

Loving Limits

The goals of parenting

- To raise disciplined children who have an active experience of God's love and forgiveness
- To raise children who are happy, grateful, kind, loving and co-operative
- What other goals would you include?

The dangers of physical punishment:

Physical punishment:

- Induces fear. (Perfect love casts out fear. 1 John 4:18)
- Teaches the child that it's ok to hit people who don't do what they want them to do – it can set a pattern for future violence.
- Grows anger, resentment and rebellion in a child's heart. (Ephesians 6:4 – do not exasperate your children)
- Does not teach a child positive behaviour or self-control.
- Distorts a child's picture of God as a punitive parent rather than a loving and forgiving father. (Psalm 103 – picture of a loving God).

What about the rod?

In Bible times a shepherd did not use the rod to hit his sheep. He used it to guide them along the path, to stop them from falling over the edge of cliffs, to lift them out of ditches when they fell, and to kill the wild animals that threatened to harm them. It was used to support, rescue and protect the sheep, and to help them go in the right direction, not to hurt them (Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34). This is the goal of loving Christian discipline.

How you can support your child's positive behaviour

Often our children behave 'badly' because we don't understand some of their basic needs. Before you discipline, think about your child's needs and make sure that you have met them well. Wise parents change their own behaviour first.

Check your child's physical needs:

- Are they hungry, thirsty, tired, ill, uncomfortable, afraid or experiencing sensory overload? All of these experiences make it very difficult for a child to stay calm and well-behaved because they can feel so miserable. When a child's physical needs are met, they are more likely to behave well because they feel comfortable on the inside.

Check your child's relational needs

- Are they lonely for time with you? – Spend one-on-one time with them
- Do they need your **acceptance** after messing up? – Let them know that you love them no matter what they do, and that you have forgiven them. Help them to clear up the mess if that's appropriate.
- Do they need your **affection**? – Show your love through hugs, eye-contact, loving words, gentle tickles, etc.
- Do they need your **appreciation**? Have you overlooked something special they've done? – Find a way to thank them for something that they have done or put their picture where they can see you appreciate it.
- Do they need to feel valued? Do they need to know how special they are to you? – Tell them how glad you are to be their parent,
- Do they need your focussed, positive and loving **attention**?
- Do they need your **comfort**? – Listen to their sadness, comfort them with hugs, help them to find calm and joy.

- Do they need some **encouragement** from you? – Encourage them towards a goal that they want to achieve.
- Do they need your **respect**? Have they felt insulted or shamed by you? – Say or do something to honour them and lift them up.
- Do they need some extra help and **support** from you? – Ask what you can do to help them right now. Do a chore alongside them. Teach them vital skills, such as how to tidy their room.
- Do they need you to help them feel **safe**? – Find out if they feel afraid and do what you can to protect and support them. Don't try to rationalize away a fear – it is a powerful emotion and logic is not always helpful.

Behaviour = communication

Ask yourself what your child is trying to tell you by their behaviour. Most of the time disruptive behaviour happens when they are trying to tell you one of the following things:

- I need your love and attention. Please spend some time with me.
- I'm overwhelmed by difficult feelings and too much stimulation. Please take me somewhere quieter and help me to calm down.
- I'm confused and I don't know what to do. Please explain what is happened here and guide me.
- Change something! I can't handle this experience anymore!

Put yourself in your children's shoes

- Put yourself in their situation and think how life feels for them.
- Simplify your life and theirs.
- Understand that children are easily overwhelmed.
- Limit their choices – eg. the less toys they have, the easier it is to tidy up.
- Pace your own schedule and slow down so you can spend positive time with your children.
- Lead by example.

Setting clear boundaries

- Choose a boundary or rule that is important for your child to obey or stay within.
- Show what it looks like – demonstrate the desired behaviour.
- Explain why the rule or boundary is important for your child's well-being, safety and happiness.
- Check the child understands and recognises the boundary – ask them what they think the rule means.
- Make it easy for them to keep – do what you can to help them, and warn them if they are getting close to the edge.
- Enforce the rule or boundary warmly, gently and consistently.
- Give positive, warm and happy attention to your child when they're doing well. Tell them when you notice them staying within the rules. This is a very powerful way to help your child choose positive behaviour.
- **The most important time to discipline is when a child has intentionally and rebelliously crossed an important boundary.**

Loving, wise discipline

- 'Connect before you redirect' – show your child warmth, love and understanding, and calm them down, before trying to deal with their behaviour. You need to be calm too... (Ephesians 6:4)

- Respond to their distressed, angry or upset emotions before responding to their behaviours (Proverbs 15:1).
- Remember that enforcing rules without building a relationship leads to angry rebellion. Your calm, loving, understanding responses can keep them on track.
- Pray and ask for wisdom to respond well.
- Find a good time to talk calmly and privately with your child about what went wrong.
- Don't ask 'why?' their behaviour happened, as this is a very difficult question for children to answer, or they may make up excuses because they don't know why. A child's behaviour is the result of complex reasons – their negative emotions and unmet relational needs, etc. Ask 'what?' happened instead.
- Make sure they understand which boundary/rule was broken and why it's important to make sure it doesn't happen again.
- Quickly show your child warmth, love and acceptance after they have done something wrong (Psalm 103:8-11). Don't make them feel alone (Genesis 2:18). Time-in (quality caring time with you) is much more loving and effective in helping a child behave well than time-out (leaving a child alone).
- **Making a child feel worse does not help them to behave better!**

Effective discipline

- Discipline is not about punishment – it is about encouraging your child towards positive behaviour.
- Positive discipline often uses natural and logical consequences – this links discipline closely and logically to the inappropriate behaviour - If they took a cookie before dinner they don't get one when everyone else does. If they mess up their bedroom, they have to help tidy it. If they say something nasty, they need to say something kind or write a letter of apology, etc.
- Help your child to put things right again as much as possible – pay for things they break – tidy up their own mess – do something nice for people they've hurt.
- Give special attention to your child when they are behaving well. 'You've played happily with your brother for ten minutes. Choose a book and I'll read to you!'
- Try a different kind of discipline for a couple of weeks and see what happens. If it works better, and you and your child are happier and closer, then you've made a good choice.
- Adjust your discipline as your child grows. You'll need to change your techniques as they mature.

What next?

- What new ideas has this seminar given you to help you discipline your children with love and grace?
- What will you do to put your ideas into action?

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