

Firm Up Your Discipline with This Helpful Tool!

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Why is it so hard for parents to be consistent when disciplining their children?



Many factors come into play. How tired are you?! How persistent is your child? How were you disciplined? What kind of parenting style do you have? Does the other parent agree with you on discipline methods and follow-through? You hate being the “heavy.”

One secret that can be highly effective in overcoming these obstacles that comes from the “Create a Discipline Plan that Works” class is to develop Family Rules and Consequences. If there’s just one thing you do to improve your discipline practices, this should be it! Follow these step-by-step directions.

How To Develop Family Rules and Consequences

Step #1- Have a meeting with your spouse/partner/other parent. (If you’re a single parent, meet by yourself.) Discuss family rules that are most important to you. I recommend picking no more than two-three house rules if you have preschoolers and no more than four-five house rules with older children.

Step #2- Brainstorm ideas for consequences that are appropriate for the misbehaviors you’ve chosen.

Step #3- Sit down with your family (even kids as young as age three can participate) at a calm, quiet time and ask them their opinion. Ask your kids: “What rules do you think are important to have in our family so that no one’s body or feelings get hurt?” Most children go to school or day care and are accustomed to having rules to follow in those settings. Try to piggy-back on those rules to build consistency.

Step #4- Write down the rules that everyone suggests. Make sure that the rules that you identified in Step #1 are included on the list. Use the words that your children are providing so the rules are kid-friendly.

Step #5- Refine the rules so they are clear and specific. i.e. “Be respectful” is vague. “No name calling” is clear.

Step #6- Next, you want to get everyone’s input on appropriate consequences for breaking a rule. Write down all of the ideas generated for each rule. Thank the children for their input. Then tell the children that you’ll review their suggestions and have another family meeting soon to share the final house rules.

Step #7- The adults meet privately to finalize the rules and consequences. Write them down on a chart you can post.

Step #8- Meet again as a family, review the rules, have everyone sign the chart which means they agree to abide by the family rules and post them in a prominent place. If you have young children they can decorate the chart, too.

Step #9- Follow through with the rules and consequences you have set. Refer to the family rules chart so you are being consistent.

An example of a family rule you may want to have is: “We only use kind words in our family.”

A consequence for using “mean” words would be to require that the offender has to say or do something kind to the person who feels hurt.

Let’s say that one child calls his/her sibling “dumb.” You can ask the child, “Is that a kind word? In our family we only use kind words. You need to do something kind to make that up to your sibling now because you have hurt his/her feelings.”

Let the child decide whether to write an apology note, say something kind, give the sibling a small gift, provide a hug or some other action that the child initiates so it comes from his/her heart. I never force kids to apologize because it usually rings false.

Be sure to have a rule that prohibits any type of hitting, kicking, biting or shoving, too.

How can this process help you to be a better parent and be more consistent?

- As parents you’ve taken the time to discuss what rules are most important to you (which many of us never sit down to do!).
- You’ve reached a consensus within the family about what rules are most important to you.
- The rules are crystal clear.
- It takes the mystery out of what will happen when a rule is broken.
- You and the other parent will enforce the same consequence for the same offense building in consistency.
- When you’re tired, you can simply look at the chart to remember the consequence.
- The consequence is more likely to be a logical one if you’ve provided forethought on the behavior.

Following these guidelines will be one of the best parenting tips that you can do.

Byline: Toni Schutta is a Parent Coach and Licensed Psychologist with 17 years experience helping families find solutions that work. To receive the **free report “The 7 Worst Mistakes Parents Make (and How to Avoid Them!)** visit

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