

## What is Positive Discipline?

**Positive discipline is a way of teaching and guiding children by letting them know what behavior is acceptable in a way that is firm, yet kind.**

**Punishment** describes methods of control, gained by requiring rules or orders be obeyed and punishing undesired behavior. **Discipline** comes from the Latin root word disciplina, which means “giving instruction, to teach.” Recent brain research has confirmed that people learn best when they feel safe and connected to others, in the context of safe relationships. Therefore, the goal of positive discipline is to teach by first creating safe relationships with children. Connection must come before correction in order for discipline to be effective in the long term.<sup>1</sup> The most powerful tool for teaching children is modeling what we want them to do or to be.

### Why is Positive Discipline Important?

Positive discipline:

- Teaches children responsibility, self-discipline, problem-solving skills and cooperation.
- Is respectful to both children and adults.
- Builds trust and strengthens relationships, helping form new connections in a child’s brain.
- Builds and maintains self-esteem.
- Teaches children how to manage their emotions.
- Teaches children to deal with stress in healthy ways.
- Invites children to contribute in meaningful ways and develops their sense of significance.
- Develops strong understanding that one has power or influence over what happens to them in life.



#### **Five Criteria for Effective Discipline <sup>1</sup>:**

1. *Helps children feel a sense of connection (belonging and significance).*
2. *Is mutually respectful and encouraging (kind and firm at the same time).*
3. *Is effective long-term (considers what the child is thinking and feeling, learning, and deciding about himself and his world, and what to do in the future to survive or to thrive).*
4. *Teaches important social skills and life skills (respect, concern for others, problem solving, and cooperation as well as the skills to contribute to the home, school, or larger community).*
5. *Invites children to discover how capable they are (encourages constructive use of personal power and autonomy).*

<sup>1</sup> (Sound Discipline, (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.sounddiscipline.com>).

## What Can Be Done?

Look to find solutions that are “reasonable, respectful, related and helpful,” rather than to “managing” misbehavior<sup>2</sup> in the following ways:

- Wait to problem solve solutions until you are calm. You will do your best thinking this way and also model an important life skill for the child.
- Show respect by listening to and acknowledging the child’s feelings. This also helps build connection.
- Model the qualities you desire to see in the child.
  - Talk to the child about what happened once both of you are completely calm.
  - Respect the child’s boundaries by allowing him/her to avoid eye contact and let the child make the first move to engage in physical contact with you.
  - Reassure the child that you care.
  - Ask the child to identify how what happened may have impacted others.
  - Use “I” statements instead of “you messed up” statements. Begin sentences with “I” and make them about yourself and how you feel rather than what the child did. This is a less critical way of discussing the situation and helps the child feel less defensive.
  - Ask the child to come up with a plan for reconciliation if others were hurt or property was damaged.
  - Help the child come up with solutions for handling similar situations in the future.
- It is ok to ask for help and talk to someone you trust for support.
- Never discipline a child in anger.



- It is not important to remember a long list of tools or rules about whether a response to misbehavior is “right.” Instead, by asking yourself a few simple questions, one can decide for oneself.
  - Is it respectful to the other person? Is it respectful to me?
  - Does it lead to a better sense of connection?
  - Does it invite the child to have a sense of meaning, value, or capability?
  - Is it encouraging? Does it help to bring out the child’s best self?
  - Will it be helpful long term?
  - Does it invite a sense of social interest and community? Does it contribute to the common good?

Everyday tips for keeping guidance positive:

- Focus on encouragement rather than praise. (See section on Resilience in this toolkit)
- Redirect the child into desired behavior. When children hear “no” or “don’t” too much, they tune it out. Instead, explain what to do, giving alternatives to replace the misbehavior with something acceptable. For example, when misbehavior occurs in the grocery store, ask for help picking things out or re-arranging things in the cart rather than scolding.
- Spending quality time with children on a daily basis helps them be happy and well-behaved.

## MORE INFORMATION



### **Positive Discipline Web Site**

Reading this in print? Go to:  
[www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com)



### **Teaching Your Child to Cooperate with Requests**



### **The Amazing Brain and Discipline**

Reading this in print? Go to:  
[www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/sites/default/files/isfFiles/amazing4.pdf](http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org/sites/default/files/isfFiles/amazing4.pdf)



### **Responding to Your Child's Bite**



### **Traditional Time Out**



### **Time-in and Positive Time-out**