Common Discipline Problems Of Elementary School Children And How to Deal With Them
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Discipline Dilemma #4: Misbehavior at School

**Smart Solution:** For exhausted parents, it’s tempting to want to “clock out” during school hours and let your child’s teacher handle whatever discipline issues arise. But maintaining good, effective discipline means that you need to be on top of your child’s behavior wherever she is. Here are some ways to handle—at home—behavioral issues that crop up at school:

- **Enforce consequences.** Even if your child’s misbehavior at school resulted in punishment (such as the loss of a recess), it’s still appropriate for there to be a follow-up penalty at home (for example, a one-day grounding).

- **Talk with your child about acceptable classroom behavior.** She’s dealing with lots of different kids in lots of situations, but the same basic rules should apply: no hitting, no name-calling, etc.

- **Demonstrate to your child that you and her teacher are a team.** Communicate regularly with the school about ongoing discipline issues (ask for weekly reports, if necessary) and make sure she understands that misbehavior at school, just like misbehavior at home, will not be tolerated.

Discipline Dilemma #5: Sibling Rivalry

**Smart Solution:** Do your kids go together like kerosene and matches? Worse, do you wish they got along that well? Even though their sibling rivalry is a natural (if dreadful) phenomenon, it doesn’t have to turn your home into a war zone. To implement a cease-fire, try these strategies:

- **Don’t take your children’s arguing too seriously, assuming there is no blood shed.** Yes, you must intervene if they’re out of control or hitting, but if they’re simply bickering, stay out of it.

- **Don’t take sides if you’re not sure what happened.** If both parties are being cantankerous, send them to their separate corners (or rooms) until things cool down.

- **Remove the touchstones that set them off.** Do your kids always fight over what TV show to watch after dinner? Impose a one-week, post-dinner, TV-free period. If the temporary blackout doesn’t encourage them to get along, make it permanent.

**Real Life Remedy:** “One of the best discipline tips I learned from a mother of older kids was—when my kids got into elementary school—to make a no-TV policy on weekdays,” says a mom of three. “Yes, sometimes my kids whine that this is mean and all of their friends are allowed [to watch TV], but I tell them that their childhood is short and I want them to know each other well.”

Discipline Dilemma #6: Chores

**Smart Solution:** Believe it or not, most kids aren’t born with the urge to vacuum, feed the cat or empty the dishwasher. Still, helping around the house is an important way for children to learn responsibility (and to realize that they’re vital parts of the family). Here are some ideas for keeping your children’s chore-related crises to a minimum:

- **Designate a weekly chore time.** Whether it’s Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning, schedule a regular period when the whole family tackles the big jobs—such as mopping the floor and dusting the furniture.

- **Give your child real responsibility, not busywork.** Let her discover that her effort at setting the table means that the family gets to sit down together to a meal. Don’t give her pointless tasks that otherwise wouldn’t need doing.

- **Provide clear instructions.** Instead of saying, “Clean your room,” try, “Toss your dirty clothes in the hamper, make your bed and put away your books.” Once she completes the task, don’t redo it for her.
Discipline Dilemma #10: Whining and Begging

Smart Solution: If you thought whining (and its evil twin, begging) was for toddlers and preschoolers only, think again. At times, that annoying whimpering sound seems like the universal language of childhood. To make your home as whine-free as possible, try these ideas:

- Don’t give in. If your child consistently begs or whines, it might be because it’s working. If whining gets her what she wants, she’ll keep it in her arsenal.
- Be clear about your expectations. If today’s errand-running absolutely will not include a trip to the park, tell your child before you set foot in the car. “We’re only going to the grocery store today, but we may stop at the playground tomorrow.”
- Tune it out. As with backtalk, it’s often best to ignore whining. Paying attention to it will only encourage your child to keep it up (and will likely drive you crazy).

Appropriate Penalties

According to a 2002 study by Columbia University’s National Center for Children in Poverty, the more a child is spanked, the more likely he is to act aggressively and misbehave again. Instead, try these consequences when your child misbehaves:

- Time-out or grounding.
- Extra chores.
- Loss of privileges (for example, no computer, no skateboard).
- Silence. Used occasionally, a little “silent treatment” can be highly effective.
- The Look. The one that means your child had better knock it off. Now.

Real Life Remedy: Our basic discipline rule is that we do the ‘cause-effect’ rule,” explains a mother of two. “Take, for example, my son. He knows that if he watches a forbidden TV show, a logical consequence could be that he loses all his TV privileges for a week. Whenever possible, rely on natural consequences. That is, let your child observe (and endure) the results of his actions. The less often you rescue him—such as by always running his forgotten homework to school—the sooner he’ll see the value in being conscientious.

Phrases to Use Every Day

Looking for easy ways to boost your child’s self-esteem and reinforce his good behavior? Try using some of these phrases—as suggested by the National PTA—at least once a day:

- Thank you.
- You can do it.
- How can I help?
- Good job.
- I love you.

Natural vs. Logical Consequences

There are two types of consequences, natural and logical. Natural consequences, which require no intervention from you, are like automatic penalties. For instance, if your child leaves his bike out in the rain, the consequence is that it gets rusty (thank you, Mother Nature).

Logical consequences, on the other hand, are imposed and should clearly relate to the child’s action. If he watches a forbidden TV show, a logical consequence could be that he loses all his TV privileges for a week.