

Positive Discipline

Positive Discipline is a large topic of interest in the parenting world. Some of you may never have heard of the term: *positive discipline*. Some of you may have heard of positive discipline but really don't know what it is. Perhaps you know some, but are looking for more guidance. Whichever describes you, I sincerely hope that the information provided here will be easily implemented in your home.

What is Positive Discipline?

Positive Discipline guides all of us parents in molding our children's behavior. A consistent, respectful and fair approach when interacting with your children is the key. It helps us to develop a good relationship with our children in order to encourage positive behavior.

Positive Discipline also steers us away from using negative discipline methods such as threats, punishment or bargaining. Instead, the goals are to use positive, loving guidance and to act as partners with our children in order to gain their respect and co-operation.

So what is positive discipline? Positive discipline works on the premise that discipline must be taught rather than forced. Discipline is NOT punishment. These two terms are very different, although they are commonly used interchangeably in our culture. You now know that there is a huge difference!!!

Positive Discipline can be described as:

- a way to set clear limits for behavior
- a way to model what we want kids to do
- a way to empathize and understand rather than just provide authority
- a way to reflect on negative behavior and creating goals for improving it, rather than using punishment
- a process for communicating respectfully with our kids
- positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior and achievements
- a strategy for guiding or molding behavior

Why should I use Positive Discipline?

Positive discipline brings many benefits to caregivers and children alike. The following characteristics are essential:

1. Children learn by imitation.

Babies and children learn about themselves, their bodies, and their environment by observing and imitating others. This means that children need firm and consistent role models that they can

trust in order to learn what is right, what is wrong, and to understand how we expect them to behave. How we treat our children and others is how they will in turn treat people. Positive discipline focuses on providing children with consistent examples of appropriate behavior.

2. Developing a positive relationship with your child.

Children essentially want to please others and are more willing to try if they are motivated by positive relationships. Positive discipline gives us strategies and tools to help us guide or correct children's behavior, while reaffirming a positive relationship. In fact, in order to use positive discipline, we must build relationships based on mutual respect. By involving our children in their discipline process and evaluation of their own behavior, we can make discipline more effective and learn to avoid using punishment as a parenting tool.

3. Discipline is consistent.

Children need consistency in every aspect of their lives. Discipline is no different. Positive discipline provides us with the framework for setting clear and firm limits and boundaries for behavior. More importantly, it provides us with strategies for managing behavior in a consistent and calm manner – without losing control or applying erratic and inconsistent discipline tools. This means that both the adult and child learn to evaluate and modify behavior in a calm and non-angry manner.

4. Discipline is not the same as punishment.

Punishment is often regarded as being a part of the discipline process. In reality, it is simply a consequence of it. Many agree that punishment is not the most effective means of modifying or correcting behavior. Consider for a moment a child who may not know what is expected of them or who may not be able to control their behavior. Would it be fair to punish this child or would approaching this situation with positive discipline be more effective in changing future behaviors? If you picked positive discipline, you are right. The child in this example will benefit from working through the situation with a calm parent (you) by talking about their choices, why or why not they are good choices, and planning for the future. When the connection between behavior and the reasons for making certain choices in life are established, the child can learn and use positive strategies on a regular basis. This is truly part of growing up!

Looking on the flip side, if we punish a child for something they have done it can be hard for them to relate the punishment to the behavior and see why it was unacceptable. Instead we need to teach our children long term skills for evaluating and changing their own behaviors. In addition to your positive discipline approach, natural consequences can nicely compliment discipline situations. Natural consequences are not punitive, but rather they are what naturally happens in life after an action. For example, if your child does not eat dinner; naturally, there should be no snack before bed.

5. Discipline needs to be taught.

Discipline and self-regulation are skills that we need throughout life. Like any skills, they need to be taught and learned. The positive discipline approach allows us to take the time to teach discipline to our children and to show them what acceptable behavior is by modeling it ourselves.

6. Internal motivation is effective and long lasting

Positive reinforcement of good behavior is always more effective than giving attention to the negative. Teaching our children to be self-motivated to achieve and to behave appropriately is longer lasting than asking them to behave in order to receive a prize, a reward or some other form of external motivation.

Steps to Implementing Positive Discipline

When trying to apply the positive discipline approach, it is important to keep in mind the following steps when evaluating behavior:

Step 1: Identify the cause of the behavior.

Effective discipline is not only focused on trying to change a child's behavior. The goal should be to recognize and understand what the child is doing, why they are doing it, and then finding solutions to change those behavioral patterns. When approaching a disciplinary situation it is important to listen, ask questions and make sure you understand what happened and why.

Step 2: Reflect on the behavior with the child

It is important to validate the child's feelings and empathize with their experience, while showing them that this is not necessarily the right kind of behavior. This could take the form of a simple "Do you think hitting is right?" or a slightly longer reflection with an older child.

Step 3: Offer options for a solution

It is important to make children feel involved in their own discipline process. This does not mean that the child is left to decide what is right or wrong. However, they should be involved in evaluating the gravity of their behavior and the consequences of it. Offering children choices as part of the solution to the problem can be a very effective tool.

Using an outright "No!" or "Don't do that!" in reaction to undesirable behavior is authoritative. It allows the child little opportunity to evaluate what they are doing, why it is unacceptable and how to avoid it in the future. On the other hand, giving a child two clear but guided choices not only shows them that there are other ways to behave, but it also help them to become independent in making the right decision. For example, if a child gets frustrated and strikes out because they don't want to share, a statement such as, "It's not nice to hit your friend. Do you want to apologize now or take a break?" is constructive, effective, and empowers your child to do the right thing.

Step 4: Focus on working towards improved behavior, not punishments

Make sure that the consequences for behavior are clear and relevant to the behavior itself. After all, taking away TV privileges or a favorite dessert has little to do with having drawn on the wall. By making the consequences of their actions relevant to the behavior itself, the child learns a great deal more about how you expect them to behave in the future. For example, if you child is misusing text messaging, the pre-established consequence may be loss of cell phone privileges.