

# So how can we guide children without punishment?

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## 1. Regulate your own emotions.

That's how children learn to manage theirs. You're the role model. Don't act when you're upset. Take a deep breath and wait until you're calm before you address the situation. Resist the impulse to be punitive; it always backfires.

## 2. Empathize with feelings.

When your child is hijacked by adrenaline and other fight or flight hormones, he can't learn. Instead of lecturing, pre-empt the bad behavior with a "Time-In" where you stay with him and acknowledge his feelings. This is not a punishment, but an opportunity to reconnect so he can get emotionally regulated. If he moves into a meltdown, don't try to reason with him. Just create safety with your compassion so he can express and work through the emotions that are driving his bad behavior. Afterwards, he'll feel so much better, and so much closer to you, that he'll be open to your guidance.

## 3. Give support so they can learn.

Consider the example of potty learning. You're very involved at first. She gradually takes more of the responsibility, and eventually she's doing it all by herself. The same principle holds for learning to say Thank You, taking turns, remembering her belongings, feeding her pet, doing homework, and most everything else you can think of. Routines provide the "scaffolding" for your child to learn basic skills, just as scaffolding provides structure for a building to take shape. You might be mad that she forgot her jacket again, but yelling won't help her remember. "Scaffolding" will.

## 4. Connect before you correct

Connect before you correct, and stay connected, even while you guide, to awaken your child's desire to be his best self. Remember that children misbehave when they feel bad about themselves and disconnected from us.

- Make loving eye contact: *"It sounds like you're really upset about X."*
- Put your hand on her shoulder: *"It seems like maybe you're scared to tell me about the cookie."*
- Stoop down to her level and look her in the eye: *"It looks like you're really mad ... I'm listening. Tell me in words."*
- Pick her up: *"Nothing's going right for you today, is it?"*

## 5. Set limits -- but set them with empathy.

Of course you need to insist on some rules. But you can also acknowledge her perspective. When kids feel understood, they're more able to accept our limits. If possible, give a choice or a redirection about what the child CAN do to meet her needs or solve her problem.

- *"It looks like you wanted your sister to move, so you pushed her. No pushing; pushing hurts. Tell her: 'Move please!'"*
- *"No biting! You're very very mad and hurt! Tell your brother -- in words."*
- *"You wish you could play longer... it's hard to stop playing and get ready for bed. Let's go..."*
- *"No throwing the ball in the house. You can take the ball outside, or you can throw stuffed animals inside."*

## 6. Teach kids to repair.

Begin with the early lesson that we all clean up our own messes, by matter-of-factly grabbing paper towels and helping your child clean up his spilled milk, with no blame and no shame. As he gets a bit older, suggest that once he calms down, he can find a way to make up with his sister after a fight: would she like a hug? a drawing? to play a game? Resist shaming, and model repair and apologizing. You'll find him following in your footsteps.

## 7. Remember that all "misbehavior" is an expression, however misguided, of a legitimate need.

He has a reason, even if you don't think it's a good one. His behavior is terrible? He must feel terrible inside. Does he need more sleep, more connection with you, more downtime, more chance to cry and release those upsetting emotions we all store up? Address the underlying need and you eliminate the misbehavior.

## 8. Say YES.

Kids will do almost anything we request if we make the request with a loving heart. Find a way to say YES instead of NO even while you set your limit.

*"YES, it's time to clean up, and YES I will help you and YES we can leave your tower up and YES you can growl about it and YES if we hurry we can read an extra story and YES we can make this fun and YES I adore you and YES how did I get so lucky to be your parent? YES!"*

Your child will respond with the generosity of spirit that matches yours.

## 9. Re-connect, every day.

Remember that every interaction is an opportunity for either connection -- or disconnection. And once a day, turn off the phone, close the computer, and tell your child

*"Ok, I'm all yours for the next 20 minutes. What should we do?"*

Follow her lead. The world is full of humiliation for kids, so for this 20 minutes just be an incompetent bumbler and let her win. Giggling releases pent-up fears and anxiety, so make sure to play, giggle, be silly. Have a pillow fight. Wrestle. Snuggle. Let her tell you what's on her mind, let her rant or cry. Just accept all those feelings. Be 100% present. Feeling DELIGHT in your child may be the most important factor in his development. And his cooperation.

## 10. Remember that connection and compassion are the secrets that help children WANT to follow your lead.

We only have influence with our child when he feels connected to us. He only feels connected when he feels understood, when we respond with compassion and acceptance instead of judgment.

But compassion isn't only for your child. Start with yourself. You can't be a loving parent if you're feeling bad about yourself, any more than your child can act "right" if she feels bad about herself.

When all else fails, give yourself a big hug. Then give your child a big hug. Connection and compassion will transform any relationship.

Don't believe it? Try prioritizing connection and compassion this week and see what kind of miracle you can make.

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