

## Greetings!

The words discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably. However knowing the difference and applying it to your parenting right now could make a huge difference in the path your relationship with your child could follow.

Punishment is the act of imposing an unpleasant consequence on a child, usually justified by the fact that we are "teaching them a lesson." Recently I heard a parent state that they had been told if they wanted their children to behave they needed to find the "child's currency." In other words find out what matters most to your child and use it to hurt them when they behave in an unacceptable manner. Thus, teaching them who has more power and coercing them into behaving. The problem with this is that you get what you give. When we teach that we get our way by hurting them, they learn that they must hurt others to get their way. It also opens the door for full-blown power struggles when the child ceases to care about the currency you are currently holding over their heads. This constant source of power struggles will exhaust you and leave the child with low self-esteem.

Discipline on the other hand is about teaching children appropriate behavior and helping them to become independent and responsible children. The goal of discipline is to empower the child with helpful information of what you **DO** want them to do. Discipline uses positively stated commands like, "couches are for sitting on" and "inside voices" to teach children the behavior you expect from them. Discipline allows consequences, both logical and natural to be the teachers, thus making it more likely the child will internalize the lesson. Once lessons are internalized the child becomes more self-guiding, eliminating the need for power struggles.

See below for some age specific applications of discipline for children.

## Pre-school

An important piece of information for parents to possess regarding disciplining children under the age of 7 is that they do not have the ability for inner speech. Therefore we need to be careful of what we expect from them. They are not able to think before they act or speak, that ability does not develop until closer to the age of eight. It also sheds a new light on the punishment technique of "time out." Can a child this young sit and think about what they have just done wrong? The answer is no. The age appropriate alternative is "time in". Time in is a technique where the child is brought to the adult rather than separated from them. During their time in children are allowed to process their behavior and expectations are clearly laid out for them. Unlike time outs where the child builds resentment and no processing is done, therefore the behavior is likely to repeat itself.

## School Age

## Featured Article



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Children 6-12 need information not lectures. Let's face it after the first couple of sentences they are unable to process all that talk. Use short, kind, information-packed directives to tell the child what you **do** want done. Instead of expending a great deal of breath lecturing them about what you did not want done and punishing them for their action, tell them what you do expect. Pro-actively laying down an expectation is more likely to gain you the behavior you do want, lower your stress level and increase your child's self-esteem.

## Teenagers

In disciplining teenagers the critical element is respect for their maturing ability to make decisions. It is tough to let go of our children, however the teenage years are about slowly guiding your child into becoming a responsible, independent young adult. Trying to control their every move will stifle their ability to build responsibility and raise your stress level. Two helpful hints are to pick your battles and then be consistent. Pick your battles means to really give the issue some thought and allow them the freedom to explore new ideas within reasonable limits. Be consistent means when you set a limit, be firm, calm and fair is enforcing that limit. What teens need most is to know that we trust them to start making more independent decisions as they mature, but at the same time we set age appropriate limits. It is striking that balance between trust and limit setting that parents of teens can find their greatest challenge.

If you have any questions about this months subject of discipline versus punishment or any other parenting issue please contact me at the number or e-mail listed below.

Be well.

**Sincerely,**

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