

## Guiding our Children towards Good Behaviour

### How to set Good Limits for your Child

#### **Explain the limit clearly and check it has been understood**

- Tell the child what they can do, rather than what they can't do. 'Stay inside the fence' is a clearer instruction for a child than 'don't go outside the fence.'
- Children tend not to hear the 'don't' part of an instruction, so rewording an instruction can make it easier for them.
- Always check with a child that they have understood important instructions. Ask them to repeat back to you what you have said so that you are sure they have heard you and know exactly what you mean.

#### **Give simple reasons for setting the limit**

- It's easier for a child to stay within the limits if the parent offers a helpful reason for the instruction.
- A parent might tell a child 'Only play in the garden.' But if the child knows that the limit has been put there to keep them safe and happy, then the child is more likely to obey the instruction, and less likely to rebel against it.

#### **Warn the child when it is getting close to the limits**

- Warn a child gently when he or she is getting close to the limits, in case they haven't noticed how close they are. Try whispering a warning to them instead of shouting at them, and they may be more likely to respond positively.

### What happens when a limit has been overstepped?

#### **How did the child cross the limit?**

- **Is the child old enough to understand the limit?** It's not very helpful to tell a one-year-old child not to go near the steps, if he doesn't really know what steps are, or what happened if you fall down them. It's better to put up a barrier to stop the child going near the steps. If a child is too young to understand the limit, the discipline won't make any sense to him at all. If he falls down the steps and hurts himself, and then receives a spanking from an angry parent, instead of the comfort he needs, he may become frightened and confused.
- **Is the child's body skilled enough to stay within the limit?** Small children will spill and drop things, because they are still learning how to manage their own limbs, and they don't understand things like gravity, or what happens when you knock over a cup of water. Accidents happen, often because we haven't arranged the environment in a very child-friendly way. When a child spills something accidentally, respond just the way you would treat your boss if he came to dinner and spilled his drink!
- **Did the parent push the child over the limit by being inconsiderate of the child's needs?** Children get tired and hungry and thirsty. If too much is happening around them they may become over-stimulated and

miserable. If a parent is busy, a child may do something unusual, or even 'naughty' to attract the parent's attention. Before punishing a child, consider how you might have prevented the behaviour, or even how you might have contributed to the behaviour. If so, apologise to the child and take care of the immediate need.

- **Did the child cross the limit deliberately to challenge you?** This is the action that needs careful discipline and handling.

#### **Discipline must be:**

- Prayerful - pray for yourself and your child as you consider the discipline required. God and the Holy Spirit can do so much for our children that we can't always do ourselves.
- Explained clearly and calmly so that it is understood by the child
- In proportion to the mistake.
- Realistic – the natural consequences of their actions are often the best learning experiences for children. Natural consequences are not a punishment; they are to help a child understand that they have choices and those choices have consequences. Ultimately, using natural consequences leads to self-discipline and increased responsibility.
- Creative – it may be easy to resort to a good spanking, because that's what you experienced as a child. But there are many other ways to discipline a child without physical punishment. Creative discipline takes thought, but it is much more effective in the long-term.
- Appropriate for the age of the child.
- Kept short, so it can be put behind the child and not be brought up again in the future. Tomorrow is a new day with a fresh start.
- Decided with the child. Children can be involved in working out what the consequences of their actions are going to be.
- Consistent – children need to know that parents say what they mean.
- Private – if you need to discipline your child, do so privately, and avoid doing so in front of their brothers and sisters. Children love to gloat over other's punishments.
- Balanced by an expression of forgiveness, and the reconciliation of the child with the parents.
- Grace-filled – occasionally parents can take the punishment for the child, to set a Christ-like example, and to help the children understand what Jesus did for them, too

#### **Using Natural Consequences to Guide a Child**

- When a parent sets limits for a child, the child has a choice. He can live within those limits or over-step them.
- The limits have been set to help keep the child safe and happy, and to help the family to function smoothly.
- When a child chooses to behave outside these limits, there are natural consequences. As parents, we may often feel like we want to protect our children from the natural consequences, but letting a child live with his choices can be the best way to help him learn.
- If a child stays up too late playing, is tired the next morning and is running late for school, he may need to be allowed to be late for school one day,

and bear the consequences. If the parent drives him to school so he won't be late, the child learns that it doesn't matter if he stays up late, in fact he might get a lift to school, rather than having to walk.

- If a child doesn't come home in time to eat supper with the family, she needs to make her own food if she's old enough, rather than expect the family to wait for her.
- If a child breaks something on purpose, and you know it's not an accident, the natural consequence is that they need to help repair the damage, or pay towards the cost.
- Physical punishment doesn't encourage children to mature and become responsible. It may teach them to conform out of fear, or to lie to avoid the punishment, or the child may become resentful.
- Using natural consequences stresses that the child needs to take responsibility for his or her own actions. A physical punishment place control in the hands of the parents, and doesn't encourage the child to consider the practical consequences of his or her actions.

Children need to be told what they **can** do, not just what they **can't** do!

When a child loses control, make sure you don't join him!

Children who are disciplined with violence, will learn to be violent.  
Children who are disciplined with love, will learn how to love.

Seen on a teenagers badge, 'I'm bored; forbid me to do something!'

Physical punishment is about controlling your children through fear.  
But 'there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.' 1 John 4:18, NIV.

Limits without a loving relationship equals rebellion.  
Limits within a loving relationship equals respect.

Fathers (and mothers) do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. Colossians 3:21.

Teach your children good moral behaviour. The Ten Commandments are an excellent basis for good moral teaching. Give positive reasons for moral behaviour, basing your reasons on the overriding principles of loving God, loving other people, and loving yourself as well.

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