front of others or whispered in their ear.

Discourage Undesirable Behaviors—Remove attention from behaviors that you do not want to see by ignoring the behavior, not the child.

- Ignore the behavior immediately.
- Make no eye contact.
- Turn body away to show you are not interested in the behavior.
- Stay calm.
- No words, no verbal cues, no sighs of exasperation.
- Focus on anything other than the behavior.
(example: look at your watch, count to 10, look at a book)
- Provide encouragement and praise as soon as the undesirable behavior stops and the child behaves appropriately.

Realistic Consequences—Make sure the consequence is something that you can follow through. Refer to guidelines on "Using Time Out Effectively." Children remember what the original consequence was. When parents do not do what they told the child they would do, the child quickly learns to ignore parents and discount their discipline as "easy to get out of."

Consistency—Parents need to respond in the same manner every time a problem behavior occurs. Discipline only works when presented consistently. In two parent homes, both adults should be united in the enforcement of consequences for a child.

About Families First®

TRANSPARENTSM was developed by Families First®, a premier not-for-profit organization providing critical, preventive services to strengthen and preserve families for more than 100 years.