



JENNIFER BALLERINI, PSY.D

Helping People Build Better Relationships

## EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE 101

### Top 5 Things Parents Can Do to Guarantee Bad Behavior:

1. Too much talking, nagging, or lecturing.
2. Too much emotion: tirades, temper tantrums, or tears.
3. Inconsistency and/or lack of parental cooperation/agreement.
4. Physical or verbal abuse, including spanking.
5. Acting out any one of the following ineffective roles (adapted from *The Total Transformation* by James Lehman):
  - *Bottomless pockets*: buys things to win child's approval; teaches the child he/she doesn't have to work
  - *Over-negotiator*: renegotiating already established rules (after inappropriate behavior); teaches the child rules are always negotiable
  - *Screamer*: gets into shouting matches, then often overcompensates later; teaches the child that he/she doesn't have to be in control of his/her emotions
  - *Ticket Puncher*: makes excuses for the child; teaches the child he/she is a victim and it's never his/her fault
  - *Savior*: protects the child and undermines authority of other adults; teaches child acting out gets him/her love and protection and to divide and conquer
  - *Martyr*: takes on child's responsibilities for him/her, works harder than the child (e.g. waking him up 7 times); teaches child that he/she is not competent
  - *Perfectionist*: sets impossibly high standards, compares child to idealized "other"; teaches child failure is expected and success is risky



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## Reflection:

- Which of these roles fit you? Your partner? Your parents?

## Top 5 Ways to Be an Effective Parent:

- 1) Lots and lots of love. Laugh, snuggle, tell your child what a great job he/she is doing. Make sure you're getting in lots of positive, fun time together as a family. Build up a "positive bank account" so those "withdrawals" won't be so hard.

## Reflection:

- How much time do you spend with your child? How often do you tell them what they're doing right?
  - Consider developing a list of rewards to reinforce your child's good behavior
- 2) Do as I say AND as I do. You are the biggest role model in your child's life. Remember, everything you do is teaching your child. What message do you want to send?

## Reflection:

- How comfortable are you confidently setting boundaries?
  - How in control are you of your own emotions?
- 3) Plan ahead. Which behaviors drive you crazy? Make rules and consequences in advance with your partner, post them, and explain them to your kids. When your child breaks a rule, all you have to do is look at your list, and simply tell the child what the consequence is. No emotion, no explaining, no trying to come up with a punishment on the spot (which usually results in "no TV until you're 40"). This creates structure, order, and respect.
  - 4) Be consistent. Follow through with any punishment and any promised reward, every time.

## Reflection:

- How much do you and your spouse support each other in your discipline?



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- 5) Find the balance between passive and aggressive. Many parents want to be “friends” with their kids, while others are constantly threatened by challenge and seek to dominate their child. Children need the stability and containment of knowing you are in charge, while also feeling that they are loved and respected as separate human beings. It’s a tricky, but critical line to walk.

## Reflection:

- How comfortable are you setting boundaries elsewhere in your life?
- If you tend to dominate your child, get curious about why you need that level of control.

## A New Strategy

- 1) Identify problem behaviors and make a list — get specific.
- 2) Identify potential consequences. These can include time outs, loss of privileges or access to favorite toys/activities.
- 3) Once you and your partner are agreed, post the lists on the fridge. Sit your kid down for a talk. Tell them about your new system. Expect your child to test it out quickly to see how serious you are about following through with what you say.
- 4) For many behaviors, a 3-strikes-and-you’re-out rule works well. For example, if a child starts whining or tantruming, tell them calmly, “That’s one.” Give them a minute or so to get control over themselves. If they can’t do it, give them a “two.” If they still can’t get control, it’s time for a consequence.
  - Remember, discipline is “teaching.” The purpose of discipline is to give your kid an opportunity to problem solve and self-correct.
  - Consider making a few behaviors “automatic 3’s.” For example, hitting could be an “automatic 3” in your house.
- 5) When your child breaks a rule, go to the list and pick a consequence. Tell your child, for example, “You didn’t do your chores by Friday, so I’m taking your iPod for the weekend.” Challenge yourself not to say more about it or to get drawn into angry or emotional conversation with your child.
- 6) Keep punishments short (i.e. no longer than a week, usually). It’s the most effective with kids, who have short attention spans. And it’s easier for you to keep track of!



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- 7) Make sure to follow through on the consequence (and on any rewards) as promised.
- 8) Catch your child being good, and be sure to reward him/her with praise or something they'll enjoy. (It doesn't need to be anything fancy or expensive.)

## Help! It's Not Working!: Top 5 Ways Parents Get Stuck

- 1) Power struggles between parents. Why should the child listen to you if your partner doesn't? If you're unable to get on the same page, consider some couple therapy so you can send a clear message to your child.
- 2) Lack of commitment/unwillingness to put forth time and energy. Everyone resists change — that's normal. It's hard work changing patterns you've been doing for years. What you've been doing is familiar and feels easier, but in the long run, it's so much harder to keep struggling than to make these changes now.
- 3) Unresolved issues with authority. Based on your personality and your history, you may feel very uncomfortable being in charge—or too comfortable being in charge. If you get stuck here, consider doing individual counseling sessions to help you find an effective balance.
- 4) Impatience. Remember, you've been doing this for years. Hang in there — it's going to take a little while to turn this ship around.
- 5) Falling for a classic kid strategy to manipulate. Everyone resists change, including your kid! Try to see if you're getting thrown off your game with guilt trips, divide-and-conquer maneuvers, anger, or some other way your child's reacting to your new parenting strategies.

## Recommended Reading:

*1-2-3 Magic* by Thomas W. Phelan. Great, simple resource for kids ages 2-12.