

Your Discipline Toolbox

Build a Strong Foundation

Play together—often!

Have snuggle time and special time and let them know that you love them.

Talk and listen to them—build a “Love Map” of what’s important to them.

Validate their emotions—their feelings are always OK. (Some behaviors are not.)

Be consistent and trustworthy.

Ask for respect from them and treat them with respect.

Teach how to be good: talk about values; model, coach, and praise good behavior.



Do Routine Maintenance

Take care of yourself. Getting support gives you the energy you need.

Whenever possible, ensure your child is well fed and well rested.

Avoid overstimulation (it leads to meltdowns).

Spend time in kid-friendly environments where it’s easy for them to succeed.

Set expectations: warn of transitions, and explain what the plans are.

Create predictable routines & clear rules so they know what’s expected of them. Set appropriate limits on behavior.

To Improve Behavior

Use the Attention Principle: pay attention to positive behavior you want to see.

Use When / Then statements.

“When you do [positive behavior], then you get [something positive.]”

Create a Reward System.

Create a Routine to address any chronic challenge in daily family life.

Clarify rules—your child may do something that they didn’t realize was wrong. You can explain what the problem is and how to avoid it in the future.

To Correct Minor Misbehavior

If it’s just annoying, just Ignore it.

Tell your child what they SHOULD do: Model, Substitute, Re-direct, Offer Choices

Give clear Commands. Make sure you have their attention first—connect to correct.

Let them suffer the Natural Consequences of their choices, and learn from their mistakes.

Warn them, using If / Then statements.

“If you continue [bad behavior], then you’ll get [a timeout or a logical consequence.]”

To Correct Major Misbehavior

Use Time Out from Positive Attention.

Impose a Logical Consequence—make sure the “punishment fits the crime.”

Seek peer advice, parent education, or professional support as needed.

Move On

When misbehavior stops, or after a time out or a consequence, re-engage with your child, providing positive attention and praise for good behavior.

The Tools in your Discipline Toolbox

To Improve Behavior

- **Use the Attention Principle.** Children want attention, so they will repeat behaviors that get your attention. If you give lots of positive attention for positive behaviors, you'll see more of those behaviors.
- **Use When / Then Statements.** "When you do [positive behavior], then you get ____." Offer a social reward: you could read a book together, play a game, have snuggle time, work on an art project, tell jokes, offer praise... You're offering focused positive attention.
- **Create a Reward System.** Be specific about exactly what behaviors you'll reward—they must do the behavior first to get the reward. Start with small, achievable tasks; work up to bigger challenges over time. Use tangible rewards, such as stickers, art supplies, a special snack, getting to choose what the family has for dinner, going to the park, having screen time or going to the library. When they master a skill, fade the reward.
- **Create a Routine.** If you have a particular challenge that repeats over and over, like struggling to get going in the morning, resisting bed time, or poor behavior at mealtimes, create a routine to improve the situation. A routine has 4—6 components, or steps in the process. You will write them out or draw them out, teach your child the steps, and help to reinforce the routine every day with social rewards.

To Correct Minor Misbehavior

- **Ignore Annoying Behaviors.** Whining, begging, teasing, swearing, and "throwing a fit" are used to get attention or to get what they want. If you pay attention by scolding or getting annoyed, or if you give in to the child's demands to get them to stop, they'll use this behavior frequently. (Remember the Attention Principle?) If their behavior is not harming anyone or anything, then ignore it. Have a neutral face, voice, and body language as you turn your attention away. As soon as your child shows a positive behavior, give your attention to that!
- **Tell your child what TO DO.** You can: Model behavior you want to see. Re-direct —tell them what other action they could do. (Instead of "don't bang on the piano", say "play gently.") Substitute—tell them what other object they could do that action with. ("I see you're in the mood for throwing. Let's find a ball.") Offer choices. ("Do you want to hold my hand or should I carry you?")
- **Give Clear Commands.** Make sure you have their attention, then briefly state exactly what you want them to do. Instead of "Can you please just behave well, OK?", say "Sit on your bottom, hands in your lap." Just say it once clearly, don't say the same command over & over.
- **Let them have Natural Consequences.** If they go out without a coat, they get cold. If they treat toys roughly, they break. Don't protect from all mistakes.
- **Use If / Then Statements.** This is the warning you give before a time out or the warning before a logical consequence. "If you continue [describe the specific bad behavior that you want to stop], then you'll get [either a time-out or a consequence.]"

To Correct Major Misbehavior—to be used any time your child is hurting someone or something or committing a significant rules violation

- **Use Time Out.** This is not a punishment. It's a time for the child (and you) to calm down, then make a better choice. They are sent to a specific place for a prescribed period of time (3 minutes for a 3 year old, 4 for a 4 year old, and 5 for children age 5 and up.) Once the time is up and they have been calm for two minutes, you tell them that time out is over, and you move on. While they're in time out, withdraw your attention from them.
- **Impose a logical consequence.** This might be removing them from the situation ("if you can't play safely outside, you will need to come inside"), removing the problem item from them ("if you can't put away your toys, I will put them away and you won't be able to play with them tomorrow"), or removing a privilege ("if you don't finish your homework tonight, then no screen time tomorrow"). Make sure: the consequence is in proportion to how bad the behavior was, you choose a consequence you can follow through on enforcing, and you carry it out calmly, not with anger and shaming.

For more details, see www.GoodDaysWithKids.com by Janelle Durham, or read [The Incredible Years](#) by Stratton.