

DISCIPLINE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



The scriptures command parents to raise children in the training and instruction of the Lord. We begin “training” a child from a very young age by the ways we respond to their actions and attitudes. The primary purpose of discipline is to consistently direct your child toward right relationships with God and others. Several practices contribute to that process.

PRACTICE ONE

Establish Your Authority

Children need a clear answer to the question “Who is the boss?” Mom and Dad embody the security and limits that come from submitting ourselves to a loving heavenly Father. God has delegated oversight of your child’s welfare and development to you, placing you in a position of authority over them.

Starting when children are very young, parents need to model clarity and consistency. Unclear rules and sporadic reinforcement breed insecurity. You must say what you mean, mean what you say and act upon it. Don’t overlook defiant behavior just because the specific issue seems minor, or because it is a hassle to stop and discipline at the moment. Children are commanded to obey their parents and parents to train their children even when it is inconvenient to do so (Colossians 3:20-21).

PRACTICE TWO

Discipline Rather Than Punish

Punishment is negative, making someone pay for what they’ve done. Discipline is positive – training toward a better future. Like touching a hot stove, we learn from the consequences of our actions. Discipline in childhood helps children avoid “learning the hard way” later in life.

Many parents ask about the use of spanking to help shape a child’s will. The scriptures teach that “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15, 13:24 and 29:15). Administering “the rod” apart from biblical principles, however, can cause more harm than good. Corporal discipline should only be used within guidelines such as those offered by Christian parenting experts. Several of the books listed under “Going Further Resources” can help you learn to apply different methods of discipline in healthy and productive ways.

Regardless of which form of discipline you use, the key is consistency. As author Ginger Plowman explains, it is not the severity of punishment but the “certainty of consequence” that makes the difference.

God holds parents accountable for how they use the authority He has given them. The scriptures instruct parents not to “exasperate” or “embitter” their children (Colossians 3:21). Do not treat childish immaturity

the same as willful defiance. Parents should never discipline children out of embarrassment, frustration or anger. Accidentally spilling the milk or waking the baby is not an occasion for stern discipline. But ignoring direct disobedience can make a child vulnerable to an ongoing spirit of rebellion.

Parents are called to protect their children from the ruin of an undisciplined life and point them to their need for a Savior (Proverbs 23:14 and Romans 3:22-24). Ultimately, the discipline you apply should be used in a way that restores right relationships. It should provide a consequence that leads the child to repentance (sorrow for their wrong behavior) and restoration of the relationship with God, mom, dad and others.

PRACTICE THREE

Lovingly Instruct

Starting in the preschool years discipline and instruction should become a package deal (Ephesians 6:4). We often make the mistake of allowing our desire for changed behavior to replace our desire for a changed heart. Use simple probing questions and share specific scriptures about wrong choices to instruct your child toward repentance. After disciplining a 2-year-old temper tantrum, for example, you might explain that "God wants us to obey." With a 4-year-old you can go further, explaining self-control, reading Titus 2:6 and asking the child "Do you think that you were self-controlled or out-of-control?" Such loving instruction after discipline helps train your son or daughter to think like a follower of Christ rather than merely behave in order to avoid punishment.

GOING FURTHER RESOURCES

SHEPHERDING A CHILD'S HEART by Tedd Tripp

Gives parents a biblical perspective on correction.

DON'T MAKE ME COUNT TO THREE by Ginger Plowman

Helps parents of younger children handle disobedience.

THE NEW STRONG-WILLED CHILD: BIRTH THROUGH ADOLESCENCE by Dr. James Dobson

Designed to teach parents, grandparents, or anyone who works with children how to help parents deal with willful defiance.

HAVE A NEW KID BY FRIDAY by Kevin Leman

Gives practical tools for redirecting a pre-teen's behaviors and attitudes..

GOING FURTHER SUPPORT

HILL COUNTRY CHILDREN

Hill Country Bible Church. Church offers a variety of programs that come alongside parents in their effort to instill faith in children. We are committed to pour in to the next generation by partnering with families to teach children the truth about God that are fun, safe, and engaging. For more info, please visit hcbc.com/children

COUNSELING AT HILL COUNTRY

Hill Country Bible Church has the vision to offer professional counseling along with excellent pastoral care to help those in need find an anchor to weather the storms of life. Life's burdens can be so heavy to carry at times, and we find ourselves needing support and guidance. As a ministry of Hill Country Bible Church, we want to come alongside you in your time of need and embrace the power of community on the road of healing. For more information, please visit hcbc.com/counseling