

GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

Sometimes people confuse the difference between punishing a child and disciplining a child. There is a difference.

Discipline means:

- using positive ways of guiding children
- teaching children skills that match their age and abilities
- children learn to develop self-control
- the adult has control, but the child's needs, wishes and abilities are respected
- developing positive relationships between children and caregivers making them feel good about themselves

Punishment means:

- teaching that physical force is the way to solve problems
- hurting the child, often because of the adult's frustration and anger
- the adult will always have to control the child's behaviour
- the adult is powerful and rules over the child who must always obey
- breaking down relationships between children and caregivers, making the child feel bad

WHY CHILDREN MISBEHAVE

There are many reasons why children do not behave the way adults want them to behave. Understanding what is causing the problem, when and how often it seems to happen will help you to decide what to do.

Am I remembering that:

- the child may be feeling tired, hungry, sick, in pain, frustrated, upset, or bored?
- the child has needs that should be taken care of?
- the child may be wanting attention?
- the child is trying to be in control?
- I may be expecting too much from the child?
- I may not have told the child clearly what I want them to do?
- the child may not understand my rules?
- the child may be feeling unfairly treated or a child may feel that a situation is unfair?
- the behaviour may be part of the child's temperament?
- misbehaving is a way a child may show poor self-esteem?

WAYS TO GUIDE CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

There are many ways to discipline children and guide their behaviour. When disciplining a child, it is important to match the discipline to:

- the age of the child
- the abilities of the child
- what the child has done

Have I tried:

Setting reasonable and clear rules and limits: make sure the child understands what is expected and what will happen if s/he does not listen. Choose a few important rules – too many rules are difficult for the child to remember. Children can help decide rules and consequences.

Consistency: follow the rules and respond the same way all the time. Follow through on consequences.

Reminding: tell the child the rules before s/he begins an activity, and if a problem begins to happen.

Recognizing that a problem is beginning: fix the problem before it gets worse. Offer choices to the child.

Redirecting: encourage the child to do something else.

Ignoring: do not pay attention to behaviours that are bothersome, but not dangerous.

Using humour: change uncooperative behaviour by making the child laugh and having fun doing what is asked.

Distracting: focus the child's attention on something else.

Talking out feelings: help the child to say what s/he is feeling and accept his/her feelings.

Problem-solving: suggest ways in which the child can handle the situation the next time. Older children can be encouraged to think of positive alternatives.

Compromising: listen to the child's point of view and try to come up with a solution that feels OK for both of you.

Modeling: when you are with others behave the way you would like the child to behave.

Allowing time to cool off: help the child to calm down, removing the child from others if necessary.

Noticing positive behaviour: praise the child for showing the desired behaviour and for trying.

Practicing patience: be aware that it takes time for the child to learn appropriate behaviours. Stay calm and do not overreact. You may have to calm yourself down if you are getting too angry and/or cannot control yourself.