

## Positive Discipline Approaches & Strategies for Managing Challenging Behaviors

Not only to teach your child conscious and explicit things like learning facts; your role as a parent is to help your child develop unconscious patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior that will set them up to lead a successful life.

### Explicit Vs Implicit Memories

Explicit memories are consciously accessible, verbal, intellectual, cognitive, etc.

Implicit memories are more unconscious, emotive, experiential, etc. (this is where difficult behaviors lie, within this system).

Developing implicit memories, such as emotion regulation, handling "no," is energy exhaustive for parent.

### What is the difference between Discipline and Punishment?

- Positive discipline takes more time and effort initially, but it can lead to longer-lasting positive changes in behavior.
- Punishment-based methods might suppress behavior in the short term, but they don't address the root cause of the issue.
- **Punishment:**
  - Is a response and deterrent to a particular action or behavior.
  - Doesn't give people a means to right their wrongs.
  - Doesn't include the tools needed to understand redemption.
  - Creates negative emotions and damages relationships.
  - Used to hurt the child, vailed as "teaching a lesson."
  - Example: Spanking, threatening to call the police, etc.
- **Positive discipline:**
  - Fosters a sense of trust and cooperation between parent and child.
  - Is independent of your love (never withhold love).
  - Is NOT hurting your child.
  - Is proactive and begins before problems arise.
  - Is future-focused, always pointing toward future acts.

- Provides guidance, focuses on prevention, enhances communication, models respect, and embraces natural consequences.

Discipline is the practice of training someone to behave in a way that follows rules or a code of conduct. Punishment is the infliction of suffering on someone for their past behavior.

**Disciplining is important, otherwise child's cry or other unwanted behaviors become weaponized. Also, with too much punishment they learn to hide their true intentions and emotions.**

## Interventions

### Developing Relationship

- For Play and to develop the relational dynamics (Let toddlers lead and set the pace of your play together as much as possible. Take your cues from them about when to start, stop, and switch to another activity.

### Managing Tantrums/Cries

- Observe and become attuned with child:
  - Goal is to identify underlying need.
  - Pay attention to presenting affect, mannerisms, and type & volume of cry.
  - Is the cry manipulation or is it true distress?
  - Hungry, tired, sleepy, in pain, caught in a negative thought loop, negative emotion activated, etc?
- Approach child with the affect (emotion) you want them to exhibit.
- Validate and label their emotions.
- Set or remind them of the limits, boundaries, or rules.
- Hug, hold, or soothe them physically.
- Always maintain leverage and power by meaning what you say, and not making empty threats.

Resources:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/brainbuildingthroughplay/>

### Focus on teaching, not punishment

#### Scenario: Tantrum in the Grocery Store

#### *Traditional Punishment-Based Method:*

1. **Action:** The parent might yell at the child to stop the tantrum, causing further distress.
2. **Outcome:** The child might stop crying out of fear, but they haven't learned how to manage their emotions or why the behavior was inappropriate. They might build resentment or become more secretive about their feelings.
3. **Focus:** Stopping the immediate behavior through fear or control.

### **Positive Discipline Approach:**

4. **Acknowledge and Validate Feelings:** The parent calmly says, "I see you're upset because you wanted those cookies. It's frustrating when you can't have something you want."
5. **Set Limits:** "We can't get cookies today, but we can pick out a special fruit before we check out."
6. **Offer Choices (when possible):** "Do you want to push the shopping cart with me or sit in it?" This gives the child a sense of control.
7. **Redirection:** "Let's go look at the apples together. Maybe we can find your favorite kind!" Distraction can help break the tantrum cycle.
8. **Positive Reinforcement:** "Thank you for using your words to tell me you're upset. I appreciate that." Highlighting good behavior encourages them to repeat it.

**Outcome:** The child feels heard and understood, and they learn to communicate their needs appropriately. They also learn that there are limits and ways to cope with disappointment.

**Focus:** Teaching the child emotional regulation, communication skills, and self-control through positive guidance.

- **Setting clear, transparent and consistent expectations:** It is important to establish age-appropriate rules and routines, and enforcing them **consistently**.
  - **Keep it Simple:** Use short, clear commands and focus on a few key rules at a time.
  - **Be Consistent:** Stick to routines and expectations as much as possible.
  - **Positive Reinforcement:** Praise good behavior and celebrate their efforts to follow the rules.
  - **Offer Choices:** When possible, offer choices to give toddlers a sense of control (e.g., "Do you want to wear the red or blue shirt?").

#### **1-2 Years Old:**

- **Routines:** Establish consistent routines for meals, naps, and bedtime.
- **Safety Rules:** Focus on basic safety rules like "no running in the street" or "hold my hand when crossing."
- **Gentle Guidance:** Redirect them from unwanted behavior and offer them a safe alternative (e.g., take away a toy they're throwing and give them a ball to play with).

#### **2-3 Years Old:**

- **Simple Rules:** Introduce simple rules like "no hitting," "use gentle hands," and "clean up your toys."
- **Self-care Skills:** Start teaching basic self-care skills like washing hands, putting on shoes (with help), and using the potty.
- **Consequences:** Use natural consequences instead of punishment (e.g., if they throw their food, they might not get seconds).

#### **3-4 Years Old:**

- **More Complex Rules:** Expand on existing rules and introduce new ones like "share with others," "wait your turn," and "use kind words."
- **Explain the "Why":** Start explaining the "why" behind the rules to encourage understanding (e.g., "We share because it's nice to take turns").
- **Choices with Limits:** Offer choices with clear limitations (e.g., "Pick out a book to read before bed, but it has to be a quiet time book").

#### **Natural consequences and logical solutions:**

##### **Scenario: Toy Truck Tantrum**

##### ***Traditional Punishment Approach:***

- **Action:** The toddler sees another child playing with a toy truck they want and throws a tantrum in the park. The parent gets frustrated, yells at the child, and takes them away from the playground as punishment.
- **Outcome:** The child feels upset and helpless. They haven't learned how to deal with their emotions or how to share.

##### ***Positive Discipline with Redirection and Choices:***

- **Action 1:** The parent acknowledges the child's feelings, "You seem really upset that you can't play with that truck right now."
- **Redirection:** "Would you like to find another fun toy to play with here? Maybe you'd like to swing or play in the sandbox?" Offer choices that distract from the desired toy truck.
- **Action 2:** If the tantrum continues, the parent might calmly say, "Let's take a short break and come back when you're feeling calmer." They can take the child to a quiet spot and wait for the tantrum to pass.
- **Offering Choices (Later):** Once the child has calmed down, the parent can discuss sharing. "Maybe you can ask the other child if they would be willing to share the truck for a little while? Or we can bring your favorite truck to the park next time."

##### **Benefits of this approach:**

- **Emotional validation:** The parent acknowledges the child's feelings, helping them feel understood.
- **Distraction and redirection:** Offering alternative activities helps the child move on from the desired object and breaks the tantrum cycle.
- **Teaching coping mechanisms:** The parent provides a calm space for the child to regulate their emotions.
- **Discussing Sharing:** Later, when the child is calm, the parent can introduce the concept of sharing in a positive way.

#### **General principles:**

- **Focus on teaching, not punishment:** The goal is to help your child learn appropriate behavior, not to make them feel bad.
- **Stay calm and consistent:** Your calmness will help de-escalate the situation. Consistency in expectations and responses is key for toddlers to learn.
- **Validate their feelings:** Acknowledge their emotions, even negative ones. Let them know it's okay to feel frustrated or angry.
- **Offer choices and redirection:** Empower them with choices when possible. Instead of saying "No running," try "Let's walk carefully inside."
- **Use positive reinforcement:** Catch them being good! Praise them for positive behaviors to encourage them to repeat it.
- **Positive reinforcement and encouragement:** Focus on praising good behavior and effort, rather than solely focusing on correcting negative behavior.
  - Where attention goes, energy flows.
  - Child develops positive sense of identity with positive reinforcements.
  - Child feels empowered and capable to grow and do the right thing.
- **Redirecting and offering choices:** Distract children from undesired behavior by presenting alternative activities or choices.
- **Time-out strategies:** Utilize time-outs as a calming space, not a punishment.
  - Time-out for arguing or yelling after multiple warnings. Sit with child, but this is not play or funny time. Sit for a minute or two and then talk to them by getting to eye level and hugging and kissing.
- **Effective communication:** Use clear and concise language, active listening, and "I" statements to communicate expectations and address challenging behaviors.
- **Promoting emotional regulation:** It's important to help children understand and manage their emotions. Examples such as strategies like "bubble breathing" or taking breaks.

### Common Difficult Behaviors and Positive Approaches:

- **Tantrums:**
  - Stay calm, validate their feelings ("You seem really upset"), offer comfort, and provide a safe space for them to calm down.
  - Once calm, discuss what happened and redirect them to a positive activity. Sometimes we must redirect while they are having a tantrum and completely ignore what they are upset at. We can validate their feelings, but we then ignore the cry and redirect. If you get frustrated it adds to the tantrum.
- **Hitting/Biting:**
  - Remove them from the situation firmly but gently, and say "No hitting/biting. We use gentle hands."
  - Model gentle touch and offer an acceptable outlet for frustration, like a safe toy to hit.
- **Not Listening/Following Directions:**
  - Get down to their eye level and use simple, clear instructions.
  - Offer choices when possible and give positive reinforcement when they follow directions.
- **Whining:**
  - Ignore whining for attention-seeking behavior.
  - Respond when they use their words appropriately and explain what you expect.

#### Tips:

- **Set clear and consistent expectations.**
- **Use simple, one-step directions.**
- **Toddlers thrive on routine. Create predictable schedules for meals, naps, and playtime.**
- **Childproof your home to minimize frustration and meltdowns.**
- **Offer age-appropriate choices to give them a sense of control.**

### Toxic Stress

Weakens the architecture of the developing brain, which can lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.

Experiencing stress is an important part of healthy development. Activation of the stress response produces a wide range of physiological reactions that prepare the body to deal with threat. **However, when these responses remain activated at high levels for significant periods of time, without supportive relationships to help calm them, toxic stress results.** This can impair the development of neural connections, especially in the areas of the brain dedicated to higher-order skills.