

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PARENTS -

MAKING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PRACTICAL FOR FAMILIES



INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLINE

Discipline is often viewed negatively in our society and may be equated with harsh punishment. This is unfortunate because discipline actually comes from the Greek word "to disciple", so the word means "to teach, to instruct, to educate". One of the most important roles of parents is to teach and educate children, instilling character traits that will provide children with the tools to eventually live as successful, responsible, and independent adults. Self-disciplined children even do better in school - so take on the difficult task of disciplining your child and reap the rewards of effective parenting.

Appropriate discipline is dependent upon the child's developmental stage and the child's temperament, and assumes a loving, nurturing relationship between parent and child.

In this newsletter, we will describe the reasons children of each age need parents to set limits and say "no" to them. In future newsletters, we will provide you with general principles of discipline, and then specific teaching tools you can use.

Duckworth AL and Seligman MEP. Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents. *Psychological Science* 2005;15:939-944.

Go to www.physicianscenter.org; Click on Prescriptions for Parents; Click on handouts and see book list for additional resources on discipline.



INFANTS and TODDLERS

For those infants at least 9 months of age:

Several developmental changes are occurring now that make it the right time to start teaching your baby what is correct behavior. Your baby is beginning to develop her own identity. She is realizing that she can become independent by crawling or moving away from you. He learns by exploring his environment, so he is going to check out every part of your home. She is also starting to understand what you say – and can begin to understand the concept of “no” or “stop”. (You may already have noticed this if you have told her not to touch something and saw that she looked at you a little differently.)

Parents are often concerned about using the word “no”. They think if they use the word too often, it will be one of the first words children say back to them. They also worry that they will be stifling or inhibiting their child’s creativity or development. We understand these concerns, but want to reassure you that it is very important for your child to hear you say “no”.

1. Having this concept of “no” actually helps his



PRESCHOOLERS

There are additional benefits to learning the concept of "no" now that your child is older. So many parents think it is their responsibility to make and keep their children happy. Their goal is to maintain their children's smiles and avoid disappointment and frustration at all costs. If we accept the idea that we are responsible for our child's happiness, what are we teaching our child?

We are teaching our child:

- a. to expect immediate gratification
- b. to expect to be entertained
- c. to expect rewards without work
- d. to avoid difficult situations and hard work

However, most parents would say they would hope their children develop personal characteristics such as: perseverance, patience, diligence, and self-reliance.

Children can only develop those traits when they have parents who feel comfortable saying "no". When you set limits on your child's behavior and forbid him from doing something he really wants, you are helping him learn to accept disappointment, handle frustration, and begin to think creatively about other ways he can



ELEMENTARY

Does the elementary age child still need to hear the word "no" and have limits set on his behavior? YES.

Children of this age are developing their ability to process information in a more mature manner. They can recognize similarities and differences in objects and situations, so they begin classifying information. Children also need to learn how to classify their behavior and actions. "Is it good or bad to lie?" "Am I rewarded or punished if I turn in my homework on time?"

Children are also developing their sense of self-esteem. Self-esteem is the way we view ourselves - our competencies and our accomplishments. Self-esteem must be based upon reality as children quickly recognize it if they are praised when they have not worked hard to accomplish a task. Unwarranted praise may actually discourage a child from attempting to learn something new.

Children who have learned to take on a challenge, work hard and persevere are more likely to develop a sense of pride. The "stress" experienced when tackling difficult situations can be positive and help children



ADOLESCENTS

If you have been setting limits with your child, your investment should help you navigate the adolescent years a little more smoothly. We expect all teens to question their parents' authority and rules, so the wise parents will determine which rules are most important and which rules can be relaxed as the teen demonstrates more maturity.

Do teens need you to continue to set limits - or should they be allowed to make all the decisions in their lives?

Teens definitely need you to set limits for them - for many of the same reasons as toddlers!

1. Teens need you to set limits to keep them safe. Just as you would not let your toddler cross the street by herself, so you should not allow your teen to attend an unsupervised party where she could participate in dangerous activities.

2. Teens need you to set limits so they know your values. Teens do better when parents convey their expectations. One study from Columbia University's Center for Alcohol and Substance Abuse found teens much

development.

During the second year of life your child will need to develop more independence as he realizes that he is a different person from you. The best way he can show you that he thinks differently and wants to act differently from you is for him to say “no”.

2. Hearing the word “no” helps her learn what behavior is acceptable and what behaviors she needs to stop.

You may choose another word(s) such as “stop” or “don’t touch”, but the concept of “no” is implied. There is no way to tell your toddler to stop touching something dangerous without having the concept of no.

3. Hearing the word “no” actually enhances your child’s ability to problem solve and be creative.

If your child is told “Don’t touch the hot stove”, then your child will start thinking – “If I can’t touch the stove, what else can I do for fun?” This allows your child to begin to think creatively and problem solve.

4. Hearing the word “no” will help keep your child safe.

Most parents find that they use the word “no” at this age mainly to protect their children from danger.

5. Hearing the word “no” will help your child recognize your leadership as parent.

Your child needs to respect you as the teacher and leader in your home. Then, later on, he will be

entertain himself. These are important skills that will help him be more successful in his relationships with others as well as in his life's work.

Children are also beginning to learn morality / ethics. What is appropriate behavior versus wrong behavior? So this is an important time to teach children your values.

realize their competence.

Setting limits on your child's behavior ultimately helps your child develop characteristics such as perseverance that will allow your child to accomplish more - and feel a better sense of self.

less likely to experiment with marijuana if parents expressed their disapproval.

3. The adolescent brain is "under construction" and the prefrontal cortex which is the CEO of the brain (helping with decision making, strategizing, and planning) is not yet mature. So...adolescents need help making decisions.

(See "The Adolescent Brain" at Prescriptions for Parents at www.physicianscenter.org)

If you have not been setting limits with your child, it will be very difficult to start now. You may need to contact a support group or psychologist to help you change your parenting style and your teen's expectations.

able to respect his teacher
at school and his boss at
work.

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