

# **DISCIPLINE**

## **Ages 6 to 8**

Timeouts and consequences are effective discipline strategies for this age group.

Consistency is crucial, as is follow-through. Make good on any promises of discipline or else you risk undermining your authority. Kids have to believe that you mean what you say. This is not to say you can't give second chances or allow a certain margin of error, but for the most part, you should act on what you say.

Be careful not to make unrealistic threats of punishment ("Slam that door and you'll never watch TV again!") in anger, since not following through could weaken **all** your threats. If you threaten to turn the car around and go home if the squabbling in the backseat doesn't stop, make sure you do exactly that. The credibility you'll gain with your kids is much more valuable than a lost beach day.

Huge punishments may take away your power as a parent. If you ground your son or daughter for a month, your child may not feel motivated to change behaviors because everything has already been taken away.

## **Ages 9 to 12**

Kids in this age group — just as with all ages — can be disciplined with natural consequences. As they mature and request more independence and responsibility, teaching them to deal with the consequences of their behavior is an effective and appropriate method of discipline.

For example, if your fifth grader's homework isn't done before bedtime, your child will go to school the next day without it and suffer the resulting bad grade.

It's natural for parents to want to rescue kids from mistakes, but in the long run they do kids a favor by letting them fail sometimes. Kids see what behaving improperly can mean and probably won't make those mistakes again. However, if your child does not seem to be learning from natural consequences, set up some of your own to help modify the behavior.

## **Ages 13 and Up**

Don't let down your guard now — discipline is just as important for teens as it is for younger kids.

Set up rules regarding homework, visits by friends, curfews, and dating and discuss them beforehand with your teenager so there will be no misunderstandings. Your teen will probably complain from time to time, but also will realize that you're in control. Believe it or not, teens still want and need you to set limits and enforce order in their lives, even as you grant them greater freedom and responsibility.

When your teen **does** break a rule, taking away privileges may seem the best plan of action. While it's fine to take away the car for a week, for example, be sure to also discuss why coming home an hour past curfew is unacceptable.

Remember to give a teenager some control over things. Not only will this limit the number of power struggles you have, it will help your teen respect the decisions that you do need to make. You could allow a younger teen to make decisions concerning school clothes, hair styles, or even the condition of his or her room.

It's also important to focus on the positives. For example, have your teen earn a later curfew by demonstrating positive behavior instead of setting an earlier curfew as punishment for irresponsible behavior.

## **A Word About Spanking**

Here are some reasons why experts discourage spanking:

- Spanking teaches kids that it's OK to hit when they're angry.
- Spanking can physically harm children.
- Rather than teaching kids how to change their behavior, spanking makes them fearful of their parents and merely teaches them to avoid getting caught.
- For kids seeking attention by acting out, spanking may inadvertently "reward" them — negative attention is better than no attention at all.