

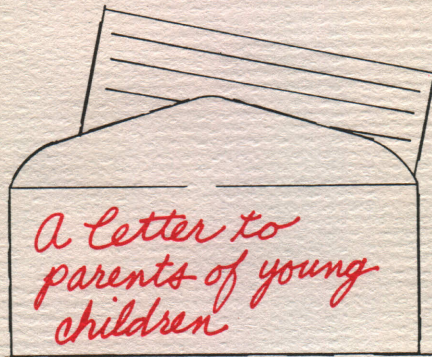
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Positive Discipline
Michigan State University Extension Service
Jeanne Brown, Sue Grossman, Extension Home Economics Program
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by
Jeanne Brown
Human Development Specialist

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Research Assistant

Extension Home Economics Program
Michigan State University

Positive Discipline

Dear Parents,

Of all the responsibilities of parenthood, discipline of children probably raises the most questions and dilemmas for parents. What is discipline? It is all of our attempts to teach children correct behavior, values and self-control. How we discipline depends on many things, including:

How we were disciplined. The way we were disciplined and how we feel about it helps determine what we expect of our own children.

What we want for our children. We value certain things more than others. Our priorities help determine our hopes and dreams for our children and what we will and will not tolerate from them.

How we see ourselves as parents. The way we think other adults judge us as parents helps determine how we "play" our role and what we expect of our children.

What is happening at the time. What we want to accomplish in a given time period or day will affect our expectations of our children.

It takes many years for children to learn correct behavior, values and self-control because they require a lot of practice and learn in small steps as they grow and develop. At first, discipline is a matter of structuring the environment. Instead of giving babies instructions to follow such as, "Don't fall

off the couch," we put them in safe places like cribs and infant seats so they are protected from harm.

Later, as children begin to understand language, we can use word directions like, "That's yucky! Don't eat it." As their ability to think develops, they can understand reasons such as, "Eating mother's plants can make you sick. Eat this apple instead."

By the time most children reach two or three years of age, they seem to have so many adult characteristics—the ability to walk, talk and think. However, young children have a long way to go before they can behave like an adult.

To do a good job of disciplining, parents need to be aware of how children grow and develop, how to organize their children's environment (surroundings) to prevent problems, and positive discipline strategies.

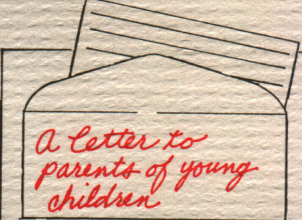
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By three years of age, children are interested in pleasing and helping adults. They have a fairly large vocabulary. They may be toilet trained but still have accidents. Three's enjoy playing with small groups of children of the same age for longer periods of time, but still like to play alone. They need adults who encourage independence and feelings of worth, allow lots of time to look, explore and



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By four years, children are full of energy and exuberance and often think they are more capable than they really are. They love all kinds of words, including those that adults think are "bad." However, children generally do not understand what the words mean. They are just beginning to understand the difference between real and pretend. Four's enjoy being with other children and need playmates of the same age. They also need adults who can set and enforce appropriate limits without using harsh punishment.

By five years, children love being "grown-up." They are usually affectionate, cooperative and talkative. They often recognize letters, words and numbers and love to hear stories. Five's generally like to conform to the rules and report others who don't. They find it hard to laugh at themselves and are embarrassed by their mistakes or accidents, and may blame someone else. They like to please adults and be praised by them and can take responsibility for simple tasks. They need adults who respect and approve of them and give them opportunities to learn independently while keeping an eye on their safety.

By six years, children are beginning to develop a joy and enthusiasm in everything about them. School and other children become very important to them and these influences are often reflected in their behavior. In this stage of development, they can be easily overtired, may be bossy and tattle on others. They can be very competitive, aggressive and very self-centered. They may have fears or bad dreams, find it hard to make decisions and like routines to stay the same. Six's need adults who are patient, accepting and understand that they are working hard to grow up.

Preparing the Child's Environment

Many discipline problems can be avoided with a little planning and rearranging of children's living space. All children (and adults too) love to touch, handle and examine interesting objects they see. Because children learn by examining, it makes sense to remove fragile and unsafe objects. This prevents the necessity of repeated reminders not to touch and is easier on the children *and* adults. Generally, by four years of age children understand what can and cannot be touched. However, *all* potentially dangerous substances, such as cleaning products, paints and medications, must be stored in childproof containers and out of reach cupboards. Children are remarkably ingenious at exploring and opening things. Even six year olds can forget the rules.

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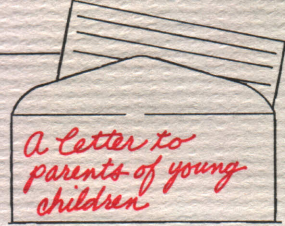
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Always remember the child's stage of development. Knowing that two-and-a-half year olds aren't able to use language or reason very well helps you understand that the only way Sam could think of to get the truck back from Charlie was to hit him. Sam needs to have you tell him what to do and the words to use rather than spank him because he hit and wouldn't share. Knowing that four-year-olds are just beginning to sort out "real" and "pretend" will help you deal constructively with the stories that Jenny tells. You will realize that the stories aren't lies but just her imagination at work.

Parents must also examine their own roles in problem situations. Do you expect too much of your children? Perhaps they are unable to do what you want. Have you stated your expectations clearly? Remember that children don't understand language as well as adults. What behaviors do you model? Children imitate the behaviors of adults and older children around them. If you expect them to listen to you, do you listen to them? If you expect the truth from them, do you occasionally tell "white lies?" If you get upset when they hit each other, do you ever hit them? Perhaps a change in what you do will make a difference in their actions.

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Negative methods of discipline include using shame or ridicule, employing harsh physical methods of discipline or threatening punishment. Positive methods of discipline utilize knowledge of how children develop and discipline strategies that teach children self-control. In the long run, positive strategies are more effective and more conducive to better relationships between parents and children.



Positive Discipline Strategies

Here are 10 ways to develop a positive discipline approach.

1. *Treat children respectfully.*

Treat your children as you wish to be treated. For example, pointing out poor table manners at the family dinner table is embarrassing to children. Instead of learning polite behavior, children will be more likely to become resentful. They may also become belligerent in such situations and the resulting confrontation ends in a no-win situation for parents and children.

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5. *Use consequences rather than punishment.* Consequences can occur naturally or parents can structure them. An example of a structured consequence is denying a favorite television show because toys are not put away after several warnings. Or, instead of nagging your child to finish lunch, remove the uneaten food and don't allow more until afternoon snack time. The natural result of not finishing lunch is hunger pains an hour later. Ask yourself if your child will suffer any real harm from an hour or two of feeling hungry. The child's own inner discomfort is much more effective than your nagging to finish lunch. Remember that consequences should not be used as punishment.

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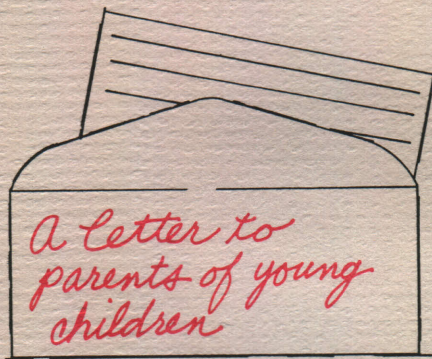
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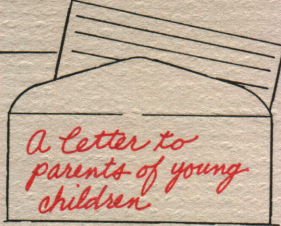
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