

Express strong disapproval if necessary, but be careful not to attack with your words.

Tell them how you feel about their behavior and why you feel that way. For example:

“I don’t like what is going on here. You could get badly hurt.”

Give a choice, but only a choice you can live with.

For example:
“You may walk beside me or ride in the cart. You decide.”

“Dinner is at 5:30. Be home then if you want to eat.”

Take action. Follow through when you have given a choice or told your children what to expect. For example:

“Since you are not staying beside me, you must ride in the cart.”

“You are still arguing over the toy, so I’ll put it away until after dinner.”

Remember: You are the adult. Stay cool, firm, calm and clear.

“We all make mistakes. We all ‘do the wrong things’ with our children. Lucky for us, most children are remarkably tough, loving and forgiving people. So if you goof, don’t give up, but try again.

“And don’t be afraid to say to your child, ‘I’m trying to work out some ways of being a better parent. What I just did was not what I want to do. I’m sorry and I’m going to try again.’”

Jennifer Birkmayer
“Discipline is Not a Dirty Word”
Cornell Cooperative Extension

Quick Tips for Parents

on Listening, Cooperation and Punishment



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Getting Children ^{to} Listen

What can you do when your children don't listen to you? Some things do not work: giving orders, criticizing, putting them down, begging. These make children stubborn, defiant or hurt. Instead try these ideas:

First, go to your child and look him or her in the eye. Touch young children to get their attention. Talking from across the room, or from another room, seldom works. Your child is more likely to listen when you are close by.

Tell your child what to do, instead of what not to do. Change “don't” to “do.”
Try: “Walk instead of running.”
Instead of: “Don't run.”

Try: “Keep your paint on these papers.”
Instead of: “Don't paint on the table.”



Be clear and specific.

Try: “Put your toys in this basket.”
Instead of: “Be a good boy and clean up.”

Try: “Put on your jacket and hat and bring your backpack.”
Instead of: “Get ready to go.”

Give your child information. Describe the situation or problem. Information helps children figure out what to do and how to behave. For example:
“I'm making a phone call and need quiet.”
“Ants come in the house when jelly is on the floor.”

Use fewer words. Children tune adults out when they talk on and on. Instead of a lecture, use a word or phrase to remind them how they are supposed to behave. For example:
“Walk.”
“Books and jacket.”
“Homework before TV.”

Don't back yourself and your child into a corner. Try “when ...” instead of “if ...”
Try: “When you finish lunch, you can go outside.”
Instead of: “If you don't finish lunch, you can't go outside.”

Remember: The louder you yell, the less effective you are. Screaming and yelling lets your child know that you are out of control.

Instead ^{of} Punishment

All children misbehave at times. It's a natural part of growing up.

Why isn't punishing them a good idea? When children are punished, they become hurt, angry and defiant. They forget the wrong that they did. They remember the “wrong” done to them.

Children need to learn what to do instead of misbehaving. Discipline teaches them. Your job as a parent is to help them learn. Try the following discipline ideas:

Clearly, calmly and firmly tell your children what to do. Tell them what you expect. Show them or describe to them how to take care of the problem. For example:
“I can't work when my tools are all over. Hang them on the rack and put the nails in the can.”
“Play in the back of the house, instead of here near the window.”

If they argue, don't argue back. Simply use the “broken record” method: Repeat your calm and firm statement.