

The ABCs of Discipline

From *The Parenting Place*

What is discipline? Many people shy away from the word because they think it only means yelling and making kids feel bad. They mistake the word for 'punishment'. But discipline is something far more noble and valuable. It is loving training.

Discipline is something you do for your child because you love them, not to your child because you are angry. It is deliberate step-by-step training and modelling. The goal is to help them learn how to behave, to gently and firmly guide them through this process – to think before they act and to make better decisions in the future.

Initially, discipline is external, but when applied properly the long-term result is self-discipline.

You provide the limits and consequences at the start, but the aim is that eventually the child comes to understand the reasons behind the limits, and appreciate both the benefits of doing the 'right' thing and learning from making mistakes.

Ultimately, a huge amount of your children's self-worth (right into adult years) will depend on the way they have been disciplined. Knowing the right thing to do and choosing to do it is the basis of self-worth. The ability to do that comes from self-discipline, which comes from wise external discipline and your consistent teaching of values like kindness, honesty, gratitude and generosity.

The ABCs of discipline - The best discipline techniques in the world can fail if the ABCs are not in place first. Before you get to the D of Discipline, you need Atmosphere, Boundaries and Communication.

Atmosphere

Discipline happens within a fabric of relationship. Something worth embroidering somewhere is, "Rules without relationship lead to rebellion." If a child doesn't feel connected to the parent, if the child doesn't feel loved and cherished, then almost no technique will work.

The first task of a parent is to create an ambience of love and attention that will provide the traction. Amazingly, when atmosphere is improved, the need for discipline is reduced. The secret to discipline is not what you do during incidents of misbehaviour, but what you do in-between them.

What are the ingredients of atmosphere? Fun, laughter, playfulness, allowing interruptions and celebrating success. Atmosphere is created by warmth in your tone and by the way you show your children you enjoy them.

Click [here](#) for some [practical ideas for building atmosphere in your home](#)

Click [here](#) for an inspiring video on [Family Dinners](#) – an essential building block for a family

Boundaries

Children need to know what the limits are. They are basically asking the question, "Who is in charge and who makes the rules stick?" They need to know that it is not them – that is too big a burden! The rules can be expressed clearly and consistently. Simple rules like – you can't hurt others, you can't hurt things, you can't hurt yourself.

Consistently repeat the rules and include the reason. For instance, "Blocks are for building with. If we bang them on the table, it could break. Let's build a tower." 'Swoop and scoop' a toddler who is heading for the power points – "Electricity is dangerous. No touching!"

A young child feels abandoned when his parents give up setting boundaries and say things like, "There's nothing we can do to stop him. If we say 'no' to more biscuits, he just helps himself." If the

rule is that he may only take one biscuit, then you must enforce the boundary. A great way to phrase a boundary is, “In our family we...”. This establishes a family rule that includes every member.

Communication

This leads nicely into communication and the importance of an agreed set of boundaries often called Family Charters. I was at a friend’s house the other day and at the end of dinner time, their seven-year-old got up to leave the table. His dad said, “In our family, we take our plate to the kitchen when we’ve finished eating.” His son said, “No, we don’t.” My friend said, “We do now.” And in that moment, a new family charter was created.

A family charter is an agreed upon set of behaviours that everyone in the family is expected to aspire toward. Would you like to raise your kids to be polite, respectful, bilingual, accepting, brave, outgoing, confident? The behaviours that you shape now will create a family culture. And being a part of a culture gives you a sense of belonging, and having a sense of belonging gives you a strong foundation to build a future upon. So, what are you going to include in your family charter?

Here are some examples of a family charter from The Parenting Place

[Family Charter](#)

[Using the Family Car Contract](#)

[Cellphone Contract](#)

This is [another example of a Family Charter](#) from Karis Kimmel Murray author of *Grace-based Discipline*

Children come on board most readily when they have had some input into the rule-making. Discipline should never be a surprise for your child. They shouldn’t suddenly discover they have transgressed some rule or made you angry without even knowing it. Your expectations should be clearly expressed.

The most effective way of communicating is to use your voice well. Calm and confident – bright with expectation of compliance. When you yell and scream, you are communicating that you are losing control. This attracts non-compliance in children.

Things you might like to try:

1. Say yes

Often you have to refuse a child’s request, but you will engage cooperation much more if you can put a positive spin on it. “Yes, you can, when...” is much better than, “No!”

2. Time together

There are times to park and sit with your child away from an activity. Your presence is comforting. Your stillness allows them to think. Your invitation to try again tells them you believe in them.

3. Follow through

There are also times to show direct firmness. Your child has thrown the truck and damaged the wall. The truck is put away quietly. Don’t protect your child from the consequences, either enforced or natural. The consequences of a choice they have made are great teachers.

4. State the fact

Name the behaviour, if there is no change remind your child of the family rule by saying “In our family we...”, and then be prepared to ‘help’ your child to comply with the family rule.

5. Ask – tell – act

Respectfully ask your child to do the task – (e.g. Would you please put your school bag away?)

If they don't do it within the required timeframe – assertively tell them to do the task (e.g. Put your school bag away!)

Help them to do the task (age appropriate action required here) – (e.g. You can watch your TV programme when your school bag is away)

Recommended Reading:

[Hold on to Your Kids](#)

[Grace Based Discipline](#)

[Of course I love you, now go to your room](#)

There are other parenting books available from Taupo Baptist Church which you are welcome to borrow. Please do!