

Establish Discipline Amongst Two Households

This tutorial is designed to assist parents, now living in separate households, to establish, maintain and enforce mutual rules while respecting differences in the households.

You and your child's other parent now have two separate households. These households are becoming as distinct as the parents who head them. The differences that underlie parental discord may now be manifesting themselves in both the appearance and operations of the respective households.

For the child this is going to be an additional challenge to the hurt already experienced by the divorce. Instead of one set of expectations from parents who mutually backed each other the child now must traverse different disciplinary landscapes. While not failing to enforce rules, parents should be cognizant of the child's need for transition time. To help ameliorate the difficulties for the child of trying to live by two different standards, parents should agree on mutual standards and enforcement.

This guide is divided into four sections: expectations in mother's home; expectations in father's home; mutual expectations; and, a parental assessment.

To begin, each parent should take the parental assessment to determine his or her discipline techniques and preferences as it relates to both the children and the other parent.

PARENTAL ASSESSMENT

To ensure effective discipline of your child and to reduce his or her level of stress associated with trying to fulfill two sets of expectations it is important for parents to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses in this area. This assessment is for you. The more honest you are about it the more it will be of assistance to you. It is up to you as to whether you share any of this information with the other parent. Rate each preference on the level by which you agree with it – 0 being “total disagree”, 10 being “totally agree”. Rate each behaviour on the scale given, ranging from always to never.

ESSAYS

Discipline is _____

Punishment is _____

PREFERENCES

1) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

BEHAVIOURS

1) Always Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

CONDUCT STANDARDS FOR FATHER'S HOME

CONDUCT STANDARDS FOR MOTHER'S HOME

MUTUAL STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

You are well aware of the adjustments that you have made following divorce or separation. This may be increased responsibilities, financial stress, more time dedicated to employment and, possibly, ongoing litigation. The children are the ones who usually suffer in this situation. Although quick-fix discipline and punishment techniques may provide instant relief they ultimately set you up for enduring struggles, additional stress and a greater commitment of time to disciplinary issues.

Before adopting a discipline and punishment strategy it is necessary to observe best practices and adapt those to your particular situation. Try to communicate with the other parent and update each other about incidents and the child's development. Understand that the developmental process of children will be to test limits, seek guidance and take actions contrary to your approval. Without these they may run amok, be injured or killed, and possibly never move out on their own. Even before they can walk children are experimenting with you. What volume or duration of crying gets a response, does repetition work, will you only pick up a spoon tossed on the floor twice or will you do it ten or more times. It is this early feedback that sets the course for who will control the household.

Discipline is not punishment. Discipline is an adapted behaviour through training. Elite athletes are disciplined in proper food intake, exercise routines and practice. It's not for the purpose of avenging some wrong that athletes eat real food that provides nutrients and energy for proper muscle and brain functioning and workout or practice for hours each day. Punishment is retaliation. Punishment is for the purpose of avenging a wrong and satisfying the emotional demands of the wronged or the person executing the punishment.

One of the most fundamental principles of effective discipline is consistency. Rules and expectations must be adhered to at all times. When this does not happen, corrective measures must be initiated promptly. Without knowledge that there will be prompt or any consequence the child is left with an additional consideration beyond the cost-benefit analysis – the consequence probability.

As a parent your primary responsibility is to provide instructed guidance. This means setting the boundary and in addition explaining the limits of accepted behaviour and why the behaviour is expected. My son in his early schooling days was told that he is not allowed to use curse words. I asked him, "What was the explanation?" to which he responded, "That we just aren't supposed to do it." – rule without purpose. So I told him that to whomever told you that you can just say to piss-off because they don't know nearly as much about linguistics as I do. I then queried him about letters, the construction of words and word origins. Then I told him he can use whatever words he wants to convey a thought so long as it is done correctly. Asking "can" you when you know you have the ability may get you corrected for asking a superfluous question. As for curse words I explained it like this; You can say that "Due to his ignorance and naivety he agreed to an arrangement which resulted in an uneven distribution of the proceeds not commensurate with his investment." but another way to say it that may better reflect the degree of the confidence scam is "His dumbass got fucked-over in a scheme!" Both properly convey a similar thought.

As a parent you may encounter nagging and may be tempted to use it. When a child nags and a parent gives in the nagging is positively reinforced – the child achieves the desire through repetitive demands or queries. A similar future situation should again produce nagging. In the reverse a parent may have

to use repetition of a command to get results. The child may opt for any of three options; escape, in which the task is completed to avoid the unpleasantness of the constant nagging; avoidance, in which the next opportunity brings immediate compliance to avoid the unpleasantness of the impending nagging; and, being obstinate, in which the nagging is met with a refusal to perform the task. This battle-of-the-wills puts the child in control. Creative measures should be used to defeat this strategy. For a chore like cleaning up toys from the living room a phone call to a friend or neighbor can quickly remedy that. Have the parent bring over his or her children and while yours is watching tell them they can have every toy they pick up. Then explain to your child that you had to “hire” the neighbors' children to do the “job” that he or she wouldn't do. Usually this type of demonstration does not need to be repeated.

Discipline is an investment. You will get out of it what you put into it. Establish a pattern of setting standards “because I told you so” will result in a child who grows up running rampant and breaking barriers until he is told what to do. A child who is provided with the knowledge of why limits exist and is empowered to make his own decisions will choose the much wiser option because he knows he owns the consequences. “I told you so” makes the parents responsible for the consequences.

Punishment should be meted out sparingly and be commensurate with the act. It should be reserved for only the most egregious acts and should follow the disciplinary activity in a relevant time period. The effectiveness of punishment is dependent upon the child's development and the lapse between the act and when the punishment is instituted. A pre-school child who hits another and within ten minutes or so is placed in isolation or held in someone's lap will effectively equate the punishment with the act. Withholding play-time from the child the next day will be much less effective. The teen however has a much more robust cognition of the abstract. On prom night when she reaches for the car keys in your hand you can withdraw them, hand her the key to the shed and say since you were a half hour late sneaking the car back in on Valentine's Day you can just take your bike instead since I want the car back on time. Oops. You'll see a tantrum over being held accountable for what she was certain that she got away with.

Punishment should never be used as a consequence of failure for not discharging a responsibility such as school work or household chores. Responsibilities are just that. They are not options for the child who may decide upon completing the tasks or accepting the punishment. This can require an enduring level of resilience if the child wants to play battle-of-the-wills.

Striking a child regardless of size or age should never be used as a punishment. This is a hotly debated issue but the affirmative argument is baseless. Physically abusive punishments cannot achieve compliance all of the time. Those who engage in physical abuse of their children have lower intelligence, do not possess satisfactory communication skills and are generally neglectful of their children in other ways. [fnX]

A major drawback to using violence against your child as a punishment is that it teaches the concept that conflict is properly resolved through violence. Spanking and other forms of hitting teaches the child that might is right – that those smaller children who do not meet the demands of the larger child will endure a beating until they submit to the will of the larger child.

When I was young I was often accused of “lawyering” – following commands strictly as worded or using logical argument to challenge authority. When I challenged my mother's authority or used a logical argument against it I'd end of taking a hit across the face. As an apt pupil of might is right I would then go out to the garage for a session with the dog. I was often reminded by my mother that the

only reason we had that dog was because it was too inconvenient to get rid of him. He wasn't a welcomed member of the family as some dogs are but was more like that refrigerator that you dump behind the garage because it's just too much effort to do the proper thing and take it to the dump and pay a few bucks to drop it off.

So I, who should have been respected for my intellect but was instead met with violence for expressing it, would take my rage out on the dog. I'd go command that he do something and if I didn't get immediate compliance then he got kicked or hit. Twice he tried to bite me but I took to him with a 2 x 4 each time. He learned to just take it after that. In my late teens I moved on to knives and guns. There were plenty of people who got their opinions readjusted when a knife or gun was pulled out which I was prepared to use. I ended up in prison for over a year and was fortunate enough to be counseled by some sage inmates.

So before using violence for punishment consider the effect that the might is right training may have on a child. Fortunately, I was able to maintain my commitment that if I ever had a child I would love him instead of hitting him – especially if he turned out to be smarter than me.

This is not to say that there is not an appropriate time for spanking a child. My son got my hand across his butt 4 times in his life. All four incidents were one swat each and immediately followed a dangerous action. One was him not following the rule of keeping his hand on the car door handle until I could escort him or let him in. One time he decided to run around the car, as he rounded the front he saw a minivan just beginning to accelerate toward him down the aisle from two spots away. As he abruptly turned he slipped on the wet pavement and slid into the wheel path. The driver stopped about two feet from my son. He took a swat to get his attention – likely unnecessary since the bumper of the van likely already did that. We then discussed why I had that rule. He was able to determine that it may be because I can see over the cars and he cannot. He was not yet age three years when this happened.

In child custody proceedings using violence against children as a form of punishment is going the way of the maternal preference standard. Custody evaluators and other professionals such as myself who provide testimony about parental fitness are rejecting violence against children as a form of punishment. Opposing attorneys are the ones who are most ardent in presenting the court with reports on the adverse effects of physical punishment. As a final caution the standards of acceptable use of force as control devices and punitive measures for children are being tightened by Child Protective Services. Mandatory report laws are bringing about CPS scrutiny of the parents of children who may not accurately articulate the form or “hitting” that was used against them.

Conclusion

When it comes to establishing discipline while co-parenting do not expect nor demand that your methods will be adopted universally. As parents you should work together and independently to mitigate any problems that a dual set of expectations can produce for the child. The child should be reminded of problems areas that he or she has been experiencing in your household. Differing rules should be clearly posted or otherwise made known to the children. The child should have a voice in the process and be the owner of his or her actions. Discipline, although it may require greater patience and a greater investment of time, produces more positive outcomes. Do not undermine the other parent's authority in his or her home. If disagreements over discipline and punishment techniques create difficulties for the children then mediation should be sought.