

# You, Your Child, and POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

*S. Doescher and L. Burt*

**C**hildren are naturally curious and have a strong desire to be independent. They may go beyond the rules and limits parents set. Sometimes parents aren't sure how to respond to children's behavior. Parents may react angrily, rather than warmly and firmly.

Careful guidance of children's behavior will help them become responsible for their own behavior. This, in turn, will lead to children who develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and problem-solving skills.

## Styles of Discipline

The family scenes below show different ways parents can guide their children.

### Scene 1

Four-year-old Logan is told to get dressed after he finishes breakfast. He goes into his room, shuts the door, and looks for his pants with the black belt. Pants and belt in hand, Logan dives onto the bed, and begins springing about in circles, while swinging his pants overhead. He loses control and flings his belt into the light fixture, smashing bits of glass across the room.

His mom bursts into the room, howling, "What on earth did you do now? Get out of here this minute. You're in more trouble than you know. You just wait till I'm finished cleaning up this mess!" Dad shouts from the kitchen, "Do you want me to show him who's boss?"

Crying, Logan leaves his room and lies on the couch. Minutes later, sister Jenny, age 8, rolls into the hall with her roller skates on. She shouts to Logan, "Wanna skate?" Mom yells, "No way, Jenny! Go to your room until lunchtime!"

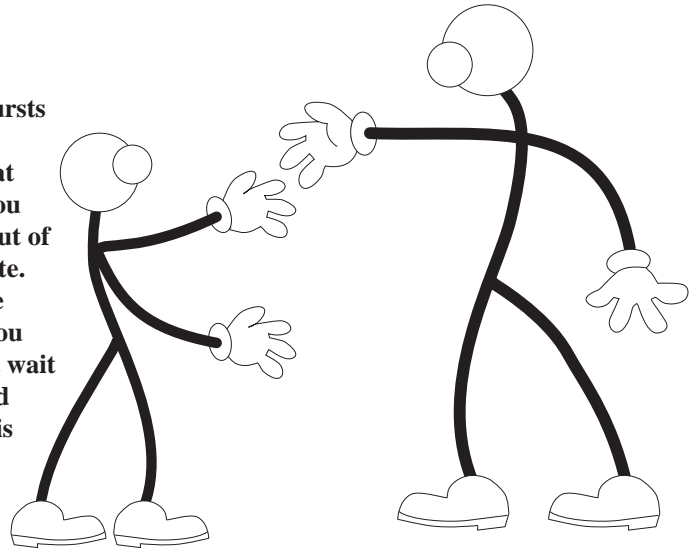
### Scene 2

Mom hears glass shattering in Logan's room, and she opens the door. "What's happening?" she asks. Dad shouts from the living room, "Someone is destroying this house, and it's going to stop, now!" Mom asks, "I wonder why Dad would say that? Do you have any ideas?" Logan replies, "Well, I was bouncing on the bed higher and higher, and I hit the light." Mom asks, "Where can we jump and

swing things safely?" Logan says, "In the backyard."

Mom nods and hands him his pants. "Show me how your legs go through the long tunnels," says Mom. Smiling, he shows her and finishes dressing. Just then, Jenny rolls into the house with her roller skates on and moves around the house, shouting, "Guess what, Mom?" Mom shouts back, "I guess you can't remember the rules around here. Hand over the skates and vacuum the whole house."

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### Scene 3

Just as Logan begins swinging his pants overhead, mom comes into his room and catches Logan and a pant leg. She gently holds Logan and once he is calm she asks, “What did I ask you to do?” He replies, “Get dressed.” Mom then hands him his pants and tells him, “I’ll set the timer for 3 minutes for you to finish dressing.”

Logan quickly dresses before the bell rings. Dad observes and says, “It makes me feel good when you quickly get dressed by yourself.” Jenny rings the doorbell and demands, “Let me in, let me in!” Dad unlocks the door and Jenny rolls though the house on roller skates. Dad gently takes her arm and escorts her to the front door. Dad asks, “Why did I just do that?” Jenny smiles at her dad and whispers, “Because skates scrape floors.” Then she hugs him.



Discipline techniques may help children or may discourage and frustrate them. Scenes 2 and 3 contain examples of positive situations between parents and children. In Scene 2, Mom asks the question, “I wonder why Dad would say that?” This question helps Logan think about reasons for Dad’s actions and how his behavior may have upset Dad. Mom also nods to show Logan he has a good idea about where to swing safely.

In Scene 3, both Mom and Dad are gentle and firm in dealing with their children’s misbehavior. Mom catches Logan as he jumps on the bed. She offers him limits when she says, “I’ll set the timer for 3 minutes for you to finish dressing.” This gives Logan the chance to direct his own behavior and be responsible for what happens next. How does Dad

## Activity 1: When Everyone Wins

Many opportunities occur each day for parents and children to relate to one another. Think about a recent situation where you and one of your children related well to one another. Describe your experience in the space provided.

What did your child do?

What did you say or do?

How did your child respond?

redirect Jenny’s behavior when she skates across the floor?

Less positive situations between parents and children can be seen in Scenes 1 and 2. In Scene 1, both Mom and Dad show explosive anger with their children. They threaten Logan: “You just wait” and “Do you want me to show him who’s boss?” Jenny is punished in a similar way. When Mom sees her skating in the hallway, she uses unreasonable punishment in ordering Jenny to her room. In Scene 2, Mom belittles Jenny with sarcasm: “I guess you can’t remember the rules around here.” How do you think Logan and Jenny feel after their parents’ angry responses?

## The Nature of Positive Discipline

Parents who use positive discipline respect, nurture, and support their children. Children feel free to share ideas and feelings, make choices, and ask questions. There are many positive discipline techniques parents can consider. Some of these include:

Give positive statements—  
“Look how well you’re cutting those apples!”

Ask questions—“What should we do next?”

Use appropriate body language—nod, smile, and look directly at children.

Lower your body position—bend, kneel, or sit at children’s levels.

Restructure the environment—remove objects that invite misbehavior.

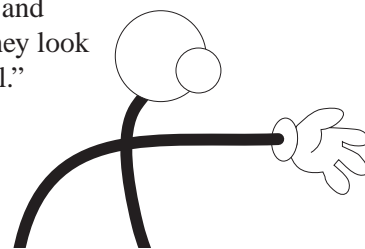
Direct behavior—“Here’s a sponge so we can wipe the table.”

Redirect behavior—Lindsay bounces the basketball around the family room. “You can bounce your basketball outside on the sidewalk.”

Distract—Kevin rolls his tricycle into the rose bush. “You can ride with me down to the mailbox.”

Provide choices—“Should we put the blue blocks or the yellow blocks away first?”

Encourage children’s attempts—While dusting the furniture, Peter shakes the dust cloth around the dusted room. “I can see you dusted the piano and chairs. They look wonderful.”



*Demonstrate desirable behaviors*—Parents wash hands with soap and water before meals, just as they ask their children to do.

*Ignore undesirable behaviors*—Jessica makes funny faces while eating dinner. Mom and Dad do not respond.

*Set specific limits*—Sam throws cars across the living room. Dad shows Sam where to play with the cars. Sam continues to throw cars. Dad directs Sam to put the cars away.

*Take a break*—Dad has Sam take a break for several minutes in an area that is safe and boring. Afterwards, Dad directs Sam to pick up the cars and play with them in the car area.

## The Nature of Negative Discipline

Some parents use negative discipline approaches to control their children's behavior. This may result in children who are angry and aggressive or have low self-esteem. Negative strategies include:

*Commands*—"Go over there and sit down!"

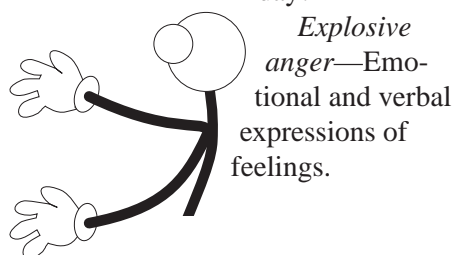
*Forbidding statements*—"Don't touch that!" or "Don't do that!"

*Criticizing statements*—"Oh no, you're going to spill that!"

*Belittling statements*—"When will you ever learn to get ready for bed on time?"

*Threatening statements*—"If you don't eat right now, you'll be in more trouble than you know!"

*Unreasonable punishment*—"Go to your room for the whole day!"



*Explosive anger*—Emotional and verbal expressions of feelings.

## Activity 2: When Everyone Doesn't Win

Sometimes parents and children have a hard time relating to one another. Think about a recent situation where you and one of your children had difficulty relating to one another. Describe your experience in the space provided.

What did your child do?

What did you say or do?

How did your child respond?

What would you say or do differently next time?

## Managing Anger

There is a variety of positive ways to deal with anger and frustration. Some parents tell their children, "I need a moment to calm down; I am very angry right now." Others cool down by counting to 10 or by leaving the room for several minutes. Some parents describe their feelings to their children to help them understand what annoys them. What works best for you?

Parents who can stop feeling angry toward their children are better able to use positive discipline techniques. In Scene 2, rather than being angry, Mom asks, "I wonder why Dad would say that?" This question invites Logan to share ideas and think about someone else's feelings. It also helps Logan direct his behavior more appropriately.

## Summary

Parents who use positive discipline techniques believe in their children's abilities and communicate love and respect for their children. When parents are willing to observe their children and respond in ways that encourage positive behavior, they help

their children become responsible for their own behaviors.

This publication has been designed to help you:

- Think about situations where everyone wins and situations where no one wins
- Consider the positive and/or negative strategies you use with your children
- Understand your own feelings and behaviors toward your children.

## For Further Reading

Beekman, S., & Holmes, J. (1993). *Battles, Hassles, Tantrums & Tears (Strategies for Coping with Conflict and Making Peace at Home)*. NY: Hearst Books.

Cline, F., & Fay, J. (1990). *Parenting with Love and Logic*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Crary, E. (1990). *Pick Up Your Socks—and Other Skills Growing Children Need*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Crary, E. (1993). *Without Spanking or Spoiling: A Practical Approach to Toddler and Preschool Guidance*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

*Continued*

### ***Other Publications in this Series***

*You, Your Child, and Problem Solving*, EC 1451, by Sue Doescher and Linda Burt (Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1995). 50¢

*You, Your Child, and Self-confidence*, EC 1453, by Sue Doescher and Linda Burt (Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1995). 50¢

### ***Related OSU Extension Publications***

*Child Guidance Techniques*, PNW 64 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1993). 50¢

*Helping Children Grow: Using Discipline Constructively*,

EC 1289 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1993). No charge.

*Helping Children Grow: Dealing with Problem Behavior*, EC 1296 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1993). No charge.

*Helping Children Grow: Finding Your Parenting Style*, EC 1318 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, 1993). No charge.

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