

Parenting Tips:

Confronting Misbehavior

1. Calm down before disciplining

“I’m too angry with you now.”

“We’ll talk about this later, after I’ve had a chance to calm down.”

“I’m going for a walk before I talk with you about what you did. I’m too angry now.”

2. Be willing to interrupt a negative conversation

“Stop for a moment, please. Let’s both calm down for a moment before we continue the conversation.”

“Let’s both agree right now to stop this tone of voice we’re both using and speak more calmly and courteously to each other.”

3. Arrange a special setting - time and place - to discuss misbehavior.

“We need to talk where the phone won’t interrupt us; let’s go outside in the yard.”:

“There are some things we need to talk about; let’s go to the pizzeria where we can have a nice lunch at the same time.”

4. Use touch to convey love

“I know this is a hard time for you; sit next to me so I can rub your back.”

5. Use a notebook for the child’s concerns, then give the child a private time to discuss what has been written down

“If you don’t like how I handled this situation, write it down in your notebook and we’ll discuss it later.”

“Thank you for writing that down in your notebook; I’d forgotten. Now tell me about the problem, and after I understand, maybe we’ll be able to think of some ways to improve that situation.”

6. Give the child an opportunity to explain and listen; try to acknowledge the child’s feelings and needs.

“Could it be that one reason for these antics in front of us is that you feel overlooked and not paid attention to?”

“I understand how hurt you must feel right now and how angry you are at Jim.”

7. Affirm you child's lovability and your desire to show love for your child

"You're our special girl/boy, and we don't want to see you be so upset when things don't go exactly the way you wanted or thought they would."

8. Teach how misbehavior harms the child or others (not just because I said so)

"The reason I won't allow you to do that to Susie is that she has a right to her privacy, just as you do to your privacy."

9. Encourage the child to come up with or suggest a better alternative for next time

"From now on when you want to play with Bill's _____, ask to borrow it rather than sneaking into his room and taking it without permission."

10. Seek win-win solutions, taking everyone's needs into consideration

"What do you think would make him more content next time so he wouldn't do that to you and you wouldn't get so mad at him?"

11. Emphasize future improvements

"What can we do differently next week so that we don't go through this same problem about your chores?"

Disciplinary Responses to Misbehavior

1. Maintain routines (it's o.k. if the child is inconvenienced, frustrated, or embarrassed)

"Dinner will be served at 6:00. You have 45 minutes to complete your chores and get ready for dinner (serve at 6:00)."

"I'm sorry you're not ready to go with us, but you had plenty of advance notice. We're going to have to leave now; maybe next time will go better for you."

2. Control yourself, not the child

"I won't pick up your clothes when they are lying next to the hamper or on your floor."

3. Sidestep power struggles

"I won't argue and debate with you about this. I want you to understand my real feelings and I want to understand yours. Once we really understand each other, I'm sure we can work out a reasonable solution."

"When you dare me to make you do this, I know something is very wrong. I'm not going to act that way toward you."

4. Avoid "caring" about how the child responds to discipline/consequences

"You must go to your room now. Are you going to walk by yourself or am I going to carry you?"

"You can dawdle as much as you want to. You're simply not coming out of this room until its cleaned up. It doesn't matter to me how long you stay in."

5. Allow the child to participate in the discipline decision

"You owe ten dollars for breaking Jane's toy. You have three choices. Either pay for it now with the money in your savings account, earn it by doing some extra work for us, or we'll give your next two allowances to Jane. Which plan would you like to use?"

6. Temporarily withdraw an abused privilege

"Because you stayed out 15 minutes past our agreed upon time, you'll have to stay in tomorrow night. We'll try again in a few days."

"I put the bat in the garage cupboard because you poked Steven with it. You can have it again this Saturday if you're ready to play safely with it."

7. Withdraw only services relevant to the misbehavior

"Even though I'm not washing your clothes, I'd be happy to play a game with you now."

8. Resume full services promptly

"Now that you've decided to put those clothes into the hamper, I'll be happy to wash them for you tonight."

9. Encourage a sincere apology, emphasizing improvements for the future and retribution or repayment

"You owe your sister an apology for doing that. You can write it to her if you want. I'll check with her at 8:00 and ask her whether she has been apologized to by that time."

You can't undo what you've done, but at least you can improve things for the future; you need to start with an apology."

“Your delay cost me about ten minutes of my time. Please help me for ten minutes on this chore I have to do tonight.”

“What favors can you do for Josh that will help him feel better about playing with you again?”

“Apologizing was a first step. You also need to do Sally a favor to make up for the pain you caused her. How about taking over her chores for tomorrow?”