

Helping Hand

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Disciplining Your Child

Discipline is necessary to teach children how to behave. Although this sounds simple, it is one of the toughest aspects of child rearing for many parents.

Discipline is not about giving orders and expecting your child to do exactly what you want—now! It's not about strictness and unthinking obedience. It's not about punishing bad behavior. Discipline teaches your child a lesson; punishment teaches your child a lesson he or she'll never forget, namely that the world is angry and it bullies you.

So what is discipline? The purpose of discipline is to teach children self-control over impulses by showing them that their behavior is linked to consequences, both good and bad. In this way, we prepare our children for the consequences of their actions.

The ultimate goal in parenting is to prepare your child to be an effective person in relationships and in achieving dreams and goals. Whatever you're doing should move them toward that.



Here are some helpful guidelines:

Do be clear about expectations and positive and negative consequences. **Don't** beg, plead, bribe or threaten consequences you can't follow through on.

Do reward and praise more than you punish and criticize. **Don't** see only what's wrong with your child's behavior.

Do criticize your child's behavior. **Don't** criticize your child.

Do use reasonable consequences that your spouse or partner will back you up on. **Don't** use unreasonable consequences and expect support.

Do give kids time to change their behavior. **Don't** get aggravated if they don't immediately change.

Do ignore a sassy attitude as long as your child changes his or her behavior, and **do** realize that your child feels bad about misbehaving. **Don't** assume that just because your child doesn't show remorse or repentance that he or she doesn't feel guilty or ashamed.

Do decide on discipline when you're cool-headed. **Don't** hand out punishment in a moment of anger.

Do speak from principle and conviction. **Don't** speak from the "because I say" position.

Do let unimportant issues drop. **Don't** make mountains out of molehills.

Do teach your child how his or her misbehavior hurts others. **Don't** hurt your child's feelings to hurt him or her back (for revenge).

Do apologize to your child when you've overreacted. **Don't** remain silent and expect your child to overlook your mistakes.

Children of Alcoholics Deal With Many Feelings

Approximately 7 million American children live in a home with an alcoholic parent. This means they are at greater risk than other children for having emotional problems. You may feel powerless to help, but just being aware of how these children feel can help them. Even if it's not possible to do more for a child living in these circumstances, merely acknowledging that they are experiencing these feelings can make a child feel better and can sustain them.

Expect and have empathy for the following:

- **Guilt.** The child may see him or herself as the main cause of parental drinking.
- **Anxiety.** The child may worry constantly about what's going on at home. He or she also may fear violence and the parent's becoming ill or injured due to drinking.
- **Embarrassment.** The child may feel shame about their home situation and won't invite friends over.
- **Inability to have close relationships.** The child doesn't trust others due to repeated disappointments experienced with parents.
- **Confusion.** Parental behavior toward the child is unpredictable, and home life lacks a schedule or structure.
- **Anger.** The child may be angry with the drinking parent—and a non-alcoholic parent for not intervening.

Inhalants at Home and School



Many parents don't think to monitor the levels of everyday household products, but inhalant use has grown in popularity among teens. These substances are legal, inexpensive, accessible and a quick high. According the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, inhalants are the third most abused substance among 14-to-15-year-olds.

Do you know what qualifies as an inhalant? Items such as glue, nail polish remover, spray paints and air fresheners are in the bathroom cabinets, under the kitchen sink and elsewhere throughout your home and even at school. Inhalant use is like playing Russian roulette. One "huffing" episode may result in some nausea, while a second episode may be deadly. It's important, as a parent, that you are informed about inhalants so you can talk to your teen about the dangers.

Specific things you can do to keep your teen safe from inhalants:

- **Monitor the levels of everyday household products.** Next time you're cleaning, take stock of all solvents, gases and nitrites in your home, such as paint, cooking spray and whipping cream aerosols. It can be as easy as using an ink pen to mark the bottle.
- **Learn the warning signs and health effects.** Inhalants are toxic, volatile substances. There are telltale signs, such as chemical odors on breath and clothes, nosebleeds, slurred speech and disorientation that can alert you if your teen is using.
- **Talk to teens about the health effects.** Communication is the best form of prevention. Learn about the long- and short-term effects of inhalant use and impress upon teens how dangerous these substances are to their health.

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Tips for Preventing School Violence

Adults can play a key role in preventing school violence. One lesson learned from incidents of school violence is that schools cannot solve the violence problem alone. Parents and other adults in the community have an obligation to ensure safe schools for all young people. Here's what adults can do.

- Discuss the school's discipline policy with children. Show support for the rules, and help children understand the reasons for them.
- Talk with children about violence they see on television, in video games and possibly in their neighborhoods.
- Help children find ways to show anger that do not involve hurting others. If an incident occurs, take the opportunity to model/discuss appropriate responses.
- Involve children in setting rules for behavior.
- Help children understand the value of accepting individual differences.
- Participate in a violence prevention group.
- Help children understand consequences of violence.



- Keep lines of communication open with young people. Encourage your child to always tell you where and with whom he or she will be. Get to know your child's friends and their parents.
- Listen when young people share concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional.
- Support and review homework, talk with teachers and attend school functions.

Text Messaging May Improve Written Language Skills

Text messaging language is a concern for parents and educators. Contractions, acronyms, symbols and unusual spellings raise concerns about the impact on students' language skills and spelling ability. Should we fear for our kids' literacy?

The conventional wisdom is that text speak has detrimental effects on learning, but researchers have found evidence of a positive influence on the way children interact with language. In the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, Dr. Beverly Plester notes, "Children's use of (text speak) is not only positively associated with word reading ability, but it may be contributing to reading development." Text speak use increases contact with language, and plays a part in learning. "The more exposure you have to the written word, the more literate you become, and we tend to get better at things that we do for fun."

Text speak does not adversely affect a student's spelling ability either. In the journal *Reading and Writing*, Connie Varnhagen concludes that new language used for text messaging or IM has no repercussions on a child's spelling. She found that using different combinations and

alternate spellings of words is a good indicator of learning, and is consistent with students' ability in the classroom. "Kids who are good spellers (academically) are good spellers in IM," she said. "And kids who are poor spellers in class are poor spellers in IM."

Plester's study backs up these findings; there was no confirmation that text speak has an influence on normal spelling. She says, "What we think of as misspellings don't really break the rules of language and children have a sophisticated understanding of the appropriate use of words."

In the *English Journal* Kristen Turner suggests that "teachers might ask for reverse translation... students can rewrite plays or other pieces of literature using text speak." The process of translating would foster critical thinking skills and boost their understanding of the literature.

Using text speak may draw on and increase a student's mental powers. As Plester observes, "Using a new type of language does require concentration, and translating it to standard English does require concentration and attention. It's a little brain workout."

Understanding Childhood Fears: Building Trust and Security

As adults, we struggle to cope with the routine of our daily lives due in part to recent tragic events and hardships that have encompassed our country and in part to the uncertainty of future adversities. Throughout this process, simple answers to “what do we say?” and “how do we help our children feel safe?” can be difficult to recognize, especially when dealing with children’s questions and feelings following the onset of tragedy and uncertainty.

Children gain strength and develop productive coping strategies as a result of secure and emotionally stable relationships. Adults must provide a nurturing environment for children at all times, and especially in the aftermath of tragedy. This means maintaining normal routines (eating/sleeping patterns, school events, family nights).

A nurturing environment is crucial during crisis or tragedy. Spending quality time with a child is of the utmost importance. Participating with children in play, listening to their concerns, and engaging in discussions promotes healthy development and diminishes anxiety.

All children experience fear and anxiety from time to time, but how we relate to children during times of crisis differs with their age ranges.



Pre-school children

- use symbolism to make sense of the world
- tend to reveal emotions through play activities

Adults should

- observe play activities to supervise/gather information
- participate in activities to help recognition of feelings and emotions associated with various role-plays

Elementary school children

- can verbalize fears/concerns through language
- thought process show a need for stability and concrete representations of abstract words, such as “safety” and “tragedy”
- interested in steps taken to diminish tragedy

Adults should

- listen to the child’s fears and provide brief, factual answers and concrete resolutions.
- Example resolutions: participating in household/school emergency drills, developing lists of emergency phone numbers

Adolescents

- more likely to engage adults in hypothetical discussions regarding specific crisis or tragic event
- interested in discussion and analysis of motives, consequences, and resolutions of tragedy
- capable of (and often need to voice) their individual perspectives, and be prompted to consider the perspectives of others
- tend to reveal their emotions through abstract means, such as through the construction of various art projects, poems, songs, or analogies

Adults should

- engage teenagers in discussions and debates that focus on analysis, perspective taking, and hypothetical considerations
- ask for and acknowledge the adolescent’s input

Whatever the tragedy or the age of the child, parents and teachers **must** reassure children of safety and security. Be an active listener, participant, and observer, and be willing to seek other community resources when in doubt.