

DISCIPLINE VS. PUNISHMENT

Discipline is different from punishment because it teaches children to learn from their mistakes rather than making them suffer for them. In fact, imposing suffering actually shifts the focus from the lesson that needs to be learned to who is in control. As a result, punishment focuses on the parent being responsible for controlling a child's behaviour, rather than the child controlling his/her own behaviour, which is the focus of discipline.

In *Positive Discipline*, Jane Nelsen offers guidelines for using consequences, which she calls the Four R's of consequences. These four R's actually apply to *all* discipline techniques, not just natural and logical consequences. Whatever discipline technique you choose, make sure it meets the following four criteria:

- Whenever possible, **REVEAL** the consequences of misbehaviour ahead of time so children will know what to expect the next time they *choose* to misbehave.
"If you want to ride your bike, you need to stay on the sidewalk or I'll know you've decided to put it in the garage."
Notice how the responsibility for the behaviour and its effect are on the child rather than the parent. Can you tell how different this sounds than if the parent said, *"Don't go in the street or I'll take your bike away."* First of all, this wording gives the child the idea to go in the street (See "Don't say Don't!" July 1993 T.I.P.S.) then challenges the child to test the rule by wording it like a power threat.
- The discipline should be logically **RELATED** to the misbehaviour. Sending a child to bed or restricting a child from TV has nothing to do with riding a bike in the street.
- Present your comments in a **RESPECTFUL** manner that lets children know they have a *choice* about how they behave.
"When I see you riding your bike in the street, I know you're not ready to ride it safely and need to put the bike away."

Notice how different this sounds than,

"That's it, get out of the street! I'm taking your bike away for the rest of the day! You could get killed out there!"

When we speak to children in **disrespectful ways**, they **respect us less and tend to talk back at us disrespectfully** more often. We **earn others' respect by showing respect to them first**.

- Provide a **REASONABLE** solution that will allow children an opportunity to correct the behaviour while the lesson is fresh in their minds.

"You can try to ride your bike again on the sidewalk after lunch."

Notice that the time limit was a matter of hours, rather than days. Always make the time limit as minimal as possible, but long enough to emphasize the lesson. Also, notice that the correct behaviour was presented as a choice. The parent is respectfully revealing the discipline again before giving the child another chance.

Each time the child violates the rule, increase the time limit *gradually*. If you restrict children from a bike for a week the first time, they'll spend more time dwelling on their resentment than thinking about the lesson. If they make the same mistake again, they're likely to lose the bike for a month! Children need practice at being good -- and we need to be honest with ourselves and decide whether our goal is to teach positive behaviour, to show who is in power, or to get revenge.

If any one of the Four R's is missing from the discipline, it turns the technique into punishment, which has Four (new) Four R's: ***Resentment, Rebellion, Revenge, and Retreat*** (lying, learning to not get caught, running away). If your child reacts in any of these ways, review how you presented your discipline. Chances are, one of the Four R's of Discipline was missing. But don't worry, children always give us another chance to learn from *our* mistakes!