

Three Alternatives to Punishment That Help Your Child Do Better

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Inside: Discover alternatives to punishment that help your child do better when they are misbehaving.

When children are misbehaving, like using back talk, hitting a sibling or refusing to go to bed it might feel challenging to address the situation without resorting to punishments like time out, yelling or grounding.

Children benefit from discipline and guidance.

While children need your help to learn right from wrong, and what you expect, children do not learn from experiences that involve pain or shame.

When your child misbehaves being willing to help them find their way back to more positive behaviors is much more effective than punishment.

Making Discipline Punishment Free and Effective



Positive discipline helps children change their behavior while at the same time **teaching them to do better.**

Positive Discipline Helps Children Thrive

Discipline that teaches and helps a child feel capable and responsible is what really helps a child change unhelpful behaviors into positive choices. With a positive approach to parenting, punishments do not need to be a part of your **discipline strategy.**

Punishments do not solve misbehavior in the long run.

Using punishments for misbehavior creates more conflict and disconnection between you and your child.



Research shows that warm and attentive parenting is more likely to lead children to **become responsible, resilient, moral citizens**, with emotional accountability. Punishment on the other hand is more closely linked to aggression and social adjustment difficulties. (Talwar, Carlson & Lee, Social Development, 26 July 2011).

When children receive guidance with empathy, unconditional love, and feel involved in problem solving they live and learn what it means to be responsible and respectful.

Authoritative parents, those that are loving, kind yet clear with their guidance grow children that are resilient and capable.

So if not punishment, then what do you do to help a misbehaving child?

While there are many parenting tools, alternatives to punishment as ways to help children learn “consequences” of their actions that are effective.

Here are **three alternatives to punishment** to bring more effective discipline into your home.

1. Set Limits:

Children need limits that are set in a kind and clear way. Make limits consistent. It doesn't mean you can't be flexible but it does mean you need to be accountable for your decisions as a parent.

When you set a limit, no matter what the limit is, it's important that you keep your limits with kindness even if your child becomes upset. It's normal and acceptable for children to become frustrated or upset with limits. This is not the same as being punitive, so long as your limits are set with the intention of keeping your child safe.

Some common limits that many families choose to set are related to bed time, nutrition, screens and media exposure and personal safety.



Keeping set bedtime routines for example can help ensure your child has plenty of rest which is very important for proper development.

Limit setting is a great tool because each family can decide how their own values will guide and influence limit setting. Most parents agree that setting limits on aggressive behaviors is must.

See more on [setting limits when children become upset.](#)

More on [setting limits in a respectful way that helps children cooperate](#)

2. Create a Safe home:

Young children need to play, learn and explore to grow well. It's very normal for children of all ages to want to tinker, explore, climb, move and wiggle.

Being pro-active about making your house a safe space can reduce misunderstandings and misbehavior.

Here is an example: If your sofa is not for jumping make this clear by setting limits but also provide alternatives for your child to be able to move and get energy out.

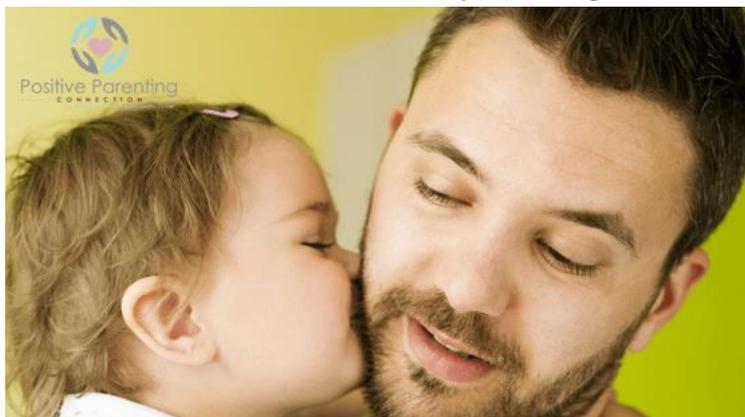
Lock up valuables, breakables and dangerous substances and provide adequate supervision.

Take time to teach your child what they can and can't do is always a good idea and also creates safety. Jane Nelsen D.Ed., author of the Positive Discipline Series encourages parents to keep making time for teaching children, even when it seems like it is not working. Children may resist and test limits, or simply need more time to learn but taking time to teach is much more effective than lectures.

Emotional Safety matters too

The other part of creating a safe home is providing emotional safety. Love and security goes a long way towards preventing misbehavior.

Children must feel safe even when they are acting out and feeling overwhelmed.



Children will say the “wrong things”, they may lash out in anger or frustration. This is normal for a growing child. When you help your child feel safe by accepting emotions, showing empathy, and giving unconditional love your child will learn they can count on you for help.

See more on [helping children with tantrums](#)

See more on [emotional intelligence](#)

3. Connect and then Correct:

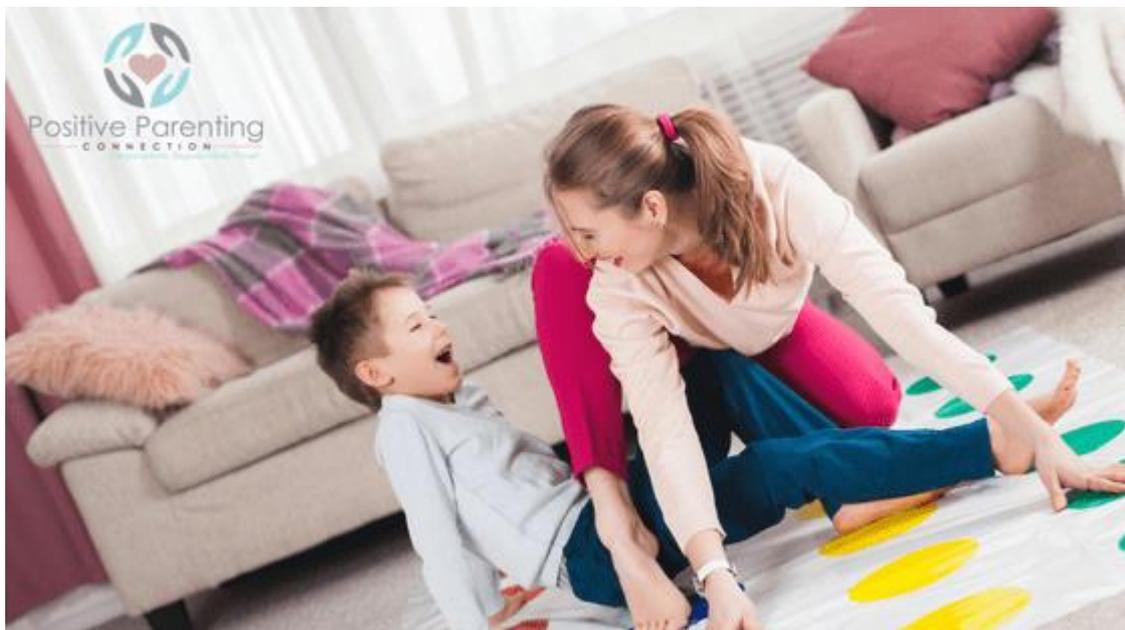
When you observe your child about to do something unacceptable or if you dislike a certain behavior start your discipline process by proactively connecting with your child. Connecting first is not a reward for misbehavior but a bridge towards safety and teaching.

If you can relate to your child’s situation, stop something before it starts or engage with your child in his play you make a real difference to how the situation will continue.

Connecting before correcting can de-escalate many would have been power struggles and tear filled moments.

Instead of yelling, threatening or issue warnings, get close, stay curious, be confident, calm and clear.

Let’s Translate these three ideas into Real Life



Here is an example from when my son was having a hard time transitioning from play time to bed time and a bit of [back talk](#) was showing up:

In the evening, after playing a game it is time for getting ready to sleep.

Mom: That was a fun game, I enjoyed playing with you.

Five year old: Mom, I want to play another round of twister.

Mom: Oh, you really like this game. (connecting) I see that, it is really fun. Since it's 7 o'clock, the answer is: you can play again tomorrow, now it's time to get ready for bed. (States limit)

Five year old: You are no fun mom. I'm going to throw the game in the trash now.

Mom: I can see you are upset (keeping it safe, no accusations or yelling about the trash threat) I bet you really would like to play more, I believe you. Bed time sure came fast tonight.

(reassurance, empathy). You may not throw the game. (Limit)

Boy: Please, just another round!

Mom: 7 pm means time to get ready for bed. . (restating limit, firmly) We can play a tooth brushing game if you would like. (keeping it fun and positive to connect)

The game was put away and the evening routine went on as planned.

Instead of punishing, aim to guide. Strive to take the time to show your child a better way.

Keep in mind that effective discipline is not about making your child feel badly, but about giving your child guidance and a chance to do better.

Sometimes discipline is a difficult, stressful and unclear process. That is absolutely normal. Your child isn't perfect and doesn't need you to be perfect either.

Be willing to show up consistently and show your child that you care. This is what makes a difference in the long run.

The secret of parenting is not in what a parent does but rather who the parent is to a child. –

Gordon Neufeld