

# 6 Discipline Mistakes and How to Solve Them

Discipline is not just about punishment, but also about teaching your child to learn from experience.

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**D**isciplining your child is never easy. Here are six of the most common discipline mistakes parents make and how to fix them. It is important to remember that discipline is not just about punishment, but also a learning experience for your child.

### **MISTAKE 1** Shouting and Overreacting

Parenting is stressful – no question about it. Add to this the stress of a hectic work or home life, and it can be all too easy to vent your frustration and anger at your children. While shouting might release your frustration, children learn quickly to ignore the frequent overreactions of stressed adults. Feeling hurt and confused, children usually end up shouting back.

**Solution:** Learn to control anger, even if this means leaving the room until you are calmer. Children respond better to adults who make calm requests. Louise Kelly, who runs her own business making custom-made goods, says of her two-year old son Arlen, “I use Time Out quite a bit now. I first started it just before he turned two, when I thought he would understand the concept a little, and would sit with him on my knee so he knew I was not abandoning him. Now he does it on his own but we don’t have a timer – it’s just purely to give us a breather and collect our thoughts. We then have a chat about what happened, why it happened, what he or we should do in the future and how it can be made better.” When you do shout or overreact, apologise sincerely – children then understand that adults are not perfect, and learn about communication this way.

### **MISTAKE 2** Physical Punishment

The belief that children will learn self-restraint through physical force is misguided. Instead, parents end up instilling in their children feelings of resentment and hatred. The undesirable behaviour that provoked the punishment tends to remain, and can even become entrenched and used again as a way to express hostility.

**Solution:** Bend down so that you are at eye level with your child and ask in a calm, controlled and sincere voice why they behaved a certain way or why, for example, they do not want to do what you have asked. Giving your children the chance to speak about a situation helps them take responsibility and gain a sense of control over any unsettling feelings. Olwyn Avery, a voluntary welfare

worker, is a firm believer in teaching her daughter Allira responsibility. "I don't hit Allira," says Avery. "I find more empowering ways to teach her what is and isn't acceptable. I let her work out why something was wrong and then ask her to suggest ways she could fix it."

### MISTAKE 3 Parents Openly Disagreeing on Discipline

It's not uncommon, or unexpected, for parents to disagree on how to discipline children. It is counterproductive, however, when such disagreements happen in front of children.

**Solution:** To prevent children from taking advantage of disagreements like these, parents should ideally voice their differences about discipline in private. Children need to see that their parents agree with one another about discipline. This means that parents should set guidelines and rules together in advance, and also agree on appropriate disciplinary measures concerning certain behaviours.

### MISTAKE 4 Inconsistent Discipline

It's a mistake to discipline your child for a transgression once and then not discipline them when they commit the same or another wrongdoing again. Inconsistent punishment confuses children, leaving them uncertain about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. If the rule is no television after a certain time, then this should hold true every time. If you ignore their misbehaviour at times, you cannot expect them not to take chances.

**Solution:** Be consistent and prompt with your discipline. Delaying punishment is not a good idea, as it would not have the same effect as when

you immediately follow misbehaviour with appropriate consequences. Delayed punishment gives children the impression their misconduct was not that serious. When you've been inconsistent, such as punishing one child but letting the other get away with misbehaving, admit this mistake to your children, apologise and try and show consistency next time.

### MISTAKE 5 Bribery

Offering children rewards for behaving appropriately is not the best way to help them learn right from wrong. Bribery will only encourage them to misbehave so they can collect rewards when asked to stop misbehaving.

**Solution:** Children need to learn that doing the right thing is by itself rewarding. Project manager, Claire Gardner says of her 16-month-old son Haydn, "In terms of negative activity, I convey by my facial expression, tone of voice and words, that it is negative or wrong; I then leave it and pay no more attention to the negative actions and try to turn Haydn's attention to positive activity. This seems to work well in encouraging Haydn not to repeat the deed. Paying too much attention to negative conduct gives it justification."


### MISTAKE 6 Shaming and Inducing Guilt

"Stop acting like a baby!" "How could you be so stupid?" "Why can't you listen like your brother?" These are all comments that have left the mouths of parents in the heat of the moment. Such comments leave children feeling insecure and can reduce their self-esteem. Furthermore, saying things like, "Your father will be very upset

with you for losing the car keys," places an unnecessary burden on a child's shoulders.

**Solution:** Be aware of the words you use in front of your children, especially when expressing displeasure. Kelly says, "Arlen's behaviour gets a label and not him, so we often say 'that's not nice behaviour' or 'that attitude is unacceptable, please change it.'"

In addition, try reframing a negative into a positive, and if necessary, learn to recognise and deal with uncontrolled feelings that cause you to say things you later regret.

Teaching children the value of discipline takes time and patience. It can also help to reconsider your expectations of your children. Remember, they are only children – they are still learning and you are their primary teacher. 

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