

# **PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTS -**

MAKING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PRACTICAL FOR FAMILIES



## **PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLINE**

In this newsletter we will provide you with general principles for teaching and instructing your child and adolescent. For all children:

1. Discipline should be appropriate for child's development and temperament.
2. Balance setting limits with demonstrations of your love. Every child needs expressions of love and affection many times a day.
3. Be the leader in your home. Your child will learn from your leadership how to function in society.
4. Accept the fact that there will be conflict between you and your child. This does not mean you are a bad parent!
5. Keep your goals in mind - the development of your child's character traits.
6. Avoid physical and verbal abuse.
7. Avoid extremes of parenting - overly permissive or overly rigid.
8. Discuss your approach to discipline with all of the child's caretakers. Try to avoid disagreeing in front of your child as your leadership will appear weak.
9. Tell your child in advance what behaviors you expect and what the consequences will be for disobedience.
10. Avoid idle threats, bribery, and yelling (which all teach children to ignore or disrespect your leadership).

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Overly harsh or inconsistent discipline has been associated with childhood mental health concerns. *Bayer, JK, et al. Risk factors for childhood mental health symptoms: national longitudinal study of Australian children. Pediatrics. 2011; 128:3865-79.*

But don't fear reprimanding your child or using negative nonverbal responses as these practices have been associated with improved compliance. *Owen DJ, et al. The effect of praise, positive nonverbal response, reprimand, and negative nonverbal response on child compliance: a systematic review. Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev 2012;15:365-85.*



**INFANTS and TODDLERS**



**PRESCHOOLERS**



**ELEMENTARY**



**ADOLESCENTS**

1. Infants and toddlers learn by exploring their world and by copying your behavior. In order to allow your child to explore safely, make sure you have made your home as safe as possible.

2. Limit the number of rules you have for toddlers. The rules should focus on your child's safety.

3. Expect and accept accidents and consequences of normal toddler behavior. Don't expect your toddler to sit still at the restaurant table.

4. Do not "battle" what you cannot win. Since we want children to view their parents as the leader, the person "in charge", be careful to only set rules that you can easily enforce. Never "battle" feeding, sleeping and toilet training. You can use other teaching tools to encourage your child's behavior in these areas, but you should never take them on as "battles" to be won!

5. Do not give lengthy explanations for the rules. Simply say "No hitting" or "Hitting hurts" and then remove your toddler from the situation.

1. Preschoolers are definitely demonstrating their improved ability to communicate, to negotiate and likely to manipulate you. So, this is the time that you can start using language to provide brief explanations for your rules.

2. Allow your child to express his emotions - and, in fact, encourage it and role model it. "I see you are frustrated that I said we cannot go to the park right now."

3. Continue to limit the number of rules, avoid battling what you cannot win. For example, do not argue and battle over mealtimes. Your child can "win" this battle by throwing up the food you have forced her to eat.

4. Assure your child's safety by maintaining a safe environment.

5. Say "Yes", "OK", "I'll think about it" as often as possible. Hearing too many "no" responses may cause your child to become defiant.

6. When correcting your child, use a firm but calm voice.

7. Focus on "catching" your child doing something right - and reinforce it!

Elementary age children are learning how to process more abstract information and how to make decisions based upon values.

1. Have family discussions, especially at meal times, about your family values. Clearly state your expectations - "Lying is unacceptable."

2. Provide opportunities for your elementary age child to problem solve, especially about ethical situations. "Our family could help sort food at the homeless shelter. Do you think we should do that? Why or why not?"

3. Explain how your child's behavior impacts other people. Point out the consequences of ...arriving late at soccer practice or arguing with his teacher.

4. Allow your child to experience consequences of her actions. "Toys left on the floor may be broken."

5. Find opportunities to bring your child into decision-making that will impact her (e.g. choices for dinner or family activities).

Adolescents definitely need your teaching and instruction to help them safely navigate the teen years! However, your role will gradually change as you see your teen demonstrating maturity and responsibility.

In early adolescence, your teen needs you to continue to set limits - but now you can engage him in discussions. What rules might be appropriate? What are the consequences for broken rules? What are appropriate expectations for behavior / for chores? Allowing your teen to help set the rules may help her take responsibility to follow them.

As your teen matures, you should consider allowing him to have additional responsibilities. As he demonstrates that he is responsible, then he is allowed additional privileges.

Ask your teen his opinion on issues such as popular culture, media, and family matters. This helps build mutual respect and confidence

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