

GETTING IN TOUCH



We need to give corrections/ instructions to our children, but it is a pity if **most** of what we say is correcting, instructing, etc. See if you agree with the way the first six sentences below are marked; then see if you can mark numbers 7-12, using one **each** of the letters opposite:

1. "Leave the baby alone. Don't do that to her!" C
2. "I know why Andrew's crying – because you hit him!" A
3. "Put that down. It's dirty." I
4. "Are you stupid? How often do you have to be told?" P
5. "Do it fast – or you'll be sorry!" T
6. "It's going to rain today. There's a strong wind blowing." O

C (for Correction),
A (for Accusation),
I (for Instruction),
P (for Put-down),
T (for Threat),
O (Open statement that is none of these)

- __ 7. "Stop it. That's dangerous!"
- __ 8. "Would you shut up! – you never stop moaning!"
- __ 9. "If you don't get back into bed, you'll get a smack!"
- __ 10. "I wonder if Gran will arrive in time for dinner?"
- __ 11. "Now, close the door behind you, and pick up your Teddy."
- __ 12. "That's a lie!"

CASE STUDIES



1. What are some **unhelpful** ways to correct a child in the situations below?
 - Your son puts his head down and won't look at people you meet.
 - Your daughter doesn't come when called for dinner.
 - Toys are left scattered all over the floor.
 - You're preparing dinner and the children's noise is too loud for you.
 - Your toddler is whinging all day but won't play with anything.
2. How could you speak respectfully to your child in each of the situations above? If you can think of an 'I' message, saying what you feel or need, all the better. (For example, in the first two situations you might say, **a**) "When you put your head down like that and don't look at people, I feel disappointed because people won't know how friendly you are." and **b**) (calmly – at least not aggressively) "I've spent a lot of time preparing dinner, and it makes me mad when you don't come."

PLANNING

Would you like to choose one of the following ways to talk more positively and respectfully with your child(ren) this week?



1. What is your worst time of the day for scolding/ speaking aggressively? What might help? – Get up earlier?... Think ahead?...
2. Babies may not understand *words*, but they certainly 'understand' your tone of voice and your undivided attention. When will you set a few minutes aside this week to talk to a baby or other child, giving positive, focused attention? What will you talk about?
3. How will you speak more *personally* over the next week – not just to your children but to a mother, partner, friend, workmate... Include *encouraging* 'I' messages as well.

My plans _____

• Please read chapter five of your handbook before the next session.

CHAPTER 5: DISCIPLINE

"You can clear up your toys now, Nicholas. It will soon be story-time."

What Annette was asking was not unreasonable, for she had taken time to teach three-year-old Nicholas to tidy away his toys, and he was usually quite good at it.

"No. I'll leave them on the floor," he said, "I'll play with them in the morning."

"That's not one of your choices," Annette said. "the floor has to be tidied. If you don't tidy the toys, I'll have to tidy them myself instead of reading you a story."

You could see Nicholas thinking. He looked at his mother intently for a moment, and then continued to play. He played quietly, perhaps hoping his mother would forget. After a while, she took him to his room, settled him to bed, kissed him, and said in a friendly tone:

"I'll go and tidy your toys now, and you can have a story tomorrow night."

Nicholas threw a tantrum and screamed, hoping Annette would change her mind, but she simply left the room. Shortly afterwards, she came back to check on him and found him asleep.

Next day, he made no objections to tidying his toys before bedtime.



"You can clear up your toys now."

Effective and respectful

In this incident, Nicholas had learnt that there were clear boundaries and limits in his world, he had even tested the limits to see if they were firm, and he now felt more secure. **When children know you mean what you say, life is easier and more peaceful all round** – including for themselves.

Annette has not used any of the common ways of 'disciplining' children which hassled parents tend to fall back on – coaxing, bribing, making decisions on the hop, reminding, nagging, making empty threats, shouting, scolding, smacking... What has she done instead? Quite simply, she has offered her son a choice – to tidy up or do without a bedtime story. And she has respected his decision, allowing him to live with the consequences of what he has chosen. **Allowing children to make choices (within limits) and to live with the consequences is a respectful, effective method of discipline.**

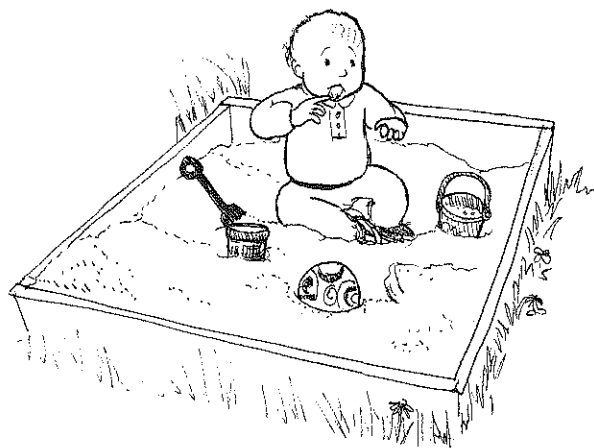
This is not the *only* effective and respectful method. We have been learning about effective methods of discipline in every chapter of this book – ignoring some misbehaviours, avoiding unnecessary confrontation, encouraging, listening, making time for guidance, allowing a child to express feelings that are controlling her, giving an I-message, speaking in a respectful, non-aggressive voice – and, possibly most effective of all, making time to pay positive, focused attention to a child. All of these skills are part of good discipline. But parents will not be effective if they do not set *limits* as well as showing affection.

Learning from consequences

That is what is different with this method of discipline. Many parents make threats about what will happen if a child does not go to sleep, does not eat, does not stop squabbling... Quite often, they do not follow through on what they say. They talk, but they do not act! A child quickly

learns that he can ignore these empty threats.

When children have to live with consequences, however, they experience the security of firm boundaries; they learn about the real world, and they become more responsible. Adults are constantly learning from consequences: when they overspend, or drink too much, or forget something, or drive carelessly. They learn because they are not protected from consequences. Responsibility increases with practice in making decisions and learning from the good and bad consequences that result. Here is an example.



she decided to taste the sand again

One-year-old Orla enjoys playing in the sandpit her father has made for her outside the back door. When she put some sand in her mouth recently, he lifted her into the house, wiped the sand away, and let her play on the living-room floor, ignoring her tears and screams to get outside. After a minute or so, he carried her to the sand again. She played quietly for a while, then decided to taste the sand again. Within seconds, she was hoisted out of the sand, had her mouth wiped, and again found herself on the floor of the living room. It was five minutes before she was allowed back to the sand this time – and ten minutes the next time. Gradually, she began to get the message that eating sand had unpleasant consequences for her. Babies may not

understand words, but can still learn from the consequences of their choices!

Being removed is a choice

But Orla did not have a choice, you may argue. Her father had removed her from the sand each time without consulting her. This is true. If Orla had been older, it would have been respectful to say, "If you put sand in your mouth again, I'll have to take you inside," but she was too young to understand. Yet, she was learning fast that she *did* have a choice: play in the sand without putting it in your mouth, or else be removed. She was learning this without nagging, scolding, punishing, or any of the other ways in which undue attention is paid to unacceptable behaviour.

We see from this example that **allowing children to live with consequences does not mean allowing them to live with danger to themselves or others.** There is no way you can allow a toddler to learn from the consequences of running across a busy street! Where the safety of your child or other people is concerned, choices may not be practicable – if a child of fifteen months has discovered how to open the garden gate or the baby seat fastener, you have no choice but to find a way of making him safe – perhaps talking with other parents or experimenting until you find a solution. It is important, then, to childproof children's surroundings as much as possible, so that they have a relatively safe area in which to be free to explore and play – that also means you will not be forever saying 'no.' It is impossible, however, to remove all hazards, whether it be the coal bucket or an electric socket or whatever. In these cases, small children can learn from the consequences of a very limited choice – limit your activity or be removed to a playpen or another room! This also applies to any dangerous or anti-social behaviour your child attempts – biting, hitting, spitting, throwing a tantrum in a shop, and so on. A mother in a parent support group told recently of how sobering it was for her son when she removed him from a shop and did not buy him shoes because he had

thrown a tantrum to try to persuade her to buy him sandals instead. When she took him back a few days later, he knew what the limits were and did not protest.

Offering choices

The secret of helping children learn from consequences is to **follow through on what you say you will do, to act more and speak less.** (Many of us pay *attention* to misbehaviour by saying too much and follow through far too little.) Sometimes this will mean removing the child from a dangerous situation so that she learns from the consequences that this behaviour is not acceptable. At other times, it will mean respecting the child's choice not to eat at a particular meal – but following through by not giving him dessert. If you offer a choice, it is important to allow the child to experience the results of his choice. When you say "I'll give it to you when you ask pleasantly," you can then ignore the child's requests until he does speak respectfully or pleasantly. When you say, "The noise is giving me a headache, so if you want to make noise, you'll have to go outside," you will then need to follow through on that if the noise continues, perhaps by offering another choice – "Okay, you have obviously decided you'd prefer to go outside – do you want me to carry you, or will you go yourself?"

Can you see how effective a choice is in winning a child's co-operation? **You can wear yourself out trying to get children to do things until you discover the magic of offering a limited choice.** A choice *involves* a child because it gives *her* some say in the decisions that affect her. When she is reluctant to get ready for bed, you can say, "Do you want to wear your nightie or your pyjamas?" When he wants to go outside but refuses to put on his coat, you can say, "Do you want to put on your coat and go out to the garden, or do you want to stay inside?" When he wants to take all his toys to his friend's, he may have a tantrum if you say, "You can take only one toy," but he is more likely to be co-operative when you say, "You can take only one toy – do

you want to take your ball or your book?" Similarly, instead of trying to discipline a 'picky' child during a meal, you might serve only a small portion to begin with, involving the child in eating by offering a limited choice *before* the meal – but don't get hooked into widening the choice! "I have sausages, beans and toast. What would you like?" or perhaps, "Do you want a big spoonful of beans or a small spoonful?" You can even involve a child who regularly delays over a choice and keeps you dangling by quietly saying, "If you can't decide quickly, I'll have to decide for you this time." But watch your tone of voice. Don't spoil it all by speaking impatiently!

We'll look at another example.

Dealing with squabbling

Six-year-old Josh Baker and his four-year-old brother, Angelo, squabbled a lot. When they were angry with each other, they nipped and pulled hair and thumped and could be quite violent, though they had never caused any serious injury. Their parents had often 'taken the bait' by paying attention to this misbehaviour, shouting at their children, threatening them, sometimes being drawn into taking sides.

Mr and Mrs Baker now wanted to stop rewarding the squabbling, so they told the boys to settle their own rows in future, and they then ignored fighting unless there seemed to be genuine danger. That had worked. The squabbling continued, but the parents felt more at peace, knowing that squabbling is pretty normal, perhaps even necessary for some children. One day, however, the fighting was serious, things got out of hand, and the parents felt they needed to intervene. The fight had started over who could play with a lorry, so Mr Baker now confiscated the lorry and spoke with them. He was deliberately calm as he spoke, and with no hint of punishment in what he said. "You can have the lorry back as soon as you come to an agreement about sharing it." Faced with the consequence of doing without the lorry, the boys quickly decided who would play with the lorry first.

Using consequences is not punishment

We see from this story that a choice is best presented in a positive, friendly manner – not as a punishment, and not in an aggressive tone of voice. Mr Baker did not speak *negatively* “No – you can’t have the lorry until you settle your differences.” Instead, he spoke *positively*, using the ‘as soon as’ approach. In this way, a choice may not even *sound* like a choice: “Yes, you may watch TV as soon as you have tidied away your toys.”/ “Yes, you can go out to play as soon as you’ve said sorry to Jessica.”/ “Yes, you can have your dessert as soon as you’ve eaten three more spoonfuls.” These are limited choices, but at least you are not insisting on your own way, and you are giving a child dignity and respect.

It was also important that Mr Baker spoke calmly, for *how* we speak can make all the difference. If children hear an apologetic tone in your voice, that will often provoke further demands as they struggle to find the limits that offer them security. A punishing, aggressive tone, on the other hand, will often provoke a power struggle. **When you speak calmly and confidently, your child will tend to be more accepting.**



“as soon as you come to an agreement”

Another way to make sure that you do not use consequences as punishment is to try, when possible, to **let the consequence flow naturally or logically out of the situation.** If Mr Baker had said, “Right, neither of you will have pocket-money this week,” or “Okay, that’s it, you’re both going to bed earlier tonight,” these might have been felt as punishments, because there is no obvious connection between them and the squabbling. Only if the boys had *broken* something should they have had to do without pocket money – in order to *pay* for it. If they had got up at six in the morning, they might have had to go to bed early that evening to make up for their loss of sleep. These would then have been logical consequences of their actions, and not punishments.

Time out

But what would have happened if the two boys had gone off, still angry with each other, and a savage row had broken out? **For extremely disruptive behaviour, parents will occasionally need to use more drastic action – like ‘time out.’** In this case, ‘time out’ might mean separating Josh and Angelo and removing them to somewhere boring to give them a few minutes to cool down and think about what to do instead. ‘Somewhere boring’ might be just inside the back door and just inside the front door. If you leave one of them in the room where the fight started, that may seem like taking sides.

For a small child, ‘time out’ usually involves removing him for a few minutes to a room with no distractions (preferably not his own bedroom), or to a special, hard ‘time out’ chair. There, he has time to think about what is happening. The child will sometimes need to be brought back to the chair as gently and respectfully as possible, even firmly (but again gently) *held* in the chair for the few minutes – and returned to the chair for a longer period if he continues to be disruptive. If he cries, a parent might stay with him, giving good attention (and thus dealing with the underlying cause). All this is demanding

on a parent, but ‘time out’ is so boring for children that they soon learn from the consequences that disruptive behaviour does not pay. It is another example of more action and less talking – but going on about it, preaching or teaching the lesson, may only draw attention to the misbehaviour. It also helps to remember that children are different, so something like ‘time out’ may help one child to learn but may not help another child.

Talking it out in advance

‘Time out’ is not recommended as a normal method of discipline – it is only used when things have got completely out of hand – and when you have explained the rules in advance. Indeed, **it helps to talk out any form of discipline with children so that you are not reacting on the spot, they know what to expect, and they have time to adjust to the limits.**

When you are under pressure, then, which is when you are most likely to make snap decisions and discipline poorly, you could try withdrawing from a power-struggle and postponing your decision: “I’m not sure what to do about this. I’ll have to think about it and talk to you later.” That may help you to be more flexible, not just insisting on things because your parents did it this way, or “because I say so.” When you have decided on the limits, it is good to give your child *reasons* for them, and *then* to be firm and consistent.

Discipline becomes easier when you have thought about it, talked about it beforehand, and children are prepared. When they know in advance that they will not be taken out shopping the next time if they start screaming for sweets at the cash desk, your trip will be easier. When they know in advance that their playmates will have to leave your house as soon as fighting starts, they soon learn to co-operate.

Taking time to prepare children for something will often win their co-operation. Bedtime, for example, becomes a more pleasant routine when you prepare your child for it, maybe an hour

beforehand, by saying something like: “Bedtime is coming soon, so you’ll be having a nice warm bath, and then we’ll have a story and a cuddle and a lovely rest.” When you rush a child, you can easily cause confrontation and upset. It is so much better to say, “We’ll be going down town in ten minutes” than to say, “Quickly! Go to the toilet and get your coat on!” Better still if you add something like, “If you’re ready in time, we’ll be able to visit granny/ feed the ducks.” Sometimes, though, preparing is as simple as remembering to bring along a few toys to the dentist’s or doctor’s waiting room to help your child cope with boredom or anxiety. A gardener knows that the key to success is to prepare the ground well for planting. In the same way, thinking ahead, or preparing children, helping them know what to expect, can make discipline easier – and it lessens the chance that you will end up resorting to emotional or physical abuse.

Self-discipline

That raises the question of *self-discipline*, including controlling your temper and not exposing a young child to strong, scary feelings. This is so important because **disciplining children is all about helping them learn to become self-disciplined**, so that they can increasingly make responsible decisions for *themselves*. A parent’s self-discipline provides them with a model.

Self-discipline is also important because offering choices will not work unless we have the discipline to be firm and consistent in following through on consequences. That can be difficult. We want to be liked, perhaps to give a child almost everything she wants. We may be nervous of letting her suffer consequences or experience limits. “Let him eat what he likes, and whenever he likes. Let her go to bed when it suits her. Let him watch TV if that’s what makes him happy. Give her treats on demand.” But this ‘no limits’ mentality can do damage. **Misbehaviour needs to be interrupted, and misbehaving children will kick harder and misbehave more in their search for limits**

and firmness. We (and our children) will end up paying for the lack of limits now and in the future unless we are prepared to resist the pressure to be 'nice guy' parents. Isn't it better that your child battles with limits and throws tantrums at the age of three than at forty-three!

Now, no one is totally consistent. Some days, you will feel stressed and under pressure. When you are under the weather or having a bad day, it is okay if you let go of the rules and allow your children to do things you would not normally allow them to do – as long as the general *pattern* is consistent. Being sometimes relaxed about your rules should not be a cause for guilt – parents carry enough guilt already!



'time out'

When others disagree with you

Another place you can model self-discipline is in your relationship with other adults. If you have a partner, or if you live with a parent or in-law, do you take time to talk about who will do what tasks and what you expect of each other? Your planning can include anything from baby-sitting arrangements to the sharing of tasks. There are no rules about what is right for a woman to do, or what is right for a man; what matters is that neither of you is

overburdened or feels hard done by. There is a different atmosphere in a home where these areas of tension are talked out. And it is good for your children to *know* that you talk out limits and rules for yourself.

That is not always easy. Friends, parents, in-laws, or a partner may be uncooperative. How do you cope then? Or when these people disapprove of your methods of discipline? Or when they use methods that threaten to undermine yours? With a little thought and adaptation, however, **all the methods in this course can also work with other adults** – listening, encouraging, not taking the bait, using 'I' messages, using consequences... You can afford to allow a certain amount of leeway to grandparents and others who have a different style to yours. If you are separated, and the children spend weekends with a 'nice' parent who does not set limits, that becomes more difficult. In some cases, you may need to talk to the other parent – though children soon get used to what each parent expects.

In dealing with another adult, as in dealing with a child, you will not always 'win' or get your own way. As you become more comfortable with these skills, and more respectful, however, everyone stands to gain, including yourself. Your confidence will often impress even your critics and leave them more open to you.

Summing up

Discipline is not about coaxing or forcing children to do what we want them to do. It is about helping them learn *self*-discipline, and especially helping them through the rough patches they meet in their development. All the skills in this book contribute to good discipline. They provide children with two great needs: limits on their misbehaviour, and affection. In this chapter we have concentrated on how to help them learn from the consequences of their own choices.

When there is danger, or when the behaviour is totally unacceptable, we may need to remove a child rather than offer a choice – although even here there is scope

for limited choices, "Do you want me to carry you, or do you want to go yourself?"

In general, however, it is good to be flexible and not to have too many rules. We avoid humiliating a child or engaging in power struggles by offering a choice. "If you throw bread on the floor again, I'll have to take away your food." This often diffuses a situation and allows a child to keep his dignity by making a different choice. If your two-year-old decides to test the limits, for example by deliberately dropping a piece of bread on the floor after being given a choice, he then experiences the consequences by having the food removed. Tears may follow as he continues to test the limits and see if you will change your mind – but the great thing about offering choices is that there is

flexibility, you can usually offer *another* choice, "If you pick up the piece of bread and put it in the kitchen bin, you can have your food back." There is no hint of punishment here. When offering a choice, parents avoid 'punishing' by linking the child's behaviour with a logical or natural consequence, and by speaking in a calm, friendly voice. This is a respectful, effective way of helping children gradually learn self-discipline.

But perhaps the greatest discipline of all is the one we have continually come back to throughout this book – making time for giving positive, loving attention to a child. This 'quality time' has such a powerful effect on children and their behaviour that we will be devoting the next chapter entirely to it.

TABLE 5: DISCIPLINE

*Below are some suggested ways of using consequences, but they are only suggestions – each situation and child is different. Note the absence of nagging or scolding. Do any of the examples remind you of situations **you** need to deal with?*

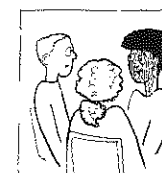
| BEHAVIOUR | USING CONSEQUENCES | EFFECT |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Baby eats sand/ touches electric socket. | Calmly remove to playpen for short time. If behaviour is repeated, leave in playpen for longer time. Remain calm, ignoring tantrum. | Baby learns to play harmlessly, without undue attention. |
| 2. Children squabbling in kitchen. | Offer choice: <i>Do you want to squabble up in the bedroom or play quietly here?</i> Then, if necessary: <i>Do you want me to carry you up to the bedroom, or to go yourselves?...</i> | Children learn to make choices – <u>and</u> they keep their dignity. |
| 3. Gary won't eat his cereal – he wants toast instead. | You will usually know if this is just attention seeking. If so, say he can have toast when he <i>finishes</i> the cereal. No snacks between meals if he doesn't eat – he lives with consequences. | Gary stops using meals as battlefield – and life becomes easier for parents! |
| 4. Imani cries whenever limits are imposed. | It won't usually help to say <i>Stop crying</i> . Try comforting her with a hug (but don't push). Be relaxed about tears and <i>allow</i> her to cry. Hold to your position, however. | Imani feels security of limits – but also freedom to express feelings. |
| 5. Mary gets up out of bed after you have settled her. | Try: <i>No bedtime story tomorrow evening if you get up again – you decide.</i> Or: <i>Bed earlier tomorrow if you get up again.</i> But <i>follow through</i> on what you say you'll do. | This will often solve the problem – and she learns that you mean what you say. |
| 6. Carlos won't let you brush his teeth. | Offer choice between having teeth brushed and giving up sweet things. He may hold out for a few days until he's convinced you mean it. Avoid any hint of 'punishment.' | Takes responsibility for teeth – and sees link between sweets and tooth decay. |
| 7. Nia doesn't come when called. | Give advance warning – '5 minutes to go.' Then offer choice – "Do you want to come or be carried?" Or "Come in time or do without dinner/ eat it cold." If she throws tantrum, hold her to prevent damage, or remove her to safe room. Try to stay calm. | Nia free to off load feelings – but gets the message. Fewer tantrums – as they no longer work. |
| 8. Jim throws tantrum at supermarket sweet counter. | Parent doesn't give in – or there'll be a successful tantrum at every sweet counter – but Jim is not allowed to go shopping next time unless he agrees to "no sweets." | Jim learns boundaries. |
| 9. Jane leaves her toys scattered on the floor. | She is not allowed her next treat – bedtime story, television, or whatever – until she clears up. (But parent 'helps' her clear up if there are a lot of toys – or very strong objections.) | Jane learns to take responsibility for her own 'mess.' |

GETTING IN TOUCH



*Tick any of the situations in Table 5 that remind you of situations that **you** would like to deal with? (If that does not help you to get in touch with a situation, you could also look at the list of behaviours that annoy or upset parents in the Getting in Touch section at the end of chapter one.)*

CASE STUDIES



1. *How would you cope with a child who has started spitting at people? Which of the following choices might work best? Or is there another choice?...*
 - A. Tell the child, "If you do that again, I'll have to remove you."
 - B. Tell the child, "If you want to stay here, you can't spit; if you want to spit, you can spit in the washbasin in the bathroom."
 - C. Ask, "Do you want to say sorry for spitting at George, or do you want to go up to the bedroom?"
 - D. Ask child "Do you want to leave the room or do you want **me** to remove you?"
2. *Which of the following choices might work for a two-year-old girl who refuses to put on her coat? Would you be prepared to let her live with the consequences?*
 - A. Tell the child, "If you don't put your coat on, you can't go outside to play."
 - B. Let her choose for today, and see if she learns from the consequence: "Okay, you don't have to, but it's cold outside, and I'm putting on my coat."
 - C. Ask, "Do you want to put on your coat, or will I put it on for you?"
3. *What choices or consequences might be suitable for a behaviour problem **you** have to deal with? – Table 5 may give you some ideas. Can you think of a respectful way of offering the choice? And how might you allow the child to live with the consequences?*

PLANNING



Think of *one* behaviour you need to deal with at present. For a baby, you will not be able to use a choice – you may just need to be gentle but firm about bedtime, baths, nappy-changing, or whatever – but how will you offer an older child a choice, and what consequences might help the child to learn that the limits are to be taken seriously? How could you present this as a *choice* rather than as a punishment? Where and when will you do this? With which child?...

My plans _____

- *Please read chapter six of your handbook before the next session.*