

Discipline Tip Sheet



Few experts advocate spanking as an effective form of discipline—so what else can a caregiver do to teach a child good behavior, and when are such methods effective? Use this checklist to make sure that your methods of discipline are in-check with the experts.

Infants under six months: No discipline needed.

- Shower an infant with love and affection – **you can't spoil an infant.**
- **Respect an infant as an individual and respond to her needs.** When she cries, try to determine why. Is she hungry, wet, tired? Does she need to burp? Is it just her fussy time of day?
- **Keep her safe.** Make sure that dangerous objects are out of reach.

Six months to walking age: Focus on safety and exploration.

- **Give a child a safe place to explore.** At this age a child still doesn't understand discipline, but he will want to touch everything he can – this is how he learns about his world.
- Encourage a child to explore – **play on the floor with a child** as much as possible.
- **Allow for a lot of tummy time** – it's important for learning to crawl.
- **Get ready to set limits.** Once you notice that the baby looks around to see if you are watching him, he is showing you his awareness of "forbidden." At this time it is appropriate to begin to set limits, letting a child know what they can and cannot do.

Toddlers, age one to two: Focus on teaching through positive reinforcement.

- **Safety is still a high priority.** Make sure your house is well child-proofed. Keep a close eye on a child at all times.
- **Be positive.** Encourage good behavior and redirect undesirable behavior.
- **Give your child plenty of safe activities** to choose from.
- If he becomes distracted with something unsafe, **redirect him to a new activity.**
- **Use "no" primarily for safety issues.** At this age, a child is beginning to understand discipline. Therefore, a child will begin to understand that electric outlets are "no-no's" if you are firm and consistent.

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Two years and up: Set rules and act on them.

At this age a child is starting to understand expectations and consequences. Use discipline to teach values and set limits.

- **Be clear and consistent.** Explain expectations up front. A child should know the boundaries you expect.
- **Create natural consequences** to reinforce desired behavior. If a child hits a friend, impose a time-out (see below) until he is ready to play.
- **Act swiftly and in the moment.** Don't threaten or negotiate and don't leave the consequences until later – a child may not understand what you are trying to teach him.

For three years and up: Try a time out.

If done right, a time-out is an opportunity to teach your child how to deal with her frustrations and diffuse a situation in an unemotional way. It's not a punishment. During a time-out, a child should be on her own, and you should not pay attention to her, otherwise she'll take it as a positive reinforcement of the behavior that caused the time-out.

- **Don't impose a time-out until your child is ready.** Trying to get a young toddler to sit still could turn into what she thinks is a game, as she runs away and you chase after her. Thirty seconds to a minute is enough of a cooling period. Don't implement the one-minute for each year of life per rule until she is three.
- **Leaving your child alone to sit quietly for a few moments allows her to calm down** and allows you to leave the scene rather than getting involved in that moment's problem.
- **Don't suddenly impose time-outs;** warn a child that her behavior is going to result in one if she continues.

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