

Taking Responsibility

If only someone could give us a sure-fire method that teaches children to take responsibility for their actions. If only we had a way to make young people behave-an infallible method for discipline to be used whenever needed. The trouble is discipline isn't something you can put on and take off like a back-to-school outfit when you need it. Discipline is a whole way of living. The cue to understanding the real significance of it goes back to the original meaning of the word, a disciple or learner. Discipline, then, is learning and learning to act in an acceptable way.

Discipline is Setting Limits

In today's world; a child cannot be left to their own devices with the hope that they will find the right way. They need control, counsel and guidance. Undirected behavior confuses a child, and it is easy to understand why. If we adults were to live in a country with no laws, or one where the laws changed everyday or two, we would be confused also. Limitations give us security in how to behave. The ultimate goal of discipline is to turn over to the child the responsibility for their own actions-to help them choose for themselves the best ways of acting. However, this doesn't come all at once. It is a gradual change from the outer authority of the parents to the inner control of "self."

Points for Adults on Discipline

Just as warm temperatures and sunshine are necessary for young plants to grow and develop, so is a good climate in the home necessary for the growth of a child. Parents who create a warm and friendly feeling among family members are setting a positive environment for good behavior.

When adults answer children's questions thoughtfully, keep promises, share experiences, and show respect and courtesy in everyday living for themselves and others, parents relay by example this way of life. Good attitudes and behavior are observed rather than taught.

Understanding Why

Limits, rules and laws are much easier to live with if we can understand them or agree with them rather than just obey them. That's the basis of democracy. A child, who obeys only because some force from the outside makes them, will do whatever they can get away with when they are on their own. Wise discipline, then, includes understanding. A definition of character I like to use is "what you do when no one is watching."

Set Limits

Let the child know what they can and cannot do. Be clear on these points and be consistent. Let the child know there are consequences for unacceptable behavior. The most effective method for positive youth development comes when the child sees the relationship between their actions and their consequences.

A Warning Helps

Let children know ahead of time about changes that will affect them; they'll be much more willing to accept them. "In a few minutes it will be time to take your bath." "In five minutes it will be your bedtime."

Speak Softly

Yelling or shouting can create tensions where previously none existed. The calmness that we associate with gentle tones helps soften ruffled feelings. Get the child's attention before you speak, and give only one request at a time.

Stress "Do" Rather than "Don't"

Suggestions should be positive. When you tell children only what they cannot do, they wonder what they can do, and you are giving them no solution to the problem. When stopping a child from doing something, give them an alternative. I believe one of the most dangerous things in the world today is a young person without discipline. Living in today's fast paced world is complicated living for adults and children. These are highly disciplined times and are likely to become more so. We need to know the "rules of life" in order to get along. Laws and limits are necessary not only in world and international affairs, but also in getting along with people, and even in handling ourselves. There are very few times in life when we can do "just as we please." It is important to teach children to live with discipline not only from outside, but inside.self-discipline. The world today offers many stimulating challenges for youth. We owe it to our children to prepare them to meet these challenges successfully and learn to take responsibility for their actions.