

Loving Discipline: Setting Limits

The Elementary School Years

“Pick up your dirty clothes!”

“Stop fighting with your brother!”

“Eat your beans. If I hear you complain one more time ...”

Sound familiar? That’s life with an elementary school aged child. It’s enough to make you crazy sometimes! When you start to feel angry:

- Take a deep breath
- Count to ten, and
- Put your hands in your pockets so you don’t use them on your kid.

Hitting doesn’t work. Maybe you grew up being spanked. In those days maybe that’s what your parents knew. You don’t want your child to grow up thinking that hitting is a good way to solve problems. Even if your child calls you names, do not react with angry yelling. It is your job to teach your child how to manage anger. Stay calm. Be a good role model.

If you need to talk to someone or need help managing your anger, please call the Family Support hotline at 1-800-829-3777. They are there to listen and help you. Don’t be afraid to call!

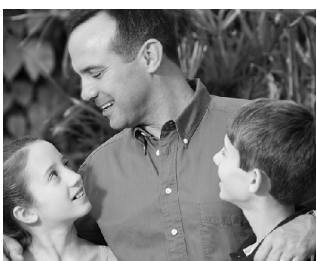
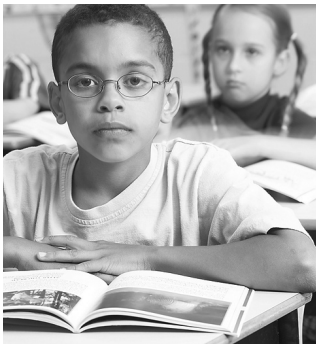
You can’t expect your child to act nicely all the time! Once your child goes to school, there are new rules to learn. Even the best behaved child in the school needs a safe place where rules and limits can be tested. That place will almost always be with you, the parent! As your kids grow up, there will be continued testing. That is part of growing up.

Praise good behavior. When your child does something right, say that you are proud. Save it for big things, though. Don’t praise for every little thing!

Respond when your child asks nicely. Ignore the whining and complaining. Listen only when your child asks in a nice voice. Your child will learn that whining does not work!

Make up a chart. When your child follows the rules, place a star on the chart. If a rule is broken, take away one or two stars. When your child gets 20 stars, give a small prize. This could be a homemade popsicle or a few stickers. You and your child can make up a system. Kids this age like to collect stars!

Let your child decide some of the smaller stuff, like what music to listen to in the car. Remember, you get to make the final decision on big things!



Remember they are still small! Kids will mess up sometimes. A parent's job is to let them know they made a mistake. If your child draws on the walls, make your child clean the mess! At this age, kids still want to please adults.

Choose the right punishment. Your child should be able to connect what he/she did wrong with the privilege you take away. If your child:

- Rides his trike into the street, take it away for the rest of the day.
- Refuses to turn off the TV and get ready for bed, take away TV shows for a few days.
- Takes a friend's video game without asking, pack up the video games for a few days.

You could also decide the punishment ahead of time. "If you don't put away your game when I ask, you will lose it for two days."

You must be firm and follow through with the punishment. Show your child that you are serious. Don't say you will do something unless you are willing to do it. If your kids are having a food fight in the back seat of the car, tell them you will go home if they don't stop. If they don't listen, turn around and go home. Next time they will think twice!

Don't make the punishment too big. Your child will only feel angry. It will also be difficult for you to follow through!

Talk to your child with respect, even when your child is bad-mouthing you! It is really hard to stay calm, but you must be a good role model. Do not shame your child. Also, if you must correct when your child's friends are around, step aside and talk in private.

Use "I" instead of "You." Don't accuse your child of being a bad person. Instead of saying, "You're always so slow and make us late every time!" try, "I feel stressed out when we rush at the last minute. Please be ready by 4:00."

Laugh with your child (not at your child)! When you want your child to listen to you, try to find something funny in the situation. This can help to change the mood. Tell a funny story from your childhood. Or make up a funny song. Be creative!

Let your child fail. Sometimes we have to let our kids learn the hard way, especially once they get to age nine and older. If your child doesn't read the book, there will be a bad grade. If your child doesn't practice, your child won't make the basketball team.

Sometimes kids act up when they are tired or hungry. Make sure your child gets enough sleep at night and quiet time during the day. Feed your child regular, healthy meals.

Nobody's perfect. If you mess up and lose your temper, say you're sorry. If you find it happening a lot, ask for help from friends, family, or other parents. Talk it out with someone else.

Kids don't come with instructions!! Parents are always learning how to raise a child. You might want to take a parenting class. Alameda Alliance for Health can help you find one. For more information, please call Health Programs at 510-747-4577.