

Age-Appropriate Discipline Techniques

- **Positive Reinforcement**

Focusing on good behavior instead of bad behavior. Parental attention and praise is one of the most powerful forms of positive reinforcement. Every time your child performs a desired behavior, such as picking up toys or sharing with a sibling, say "Good job!" or "I like the way you did that."

- **Redirecting**

This technique literally involves the simple act of redirecting your child to appropriate behavior. For example, if your child throws sand at the playground, redirect them by saying, "If you want to play in the sand, let's get your shovel and bucket."

- **Verbal Instruction/Explanation**

Going over what you want your child to do and why you want him/her to do it, can help him/her develop good judgment. For example, if you expect your child to go into a store without asking for a toy, say, "I know you like toys, and there are toys in the store. But, you have lots of toys to play with at home. We'll play with them together after we leave the store."

- **Time-outs**

Time-outs involve physically removing your child from a problem situation. Sending your child to a neutral and "boring" area, such as the corner of a room with no toys or television, and ignoring him/her until he/she is calm and quiet. Time-outs should not last longer than five minutes. One minute of time-out per year of life is a good rule of thumb. This technique is not appropriate for a child younger than 19 months and older than 12 years.

- **Establishing Rules**

Explain your rules and be prepared to repeat them until your child learns to follow them on his/her own. Your child needs to be told exactly which behaviors are expected, just as you would teach him/her the rules to a new game. If you expect your child to clean up his/her room before bed, each night say "It's time to pick up your toys before bed." This technique is good for children 4 years and older.

- **Grounding**

A technique effective with school-age children and teenagers, grounding involves restricting your child to a certain place, usually home or his/her room, as punishment. For example, "grounding" your child on a Saturday night as punishment for breaking curfew on Friday night.

- **Withholding Privileges**

Children should learn that privileges come with responsibility and they need to be earned. In order to be effective, this technique should be used infrequently. A privilege is something valued by the child, such as watching television or playing with friends, should be removed.

Birth to 18 Months

Effective:

- Positive Reinforcement
- Redirecting

Too young to use:

- Verbal Instruction/Explanation
- Time-outs
- Establishing Rules
- Grounding
- Withholding Privileges

19 Months to 3 Years

Effective:

- Positive Reinforcement
- Redirecting
- Verbal Instruction
- Explanation
- Time-outs

Too young to use:

- Establishment of Rules
- Grounding
- Withholding Privileges

4 to 12 Years

Effective:

- Positive Reinforcement
- Redirecting
- Verbal Instruction
- Explanation
- Time-outs
- Establishment of Rules
- Grounding
- Withholding Privileges

13 to 16 Years

Effective:

- Positive Reinforcement
- Verbal Instruction
- Explanation
- Establishment of Rules
- Grounding
- Withholding Privileges

Too old to use:

- Redirecting
- Time-outs

At no time is it acceptable to strike a child with an object, use enough force to leave marks, pull hair, jerk arms, or shake a child. Physical punishment delivered in anger with the intent to cause pain is never appropriate.