



Center for Children and Families
2016 Spring Lecture Series
Empowering Children and Parents Together

Is There a Better Way to Discipline? Protecting Children and Promoting Positive Behavior

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The term “discipline” originally came from the Latin “disciplina” meaning “to instruct” or “to teach”. The definition is now commonly defined as “training someone to obey the rules using punishment to correct disobedience.”

Americans (and many others) rely on punishment to elicit desired behavior in children. Depending on the sample, from 70% to 90% report they use corporal punishment (CP).

CP is an especially problematic form of punishment as it is linked to multiple child problems (e.g., increased aggression, anxiety, depression) and is an unintentional pathway to child physical abuse. There is some evidence it negatively affects brain development.

Through various intervention methods, most parents can be persuaded to change their positive CP attitudes and behavior.

The “Positive Discipline/Parenting” Approach to Childrearing

This “new” orientation is increasingly gaining attention. It has many labels, including “Positive Discipline,” “Positive Parenting,” and “Attachment Parenting.” The approach encourages parents to avoid focusing on compliance, obedience, and the use of rewards and punishments.

The approach has a long history (dating back to hunter-gatherer societies) and writings from many philosophers and psychiatrists/psychologists (e.g., Adler, Bowlby) support it.

It can be defined as ... *“a child-rearing orientation that is centered around promoting a loving, cooperative relationship, respecting the child’s individuality, and focusing on guidance not compliance.”*

Some common themes:

1. The central goal is to promote a loving, cooperative, and healthy parent-child relationship.
2. Avoid all rewards & punishments (especially corporal punishment).
3. Stay calm; treat child with respect and empathy.
3. Take the child’s perspective to understand their behavior.

4. Focus on promoting the child's autonomy through guidance; think in terms of long-term development and encouraging good behavior.
5. Be proactive and thereby prevent problems from occurring.
6. Set clear expectations, provide boundaries, and be consistent.
7. Promote the child's ability to solve problems by joint problem-solving.
8. Let the child experience natural consequences (if it is safe).

Some Questions about the Positive Discipline/Parenting

1) Does it work?; 2) What types of children is it most effective with?; 3) Which components are most important?; 4) What are the potential problems or pitfalls with it?; and 5) Will parents adopt the approach? There is very little evidence on the topic.

Trends in Support of Positive Discipline/Parenting

- Violence prevention efforts, including the World Health Organization's promotion of "safe, stable, nurturing relationships."
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in April 2016 recognized CP as key contributor to child abuse; efforts to prevent child abuse need to focus on changing the norm.
- Spreading international recognition of children's rights (including the right not to be hit) has resulted in legal bans against CP in 49 countries.

A Few Websites Resources

<http://www.attachmentparenting.org/principles/discipline>

<https://www.positivediscipline.org/>

<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/positive-discipline-everyday-parenting-third-edition>

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