

# Common sense<sup>THIRD EDITION</sup> PARENTING<sup>®</sup>

Using Your Head as Well as Your  
Heart to Raise School-Aged Children



New chapters on  
positive teaching, creating  
family routines and traditions,  
and setting expectations!  
New charts and Q & As  
to help parents!

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Section I Parents Are Teachers</b>	7
Chapter 1 Discipline Through Positive Teaching	9
Chapter 2 Setting Reasonable Expectations	19
Chapter 3 Giving Clear Messages	31
Chapter 4 Giving Consequences to Change Behavior	39
Chapter 5 Using Reasons to Encourage Improvement	65
<b>Section II Encouraging Good Behavior and Preventing Problems</b>	75
Chapter 6 Praise Is Powerful	77
Chapter 7 Teaching to Prevent Problems	87
Chapter 8 Reaching Goals Using Charts and Contracts	101
<b>Section III Correcting Problem Behavior</b>	115
Chapter 9 Staying Calm	117
Chapter 10 Correcting Misbehavior	129
Chapter 11 Teaching Self-Control	145
<b>Section IV Putting It All Together</b>	165
Chapter 12 Teaching Social Skills	167
Chapter 13 Making Decisions and Solving Problems	193
Chapter 14 Holding Family Meetings	203
Chapter 15 Establishing Family Routines and Traditions	217
Chapter 16 Making a Parenting Plan	231
<b>Section V Special Topics</b>	245
Chapter 17 Helping Children Succeed in School	249
Chapter 18 Handling Peer Pressure	267
<b>Wrapping It Up</b>	285
<b>Quick Reference to Parenting Skills</b>	287

## Chapter 1

# Discipline Through Positive Teaching

Discipline is often misunderstood and is usually thought of only as something negative. Many parents dread the times when they have to “discipline” their child because it more than likely means tears, tantrums, or stony silence. Some parents get so frustrated and angry over their children’s misbehavior that they react violently – either verbally or physically. For these parents, the goal of discipline is to “punish” children for misbehaving. In the short term, punishment may seem to work. In other words, it may stop the child’s problem behavior at that moment. But in the long run, slapping, hitting, screaming, ridiculing, belittling, or isolating children results in all sorts of problems for families, the worst being the damage it does to the relationship between parent and child. In addition, children learn nothing from inappropriate punishment, other than to fear and avoid the parent or to behave violently themselves when they are angry or frustrated.

There are other, much more effective ways to discipline children. We hope to show you in this chapter and throughout this book that discipline can actually be positive, especially when you deal with misbehavior as an opportunity to teach your child. But first, let’s look at how you currently might be disciplining your children.

## What Kind of Disciplinarian Are You?

Take a moment to review and evaluate your discipline style. Read through the following descriptions of discipline responses. Then choose the five responses that most closely describe the way you react when your children misbehave or you are trying to prevent negative behavior. Rank your five picks, starting with the one you use most frequently. Next to your ranked list, note whether you use those responses seldom, moderately, or frequently. Be honest with yourself so you can get an accurate idea of your discipline style.

### When I discipline my child, . . .

1. I use **instructions**, such as, *"You are talking back. Stop talking and listen to me."*
2. I use **negotiation**, such as, *"I'll let you do what you want this time if you promise to...."*
3. I use **explanations**, such as, *"I want you to do this because..."* or *"The reason why you should do what I ask is...."*
4. I use **excuses**, such as, *"It's not really your fault; you've got bad friends"* or *"You should be more responsible but I know it's hard."*
5. I use **negative consequences**, such as, *"Because you didn't do what I asked, you can't watch television tonight."*
6. I use **threats**, such as, *"If you do that one more time, I'm going to..."* or *"Don't make me tell you again, or else."*
7. I use **limits**, such as, *"I know this is hard to accept, but no means no."*
8. I use **judgments**, such as, *"You are such a brat!"* or *"Stop being so lazy."*
9. I use **positive motivators**, such as, *"Because you came home from school on time every day this week, you've earned a later curfew on the weekend."*
10. I use **retaliation**, such as, *"You bit your sister. Now she can bite you."*

11. I use **reaction**, such as, *"I'm fed up! Now, you're going to get it."*
12. I use **preparation**, such as, *"Let's practice a few things to help you stay in school when your friends pressure you to skip class."*

The three most common discipline styles of parenting are: 1) **indulgent disciplinarian**, 2) **strict disciplinarian**, and 3) **responsive disciplinarian**. Parents who are indulgent disciplinarians tend to be extremely lenient in their expectations and boundaries for children. Strict disciplinarians usually are not willing to be flexible or open to their children's views on the rules or limits. Parents who are responsive disciplinarians are more willing to negotiate with their children on some rules, but are comfortable enforcing reasonable limits.

How did your discipline assessment turn out? What were your top three discipline responses? If your top choices included 2, 4, and 11, then you are more of an indulgent disciplinarian. If 6, 8, and 10 were your top choices, you may be more of a strict disciplinarian. If your top responses included 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 12, you are more of a responsive disciplinarian. Most parents use a blend of all three approaches, but your top responses will let you know which style you tend to rely on most often.

Generally, parents who use the responsive approach are more likely to create a positive family environment and are more successful at getting their children to follow the rules and argue less about limits. Common Sense Parenting endorses the techniques of responsive discipline. The aim of this book is to teach you how to learn and incorporate those responsive discipline techniques into your parenting style. For example, if you are mostly indulgent (using excuses, negotiation, and reactions), then we recommend that you firm up your approach by learning to use more instructions, limits, and consequences. If you are a parent who is very strict (using judgments, retaliations, and threats), then we hope you can become more responsive by making consequences more contingent on behavior and explaining your instructions or rules. Finally, even a responsive approach can be weak or ineffective – for example, using too many instructions and endless explanations. If this is true for

you, you can add more written limits, follow through better on consequences, and react immediately when problems occur.

## **Positive Teaching**

We discipline our children so that they will learn how to live cooperatively within our families, in the community, and in the larger society. If you begin to think about discipline as a way to teach your children what they need to know, the situations in which you use discipline will seem less like chores and more like opportunities for your child to learn what he or she will need to know to succeed in the future.

In Common Sense Parenting, we use what we call “positive teaching.” All of the skills outlined in this book provide the foundation for and enhance this positive and effective approach to discipline and parenting.

Positive teaching is:

- **Caring** – You let your children know that you love them and care about what happens to them.
- **Specific** – You let your children know exactly what they do right or wrong.
- **Responsive** – You help your children understand the relationship between what they do and what happens as a result of their actions.
- **Concrete** – You give your children clear examples of how to improve in the future.
- **Effective** – You help your children learn self-discipline (to be in control of their actions and expressions of emotions).
- **Interactive** – You give your children a chance to show what they have learned. You are an active part of the learning process. You and your children work together toward a common goal.
- **Informative** – You become the teacher and the coach as you give information that helps your children learn to solve problems.

Positive teaching helps build self-confidence, teaches kids to get along well with others, and gives them the skills they need to make their own decisions and control their own behavior. It also helps children learn self-discipline.

We call it positive teaching because children are much more likely to learn when they are treated with affection and pleasantness rather than with anger and punishing behavior. Parents who use positive teaching tell their kids what they did right and why they should continue it, and what they did wrong and how to correct it. Having a good relationship with your child provides a positive framework for learning to take place. If you are pleasant, calm, firm, consistent, and able to give clear messages, your teaching will be effective.

Here are two examples of positive teaching:

Sally and her friend walk into the living room and talk about the new girl in school. Sally's mom overhears Sally tell her friend that they shouldn't play with the new girl anymore because she doesn't wear name-brand clothes. Her mom asks the girls to sit down and they talk about how clothes shouldn't determine how someone feels about another person. Mom says that it is what's inside a person that is important, not what's on the outside. The girls agree to ask the new girl over after school.

Dad tells Vernon that he can't go outside to shoot baskets because he has homework to finish. Vernon gets angry, stomps his feet, and complains that his dad is unfair. Dad tells Vernon that they need to talk about Vernon's behavior. First, Dad asks Vernon to calm down and stop yelling. When Vernon is calm, Dad explains to him that he needs to learn to accept "No" for an answer, why it is important to do so, and the appropriate way to do it.

When you learn and practice the techniques of Common Sense Parenting, you'll be able to respond to your children and their misbehavior like these parents did – calmly, lovingly, and

with the goal of helping children improve their behavior and become better people.

## **TIME with Your Children**

We've already pointed out that in order to be an effective parent you must spend time with your children. Here's another way to look at how you spend that time with them.

**T = Talk** with your children.

**I = Instruct** your children.

**M = Monitor** your children.

**E = Encourage** your children.

**Talking** with your children includes clearly describing their behavior to them so they know what they've done right and what they need to change. Parents also need to discuss why some behavior is acceptable and why other behavior is inappropriate. In other words, give children reasons for why you want them to behave in certain ways. **Instruct** or teach your children social skills so they learn how to get along with you and others. Teaching and practicing appropriate behavior when children are facing new situations or situations that have given them trouble in the past helps prevent problem behavior. **Monitor** your children's behavior so you can correct them and give them negative consequences when they make mistakes or reward them for behavior you want them to repeat. Finally, **encourage** children by praising what they do well and build loving relationships by establishing family communication, meetings, routines, and traditions. In the following chapters, we'll look in greater detail at all the individual components of the TIME you spend with children.

## **Summary**

Discipline and positive teaching go hand in hand when it comes to good parenting. When parents discipline their children by using teaching that is positive, caring, and specific, they not only address problem behaviors but also build healthier



relationships. Teaching is the key to helping children understand right from wrong and to helping them learn positive skills that they will use all their lives.

No matter what is happening between parents and their children, parents are always teaching. Children are like sponges, soaking up their parents' words and actions, even when parents think they aren't being heard or watched. When parents take a positive approach to teaching and discipline, they make the most of their opportunities to use their experience and love to shape their children's lives.

## **Chapter Review**

### **What is discipline?**

Discipline is the positive teaching and guidance you give children every day.

### **What does the acronym TIME stand for?**

- T = Talk** with your children.
- I = Instruct** your children.
- M = Monitor** your children.
- E = Encourage** your children.

### **How can positive discipline teach children to be self-disciplined?**

Positive teaching helps build self-confidence, teaches kids to get along well with others, and gives them the skills they need to make their own decisions and control their own behavior.

## **Action Plan**

1. Take some time to answer the following questions:
  - What is the most important thing you learned in this chapter?
  - What do you plan to do differently as a result of what you've learned?

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2. As part of your action plan, spend some time this week doing something fun with your child. Let your child take the lead in planning the activity, but tell him or her that it shouldn't cost any money and/or it should be something you both enjoy doing.

# Q&A

## FOR PARENTS

**Q** I'm a single working parent. How can I do all this teaching? I hardly have time to think.

**A** There's no question that parenting can be difficult when you have little or no support. Even though teaching initially takes some time, it pays off in the long run as your child learns more about appropriate behavior. Look at it this way: Would you rather spend a few minutes telling and showing your child what your expectations are for his behavior or dealing with a tantrum, tears, or other out-of-control behavior when your child doesn't get his way? Over time, teaching should become second nature to you, and as your child's behavior improves, it should take less and less time.

**Q** What if I use positive teaching but my child's behavior just gets worse?

**A** If you feel you need more help, call a professional to assist you. We all need guidance from others at times, especially with some parenting issues. If you don't know how to find a professional, call your child's

school or pediatrician, or contact your church. In addition, you can always call the Girls and Boys Town National Hotline for assistance (1-800-448-3000), anytime day or night.

**Q** Will the skills in this book help me parent my special-needs child?

**A** They certainly won't hurt and can only help you. We understand that children with special needs may require specific kinds of treatment and support – medically and/or psychologically. If this is the case, then parents should seek out professional guidance. However, you can still utilize the skills learned in this book for "everyday" or "routine" concerns regarding your child's behavior.