

Resource Article

Disciplining Children

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Disciplining children and teens can be challenging in any situation. But caring enough to discipline those who may be suffering from disorders caused by their harsh backgrounds can be even more difficult. To be successful, you may need to look at discipline in a different way.

Love and the Rod

Read this Bible verse carefully. It actually may be different than you remember. Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them." Another English translation says, "If you love your children, you will correct them; if you don't love them, you won't correct them" (CEV).

Some people concentrate on the correction, the rod, and completely miss the reason for correction. It is love for the child. It is not the rod that is important but the correction. You can bring correction to a child or teen in many more ways than by using a rod.

Abused children have been hurt. Many of them suffer from other disorders because of the trauma they have experienced. You do not want to repeat the abuse by punishing them in physical ways. You will need new ways to offer correction and guidance to children who misbehave and teens who do not follow the rules. These new ways demonstrate that you love them.

Finding a New Way

Consider why you want to correct a child or teen:

- First, correct the child or teen because you love and care for him. This is sometimes a challenge!
- Second, correct the child or teen because you care about her character development.
- Most importantly, correct the child or teen because you want to see him grow up and become a mature, loving, and caring adult who is accepted and respected in the community. Without effective discipline, this will not happen.

Caregivers also need to understand the developmental age of the child or teen. Sometimes adults see certain behaviors and immediately believe that the child or teen needs to be disciplined. However, she might be too young to understand what is being asked of her. Knowing appropriate behaviors and characteristics for different ages can give you a new perspective!

Wrong Ways to Correct

Do not lecture. When you give a long lecture about why children should behave or how disappointed you are in the teen, he will stop listening. Then you have gained nothing.

Do not repeat yourself. Say what you want and expect the child or teen to do it. Otherwise, she will get used to hearing the expectation several times and will only obey when you start to get angry.

Do not promise to do something if the child or teen behaves well.

Right Ways to Correct

Have clear rules and boundaries. When the rules are clear, both you and the child or teen will know when he has disobeyed, and you will know how to behave in response.

Use consequences to guide discipline. This is much more effective than punishing children or teens. Sometimes consequences are natural. For example, if a teen is told to pack her lunch and she does not do it, the natural consequence will be that she goes hungry. Next time she will listen. Similarly, if a child leaves without a jacket in cold weather even if he is reminded to take it, he will feel cold and listen next time. Making children and teens responsible for the natural consequences of what they do can help them to make wiser choices.

Connect discipline and consequences. For example, if a teen uses bad language, she has shown disrespect and must do an additional chore. If a child shouts at you, he loses the privilege of doing something he wants to do.

Help the child make a plan to resolve the situation. For example, if a child deliberately or carelessly destroys something, he will have to help to replace it and clean up the mess. Talk with him about how he plans to do this. He may not have money to purchase a replacement item, but he can do extra work at home to “pay” for it, such as cleaning or cooking. If a teen steals from a friend, she must return the stolen item or “repay” the friend with 1 of her own belongings.

Understand the reasons. Sometimes there is an important reason behind the misbehavior of the child or teen. Ask him why he did what he did, and do not make assumptions about the reasons.

Do not punish a child or teen for an accident. If he drops a glass while helping with the dishes, he did not deliberately break the glass. Children and teens need to know that we all make mistakes.

Ask for forgiveness. If you punish a child or teen and later realize it was not the correct way to handle the situation, apologize and ask for her forgiveness. This is not a sign of weakness but of true humility. It sets a good example.

If you consistently apply these rules of discipline, you will find they make life easier for you and the children and teens in your care.