

# Discipline for children

*Suitable for 1-8 years*

Discipline is about helping children learn how to behave appropriately. You can use a range of discipline strategies to teach your child the basics of good behavior. The strategies you choose will depend on your child's age.

## About discipline

Discipline is helping your child learn how to behave – as well as how not to behave. It works best when you have a warm and loving relationship with your child.

Discipline doesn't always – or even often – mean punishment. In fact, discipline and discipline strategies are positive. They're built on talking and listening, and they guide children towards:

- knowing what behavior is appropriate, whether it's at home, a friend's house, child care, preschool or school
- managing their own behavior and developing important skills like the ability to get along well with others, now and as they get older
- learning to understand, manage and express their feelings.

## Choosing an approach to discipline

Choosing an approach to discipline is about finding the right balance.

Not enough discipline can leave children feeling insecure and parents feeling out of control. Too much harsh, negative discipline, and not enough praise and rewards, might get children behaving well, but out of fear. This can lead to problems with children's self-esteem and anxiety later in life.

Discipline works best when it's firm but fair. This means you set limits and consequences for your child's behavior, while also [encouraging good behavior](#) with praise, rewards and other strategies.

Your approach to discipline will also depend on things like your parenting style, your child's stage of development and your child's temperament.

**\*\*Physical punishment – for example, smacking – doesn't teach children how to behave. When parents use physical punishment, children are more likely to have challenging behaviour, anxiety or depression. There's also a risk that smacking might hurt your child.**

## **Discipline: setting behavior expectations**

Setting expectations for your child's behavior lays the groundwork for your approach to discipline. Here's how to get started.

### **1. Decide on family rules**

A good place to start is with 4-5 family rules. For example, your family rules might be things like:

- We speak nicely to each other.
- We look after other people.
- Everyone helps out around the house.
- We look after our own belongings.

When children are school age and above, you can involve them in helping to decide on some of these rules.

### **2. Teach your child what behavior is expected**

Children learn by watching what you do. Showing your child the behavior you like by doing it yourself will help your child learn. For example, if you want your child to sit down to eat, sitting down together to eat family meals can help children learn this behavior.

### **3. Praise your child for good behavior**

Praise is when you tell your child what you like about him or his behavior. When your child gets praise for behaving well, he's likely to want to keep behaving well.

Descriptive praise is when you tell your child exactly what it is that you like. It's best for encouraging good behavior. For example, 'Ari, I really like how you used please and thank you just then. Great manners!'

### **4. Set clear limits and consequences**

Decide on a consequence for breaking a family rule. For example, you might withhold pocket money from an eight-year-old if she hasn't done her household chores. But if she hits her brother, time-out is a better consequence.

When you use consequences in the same way and for the same behavior every time, your child knows what to expect.

Credit: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/behaviour/discipline/discipline-strategies>