

Learning by example, demonstration, explanation, and experience are methods used to teach your children toilet training at this time. Success slowly follows. Children should be rewarded with a kind word of praise. They should, however, never be scolded, ridiculed, or punished for failures.

Nap and night training gradually follow and normally are not problems. Bed wetting has nothing to do with toilet training.

DISCIPLINE:

Discipline is one of the most difficult areas encountered in raising a family. Parents soon discover that there is no single correct way to discipline their children. As each child (and each parent) is an individual, what works for one child and parent may not work for another. In addition, parents react differently to each of their children, changing their attitudes toward disciplinary problems as they, their children, and the problems develop.

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE TOGETHER

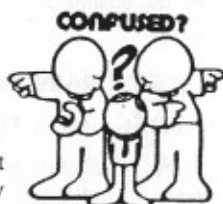
The key words associated with good discipline are consistency and communication. Children quickly learn how to play one parent against the other. If discipline is to be effective, parents must learn to "stick together" even though they do not always agree. Thus the differences (or inconsistencies) that exist between parents must always be worked out privately or away from the children. Consistency in discipline must always include reasonable judgment—the punishment must always fit the crime.

Children always recognize fairness, so when we do make mistakes in discipline, an honest apology goes a long way towards a good, open child-parent relationship. Communication is the heart of good family unity, especially if children know that parents are willing to listen with an open mind. Under such circumstances, compromises among all parties often occur although initially there may have been great areas of disagreement. Remember, you are their parent, not their friend.

TYPES OF DISCIPLINE

Types of discipline vary with each stage in a child's life. For example, mild physical punishment is justifiable in the toddler age group when confronted with danger. Toddlers must be firmly taught that streets are not playgrounds, stoves and other hot things burn, and electric sockets "bite" back. Each day your toddler will be busy thinking of new challenges! These are the years when a buttock swat with an open hand plus a key word (NO! HOT!-NO! STREET!) may be effective in protecting your child from a serious injury in the future.

For lesser dangers, a stern look associated with a key word will warn the sensitive child against danger. The latter is really an expression of parental caring. By hugging your toddler after a crisis and discipline, you are saying "I love you even if I have to discipline you." A "loving" reward is often much more effective than material ones such as money or candy. A child's feelings of self-worth and emotional stability are enforced by the reward of praise and appreciation. Material rewards, when used too often, support good behavior in a negative way.



There are many ways to discipline children on inappropriate behavior or actions. Currently, most physicians and counselors recommend "time out" for younger children. Time out should generally be for three to five minutes in younger children, but the length may be increased for older children. The "time out" area may be a quiet area of the house away from other children. The child should be clearly instructed on the length of time being used and the inappropriate behavior being corrected. It is permissible to use the child's crib or room for time-out.

As children grow, negative or positive reinforcement is helpful. In negative reinforcement, the child has privileges or treats removed for inappropriate behavior. In positive reinforcement, special rewards or treats are rewarded in recognition of appropriate behavior.

In all types of discipline, it is important that both parents have agreed on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. When inappropriate behavior occurs, it must be consistently punished. Conversely, appropriate behavior should be rewarded with a word of praise. Children are easily confused if punishment is not consistent. Clearly state what you expect. Parents commonly ask me about corporal punishment (spanking). I feel corporal punishment has a very limited role in discipline. Corporal punishment may be a way of adding emphasis to punishment techniques mentioned previously. It should never be done in anger or in sufficient force to injure the child. Other forms of discipline, if used consistently, will generally be effective without the use of corporal punishment. An open-hand and firm swat on the buttocks is the only acceptable form of corporal punishment and only for emergency "dangerous" situations.

ISOLATION (As a method of discipline)

After the first year a child will frequently modify unwanted behavior if told "when you behave this way, you make other people unhappy. You will have to spend some time away from me (us)." Then he may be isolated for three to five minutes. This gives him freedom to make choices. Usually, one minute per year of age is a good guideline.

ADOLESCENCE

Every family has its own way to deal with disciplinary problems; this is especially true with adolescents who seem to put a severe strain on their parents because of their continued struggle for independence. Teenagers are trying to find out who they are and where they are going as they grow apart from the family. This struggle within the family can be a frightening experience for both the "child-adult" and the parents. When shedding childhood dependence, children seem to be purposely trying to disagree with family views. Understanding this situation and choosing the proper discipline may not be easy, but this is a time when children really need our love, guidance, and tolerance. Do not be afraid to seek professional help if things seem to get out of control. Remember to be their parent, not their friend.

RESPONSIBLE PARENTS AND CHILDREN

In shaping a dependable adult, we must strive to teach our children to take the responsibility for their own actions. This is the essence of responsible parenthood, and there is no easy or guaranteed formula for being successful. First, last, and always we must strive to be thinking, fair, consistent, reasonable, firm, and loving parents. Being a parent is probably the hardest (and most rewarding) job most of us will ever do. Everyone will make mistakes. Accept them; learn from them and grow.