School Administrator’s Top 10 Discipline Tips All Parents Should Know

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Discipline is often a parent’s greatest challenge. Good discipline is critical to student success—and experts know it’s best taught by parents at home. Thankfully, there are discipline basics you can rely on throughout your child’s life to help you along the way. Research indicates that being a nurturing parent—not too harsh and not too lenient—helps children behave best. This requires being kind, understanding, and helpful.

This report summarizes the best of what The Parent Institute has learned about effective discipline techniques. It is packed with sensible, proven ideas parents can put into action now with specific information parents need most in order to raise a well-disciplined child.

These are the tips all parents should know!

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1. Teach children responsibility for their own learning and behavior.
2. Help your child learn to resolve conflicts using active listening, accepting criticism, and respecting others opinions.
4. Help your child respect rules, authority and other people.
5. Help your child develop good character traits.
6. Instill the desire for success in your child.
7. Always use firm, fair and consistent discipline with your child.
8. Be a good role model for your child.
9. Parents and all other adults in charge of disciplining your child should all be on the same team.
10. Remember, you are the adult and you are in charge.
Tip #1:
Teach children responsibility for their own learning and behavior.

Children have to take charge of their own learning and behavior. When they do, parents no longer have to micromanage their child. Children will find that their diligence leads to success in every endeavor.

What if your son shows you the paper he’s planning to hand in tomorrow. It’s filled with misspelled words and unclear writing. What is your role here? Do you let your child take responsibility for the paper and turn it in as is? Or do you clean it up before it goes to the teacher? Here are some do’s and don’ts on how you can help with writing assignments.

**Do:**
- Help your child brainstorm about what to write.
- Encourage your child to write a rough draft.
- Answer questions about how to spell words. Write them down so he can copy them, or help him sound them out.
- Let your child find errors. Say, “I see a place in the first three lines where a sentence should end. Can you find it and fix it?”
- Praise your child for using interesting words. Say, “I love that you say the snow creaked under his shoes.”
- Encourage your child to write a neat final copy.

**Don’t:**
- Don’t choose a topic for your child.
- Don’t do all of the proofreading for your child.
- Don’t write or type your child’s paper, no matter how messy you may think it is.
- Don’t be afraid to tell your child there are some things you can’t help with. Say, “Josh, I don’t think Ms. Jones wants to see what I think about this subject. She wants to know what you think.”

Tip #2:
Help your child learn to resolve conflicts using active listening, accepting criticism, and respecting others opinions.

Talk with and listen to your child. It’s important to keep the lines of communication open.

Whether it’s a fight between siblings or an argument at school, all kids are going to be involved in conflicts. As a parent, you can teach these skills in resolving conflicts peacefully:

• **Talk about problems** before they become conflicts. When little things are ignored, they tend to grow into major disputes.

• **Use “I-Messages.”** Help your children learn to talk about their feelings, not the other person’s mistakes. Instead of, “YOU always leave my bike out in the rain,” your child could say, “I feel angry when you leave my bike out in the rain because it may rust. If you are going to use it, please put it away.”

• **Don’t play “the blame game.”** If there’s a problem, it probably doesn’t matter whose fault it is. Help your children spend their time fixing the problem, not fixing the blame.

• **Be willing to cooperate and compromise.** If two people have a conflict, they both have a problem. To solve it, they’ll probably both have to make some changes.

• **Talk to adults.** Sometimes, kids think they have to solve all their problems themselves. A trusted adult—parent, teacher or counselor—can sometimes help see solutions they hadn’t thought of.

• **Listen.** Children can never see another person’s point of view if they don’t listen to what that person has to say.

• **Practice.** Just like learning to ride a bike or read a book, learning to solve conflicts peacefully takes practice. Role-play different ways to resolve conflicts.

Tip #3:  
Help your child learn self-discipline.

Praise is a very powerful motivator when it comes to reinforcing positive behavior.

Do you believe self-discipline is important? Research shows most parents say yes—yet many don’t feel confident about teaching it. Instilling self-discipline is tough, but necessary, starting when kids are young. For example, you can:

• Put family time first. Instead of signing your child up for endless activities, make time at home a priority. Plan calm, daily routines that help her develop basic skills, such as getting dressed, brushing teeth and putting on shoes.

• Focus less on “things.” Being patient is part of self-discipline. It’s good to say no to items you can’t afford or don’t need—even if “everyone else” has them.

• Give your child choices. Let her make age-appropriate decisions. “Would you like to wear a red or blue shirt today?” She’ll gain confidence and skills while learning from minor mistakes.

Source: S. Whitehead, “How to Teach Kids Self-Discipline.”

Tip #4:  
Help your child respect rules, authority and other people.

When children respect themselves, it’s easier for them to respect others.

A disrespectful child will have trouble in school. A disrespectful adult may not be able to hold onto a job. It is important to remember this as your child goes through middle school.

Your child’s newfound sense of independence and separation may make him prone to back-talk and disrespect. Do not allow yourself—or him—to get used to it. Instead:

• **Call him out.** Label disrespectful talk and behavior as such. “Your tone of voice is not appropriate.” “Making faces is rude. I won’t tolerate it.” “Do not curse. It is disrespectful.”

• **Don’t stoop to disrespect.** Your child’s disrespectful words, tone, or actions deserve nothing from you. Simply say, “I won’t deal with you at all when you speak that way. I am your parent and I deserve your politeness. When you are ready to speak respectfully, come back and we will try again.”

• **Use consequences if necessary.** “Instead of telling me your feelings calmly and with respect, you have chosen to shout and throw a tantrum. You are acting like a much younger child and I will have to treat you like one. You will be staying in this weekend. You will have another chance next weekend if you can show more maturity this coming week.”

Source: M. Borba, Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues that Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing, ISBN: 0-7879-6226-0.
Tip #5:
Help your child develop good character traits.

_In order to build responsibility. Children need to be given responsibility._

Busy family life can disconnect parents and children from each other—and from the community. Volunteering as a family is a great way to change that. It also teaches your child about responsibility, compassion, generosity and more!

When making summer plans, try to squeeze in at least one volunteer activity. For example, your family might:

- **Clean a favorite spot.** Inspect places your family spends time, such as your street, a park or the beach. You may be surprised by how much trash and debris is there. Supervise as your family fills garbage and recycling bags.

- **Provide shelter.** Many groups provide or improve housing for others. Find one that welcomes kids’ help. Your child might sweep, carry items or hand out nails while you hammer. Talk about how “many hands might light work.”

- **Provide food.** Community food banks are usually in need of groceries and helpers. Homeless shelters and meal-delivery programs may also request supplies, including sandwiches kids can make. You might even help with deliveries.

- **Care for animals.** Call an animal shelter to learn about its needs. If you and your child can’t work directly with pets, consider other ideas, such as raising awareness about adoption or collecting necessities.

- **Make visits.** Find a charity that serves elderly or homebound citizens. They may need company, meals or help with errands. A visit from a child may be more uplifting than anything else.

Tip #6:
Instill the desire for success in your child.

Before your child can meet high expectations for achievement, establish a learning environment that supports your efforts.

Attitudes are like mental pictures. Basketball players who can picture themselves scoring a basket can usually do just that. Students who have a positive picture of themselves being successful in the classroom are more likely to achieve.

As a parent, you have the ability to help your child create positive pictures and positive thoughts about what she can do. Here are some ways you can help your child create an attitude of achievement:

- **Picture success in school.** Help your child create a mental picture of success. “I want you to see yourself getting an A on that book report.”
- **Stress the importance of effort.** If your child is struggling, say, “When you studied hard last week, you got your spelling words right. You can do it.”
- **Give the positive behavior you see a name.** “I was so proud when you were kind to the new boy in class today.”


Tip #7:
Always use firm, fair and consistent discipline with your child.

Remember: Discipline is more about teaching than it is about punishing.

Kids are smart. They figure out just how long they can ignore what their parents say. They also know that the more parents talk, the more likely kids are able to wear them down until they finally just give up.

Instead of giving up, use “if-then” statements when you discipline your child. If your child does one thing, then something else will follow. But the key is to make sure that you follow through with what you say.

Instead of reminding your child to turn off the TV 15 times, say, “Jacob, if you don’t turn off the TV, then I will turn it off and it will stay off for the rest of the day.” When you turn off the TV and keep it off, your child will learn that you mean what you say. That’s why the “if–then” has to be something you will actually do. If you don’t follow through with the consequence (even just once), your child won’t take you seriously.

And remember that an “if–then” statement can be positive, too. “If you do your homework now, then we will have time to watch your favorite TV show after dinner.”

Tip #8:
Be a good role model for your child.

*Children learn best when they see good behavior and parents are in the best position to show them.*

A recent study shows that today’s college kids are 40 percent less empathetic than their counterparts in the 1980s and 1990s. Young adults seem to be less caring nowadays. But that doesn’t mean your child has to be! To help him grow into a caring, empathetic person:

- **Be a good role model.** Show your child that you care about what’s happening in his life.
- **Talk about feelings.** Whether you’re having a wonderful or a rotten day, share it with your child. Invite him to do the same.
- **Limit exposure to violence.** If you want your child to learn compassion, don’t surround him with violent video games, movies or music.
- **Praise him.** Did your child just do something thoughtful? Give him a hug!

Source: L. Tarkan, “How to Raise an Empathetic, Caring Kid—It’s Harder Than It Used to Be,” iVillage.
Tip #9:
Parents and all other adults in charge of disciplining your child should all be on the same team.

*Commit to working as a cohesive unit—a strong front, sets an even stronger tone.*

Your child breaks a rule, and you and your partner respond differently. One of you wants to give your child a consequence. The other wants to forgive and forget.

Discipline is most effective when parents on are the same team. To get on track:

- **Accept reality.** Parents often have different opinions. Decide to disagree privately and present a united front. If your child sees a disagreement, resolve it peacefully.
- **Plan ahead.** Make a family rule book that includes basic, agreed-upon rules that apply to children and parents.
- **Use a signal.** If a discipline dilemma is on the horizon, use a signal to tell your partner, “Let’s talk somewhere else.”
- **Consult the experts.** Read a parenting book or take a parenting class together to stay on the same page about discipline.

Source: A. Brott, “Mom vs. Dad,” SheKnows Parenting.
Tip #10: Remember, you are the adult and you are in charge.

There’s no “perfect” approach to discipline but there are things you can do to make sure it is effective.

Researchers describe a kind of discipline that has positive effects on kids: authoritative parenting. Authoritative parents are caring, yet firm. They:

- **Set limits that are appropriate for kids.** For example, children are not allowed to hit. Instead, they’re encouraged to say things like, “I’m angry because ... .”

- **Are firm and consistent.** They choose a few essential, sensible rules and stick to them—without bending.

- **Communicate well with kids.** It’s easier for children to cooperate with calm, simple and brief instructions.

- **Have reasonable expectations.** When parents expect too much, kids are doomed to fail. Expecting too little, meanwhile, hurts kids’ skills and confidence.

- **Accept kids for who they are.** Children need to feel good about themselves and their particular strengths.

- **Support kids’ independence.** It’s challenging, but critical, to allow the right amount of freedom—enough for kids to grow without risking their well-being.

- **Give children chances to be responsible and make choices.** A young child might help set the table, for example, or pick between two outfits to wear.

Choosing to discipline in a loving, caring way isn’t always easy. In fact, sometimes it feels more natural to yell! But the results of authoritative parenting are clear: Kids are more accomplished and feel better about themselves. That’s worth the effort!

Summary:

When You Have Respectful, Responsible, Well-Mannered Students, You, Your Teachers and Your School Benefit!

Research proves what educators have known for years: self-discipline in students, and not IQ, is a better predictor of future success.1

1. [Duckworth, Angela L., Seligman, Martin E.P., Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents. Psychological Science, 16 (12), 393-944(6).]

Well-disciplined children make the best students. In order to help students succeed and make your school a superior place to learn, The Parent Institute can help you engage parents to help them discipline their children. Our monthly, two-page, reproducible newsletter, Firm, Fair & Consistent gives parents straightforward, easy-to-understand tips and advice to help them with virtually any common disciplinary problem that arises with students. It’s what YOU want to tell parents, but communicated through a neutral third party expert. Send the newsletter home to parents and post it on your website to help build the vital school home connection. Then reap the benefits of learning-filled classrooms and a productive school environment that only well-disciplined children can bring. To subscribe, call toll-free 1-800-756-5525.