

The Four Parts to Discipline

from *The No-Cry Discipline Solution* (McGraw-Hill) by Elizabeth Pantley

Discipline is a very complicated and complex matter. We want to enjoy our children, we don't want to stress about the little things, and we want to be forgiving to our children and our selves. However – there are many, many things we must get our children to do, or stop them from doing – all day, every day. There are lots of daily tasks that must be completed. Add to that the fact that children don't always listen, they don't always do the things we want them to do, and they have a limited amount of knowledge and emotional control. Keeping all this in mind, I believe that there are four distinct parts to the purpose and goal of discipline:

- 1 – To correct immediate behavior.
- 2 – To teach a lesson.
- 3 – To give tools that build self-discipline and emotional control.
- 4 – To build the parent/child relationship.

Let's examine how this applies to a few typical situations so that you can begin to understand how these four purposes colors almost every discipline situation with your child.

Situation:

Your child is having a temper tantrum in a store because you won't buy a new toy.

- 1 – **Correct** immediate behavior
Take your child to a restroom or unpopulated corner of the store. Wait for your child to stop the tantrum.
- 2 – **Teach** a lesson
You can't have everything you want. You need to express your emotions appropriately.
- 3 – **Give tools** to build self discipline and emotional control
Help child write a list of toys that she wants, but can't have right now.
- 4 – **Build** the relationship
Demonstrate leadership, understanding and patience.

Situation:

Your two children are squabbling over a toy.

1 – **Correct** immediate behavior

Put the toy on the counter while you get your children to stop tussling and pay attention to you.

2 – **Teach** a lesson

Children need to learn how to share toys and take turns.

3 – **Give tools** to build self discipline and emotional control

Help children by setting a timer so each can have a five minute turn with it. Show them how to do this in the future without your help.

4 – **Build** the relationship

Show them how to play together and how to settle disputes. Show them that they can look to you for help in handling problems.

Situation:

Your child is upset with a playmate and bites her on the arm.

1 – **Correct** immediate behavior

Separate the children. Provide attention and care to the child who was bitten.

2 – **Teach** a lesson

Get down to your child's level, put your hands on her shoulders, look her in the eye and tell her, "Biting hurts. We don't bite. Give Emmy a hug now. That will make her feel better."

3 – **Give tools** to build self discipline and emotional control

Give your child a few hints on how she should handle her frustration next time; "If you want a toy, you can ask nicely for it or you can come to Mommy for help."

4 – **Build** your relationship

Show your child that you are on her side even when she makes mistakes. Demonstrate that she can count on you to teach her how to handle strong emotions.

Discipline is not a one-time maneuver

You say you've tried to get your little one to put his toys away, but he never does. You're after your daughter constantly not to whine, yet that screechy voice continues. You repeatedly attempt to get your two children to share their toys *nicely* yet it seems that

daily you're refereeing an argument over toys. No matter what you do, the same issues keep coming up over and over again.

Think about something that you do, or don't do – that you know you should do differently. Perhaps it's exercising or eating healthily. Maybe it's keeping your desk organized or your closet clean. In all of these examples it's likely that you struggle to always do the right thing, even when you know what the right thing is. So, if you, the mature adult, still don't do everything the right way how could you possibly expect such a feat from your young child?

Discipline means to teach – and it is a very rare lesson that can be learned in one simple session. Furthermore, young children cannot easily apply what they've learned in one situation to another. So even minor variations create entirely new scenarios – for example, learning to share toys with a sibling at home isn't easily transposed to the situation of sharing playground equipment with a friend at the park.

What this all means is that you must teach the same, or similar, lessons over and over and over and *over* again in many different ways until, perhaps, your child will master the idea and claim it as his own. Even then, just because a child knows what is right doesn't mean he will always do the right thing. (Do you *always* drive the posted speed limit?) Our job as parents is to help our children learn right from wrong, and how to make the right decisions in life. It is to guide and teach our children, every day, in many ways.

Discipline means teaching, and as such, it can encompass almost every interaction you have with your child. When you are thoughtful about your role as a parent, and when you keep your eye on your long-term goals and use carefully planned parenting skills, then your essential parenting attitudes will be properly aligned and your job as a parent will be more fulfilling and rewarding.

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