



# Positive parenting

Reflection guide

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## Overview

- Define the philosophy of positive discipline and how it differs from punishment
- Understand common reasons why children misbehave
- Identify strategies to manage common behaviour problems

## Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

# What is positive discipline?

## 1) Positive discipline = teaching:

The word “discipline” comes from a Latin word meaning “learner,” or “disciple.” As a parent, setting limits and rules for your child in a positive, loving way, you can help your child begin to learn how to control her own behaviour. When using positive discipline – or teaching – you can think to yourself “Is what I am doing now helping or hurting my child.”

## 2) It is not “punishment”:

Positive discipline is different from punishment. Punishment lets a child know he's made a mistake, but it doesn't help him learn how to change his behaviour. Punishment is done out of anger and is reactive, and children will generally respond to it out of fear. When children change their behaviour based on fear, they do so to avoid the punishment, rather than to learn. Nagging, yelling, threatening, arguing, bribing, pleading, and punishing are often ineffective, especially in younger children, largely because it is often done in the absence of teaching the child how to engage in a more healthy behaviour.

## 3) Consistency and communication are important:

Often the way we talk to our kids is the way we were talked to. How many times have you caught yourself saying something and thought to yourself: “Wow, I sound just like my mom/dad!” When you are consistent, you are teaching your children, and they will learn what to expect and what consequence they will get. They won't get it on the first try, but over time the consistency will help instill the good behavior.

## 4) It is authoritative (not authoritarian or permissive)

Author and parenting expert Nancy Samalin describes positive discipline in her book *Positive Discipline* as “authoritative.” She differentiates it from “authoritarian” and “permissive” parenting styles:

- Authoritarian: “You must do as I say because I said so.”
- Permissive: “You have to hold my hand, okay?”
- Authoritative: clear, straightforward rules, and a limited number of rules. You probably know parents who fit the bill for each of these styles.

## How to set the stage for positive discipline

- Reward good behaviour
- Role model good behaviour
- Spend time with child to build respect and empathy
- Understand ages and stages of child development
- Be empathic

“Punishment may make us obey the orders we are given, but at best it will only teach an obedience to authority, not a self-control which enhances our self-respect.”

Bruno Bettelheim, *A Good Enough Parent*

## More about discipline

### Common reasons why children misbehave:

- Acting their age
- Experiencing stress
- Have fears and worries
- Seeking attention
- Don't have inner control

### Harmful forms of discipline:

- Verbal abuse such as name-calling, labeling, threatening, comparing, being sarcastic, and teasing
- Physical abuse
- Deprivations that are too long, rigid, or don't relate to the misbehavior



## What to expect at different ages

Here are some common characteristics and behaviours for different stages of your young child's development. These can help you understand why your child may be acting out and what kinds of discipline are appropriate for her age. You will also be able to see that some behaviours that you may find exasperating are actually very normal and healthy for your child's development.

### Expect your toddler to:

- Be self-centered; not understand other people's feelings
- Become increasingly independent
- Be aware of self as separate from others
- Explore environment and test you
- Imitate behaviours of others
- Enjoy being with other children, but have a hard time sharing
- Acquire more control over body and learn self-help skills: feeding, dressing, washing, using toilet
- Develop language and comprehension skills, but still feel frustrated when trying to express self
- Have mood swings and much negativity
- Have drop in appetite and be fussy about food
- Have little internal self - control
- Have short attention span; be easily distracted.

## Expect your preschooler to:

- Need lots of physical activity
- Gain more control over his body and become more adept at self-help skills: toileting, dressing, eating
- Establish self as separate from parents; become more independent
- Play with, rather than beside, other children
- Show empathy and want to please
- Be interested in words, ask questions, experiment with profanity, enjoy being silly
- Exaggerate, boast, tell stories, have imaginary friends, engage in fantasy play, have some difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality
- Have fears and anxieties
- Begin to understand right from wrong and relationship between behavior and consequences
- Have awareness of sexuality
- Fall in love with mother (boys) or father (girls)
- Be bossy; order people around

## Expect your young school-age child to:

- Be curious and eager to learn
- Understand the differences between right and wrong, fantasy and reality
- Be more interested in real tasks with concrete goals
- Begin to develop a conscience, sense of morality, and sense of justice
- Test the limits of physical abilities, sometimes recklessly
- Need to make choices and decisions within limits
- Understand relationship between behaviour and consequences
- Feel attached to parents but want more independence
- Be influenced by peer group
- Understand other people's feelings

## How would you respond?

For each statement below, brainstorm a positive way to respond by using an “I” message or simple, direct statement. Then add some common phrases you hear your child say in the blank spaces and write a response you can use.

Your child says:	A good way to respond is:
I hate my teacher.	
I just want fries and soda for dinner. I don't want anything else.	
You're not the boss of me!	

# Tips for handling common situations with children

These situations, frustrating though they may seem, may take on a new light when considered from a child's point of view. Consider these guidelines when determining the best way to respond to common situations with children:

## 1. The child becomes angry

It may mean the child:

- Is not successful in doing something important to the child personally
- Has been told stop, no and don't too many times
- Is being made to do something he or she doesn't want to do

So do not:

- Become angry
- Allow a tantrum to become extreme

You might try:

- Remembering anger is normal and may be expected
- Observing when the child gets angry and at whom the anger is targeted
- Observing if the child is able to express anger in acceptable way.
- Providing a safe outlet for the child's feelings such as vigorous play, punching bag, or finger painting

## 2. The child steals

It may mean the child:

- Wants something
- Is ignorant of property rights
- Is imitating someone
- Has unsatisfied needs
- Has hostile feelings

So do not:

- Scold or shame the child
- Punish or reject the child
- Humiliate the child

You might try:

- Being kind and understanding
- Observing the frequency of stealing, the objects taken, and the reaction when caught
- Helping fill the child's needs and discussing why a person cannot have or do some things

### **3. The child lies or fibs**

It may mean the child:

- Has a vivid imagination
- Is imitating someone
- Wants to please
- Fears punishment
- Likes to exaggerate
- Is seeking attention

So do not:

- Show how upset you are
- Punish, shame, or reject the child
- Preach or predict that the child will come to a bad end
- Make the child apologize

You might try:

- Relaxing and trying to look for the reason
- Telling the child the truth yourself
- Giving attention to who the child is and what he or she does
- Providing the child with opportunities for enriching the imagination
- Helping the child discover the difference between fact and fancy
- Being casual and calm

### **4. The child refuses to eat**

It may mean the child:

- Is showing the normal decrease in appetite that occurs at about 2 when growth slows down
- Is not hungry

- Does not feel well
- Dislikes a particular flavor or texture – children’s tastes are stronger than adults’ are
- Is imitating someone
- Is trying to be independent
- Is trying to get attention

So do not:

- Make a scene
- Reward or bribe the child to eat
- Threaten the child
- Punish the child for not eating
- Force the child to eat

You might try:

- Making food interesting and attractive
- Enjoying food with the child
- Introducing new foods a bit at a time and only along with other favoured foods
- Helping the child learn to feed themselves
- Serving small portions
- Serving rejected food in a new way
- Involving the child in preparation of food

## **5. The child has fears**

It may mean the child:

- Has a feeling of strangeness, such as encountering something for the first time
- Needs the closeness of an important adult and wants to know where the person is
- Has had a previous painful experience
- Has some feelings of guilt or lack of love

So do not:

- Shame or threaten the child
- Make the child go toward the thing that is feared

You might try:

- Reassuring and comforting the child
- Telling or showing the child where the important adult is

- Observing the situations that frighten the child
- Preparing the child for new situations
- Spending extra time with the child
- Teaching the child caution for real danger

## **6. The child hurts other children or you**

It may mean the child:

- Is too young to understand
- Is inexperienced
- Is angry
- Has troubled feelings

So do not:

- Get angry
- Punish or hurt the child
- Force the child to say “I’m sorry”
- Make the child feel badly by shaming or ignoring the child or withdrawing love

You might try:

- Attending to the hurt child first and involving the child who did the hurt in the comforting
- Observing when it happens, how often it happens, who is hurt, and what happened before the hitting
- Helping the child feel loved
- Quietly separating the children
- Diverting their attention
- Taking the hurting objects away, calmly and firmly
- Begin teaching the child that hurting is not something to do

## **7. The child destroys things**

It may mean the child:

- Is curious
- Does not understand what to do
- Has had an accident
- Finds the materials are not sturdy enough
- Feels excited or angry

- Feels jealous, helpless, or bored

So do not:

- Scold, yell, or shout
- Tell the child that he/she is bad
- Punish the child

You might try:

- Providing guidance in the use and care of things.
- Examining fragile items together to satisfy the child's curiosity.
- Removing destructible and broken things from the play area.
- Providing a different place for play or reorganizing the environment to discourage destruction.
- Teaching the child the difference between expendable items and valued items.

## **8. The child sucks thumb and fingers**

It may mean the child:

- Enjoys the physical sensation
- Uses thumb sucking to relax
- Has troubled feelings

So do not:

- Force or restrain the thumb or finger with mitts, guards, or ties
- Use bad tasting lotions
- Threaten or punish the child
- Make fun of or shame the child
- Coax or bribe the child

You might try:

- Relaxing and realizing that it rarely lasts and is not serious
- Giving the child more love and attention
- Observing when the child sucks the thumb or fingers
- Discovering what the child wants or needs and supplying it
- Explain to a school-age child the possible damage to teeth and mouth
- Help break the habit by gently saying "show me your pretty smile"



## **9. The child demands attention**

It may mean the child:

- Has been directed by adults or entertained by TV and therefore is inexperienced in independent creative play
- Has an interest in you
- Is tired, not feeling well, or hungry
- Feels left out, insecure, or unloved

So do not:

- Scold or punish the child
- Tell the child that he/she is bad

You might try:

- Observing when the child demands attention
- Providing interesting things for the child to do
- Praising the child for effort and success
- Sharing yourself with the child

## **10. The child runs away from you**

It may mean the child:

- Wants to be independent or explore
- Feels bored
- Needs privacy and time to be alone
- Is rebelling
- Feels unwanted and is trying to punish you for not showing love

So do not:

- Make a scene
- Cry or make a fuss over the child
- Punish or tie the child up
- Remove the child's privileges

You might try:

- Letting the child know you love him/her and that the child was missed
- Taking safety precautions with the environment so the child sees a controlled environment rather than you as a jailer or partner in a run-away game
- Setting up safe ways and places for the child to get away and be alone

## **11. The child uses foul language**

It may mean the child:

- Doesn't know any better
- Is imitating someone
- Is trying something new, or making a joke
- Is trying to get attention
- Is letting off steam

So do not:

- Show embarrassment or shock
- Get excited
- Scold or punish the child
- Over-emphasize the incident

You might try:

- Ignoring the child
- Observing when foul language is used
- Offering a substitute for the word
- Teaching the child new, extra long words
- Giving warmth, love and understanding

## **12. The child is jealous**

It may mean the child:

- Feels replaced by a new person in the family
- Has been unfairly compared to other children
- Has been given unfair treatment

So do not:

- Shame the child
- Ignore the child

You might try:

- Giving love and understanding
- Discussing his/her feelings one-to-one
- Observing how the child copes with jealousy
- Promoting good feelings about who the child is and what he/she can do

### **13.The child bites**

It may mean the child:

- Is still trying to put everything in the mouth
- Is teething and needs objects or harder foods to chew on
- Is using biting instead of words to communicate
- Feels frustrated and has not developed other, more positive coping skills

So do not:

- Bite the child back
- Encourage another child to bite the child
- Make the child bite soap

You might try:

- Providing close supervision of the biter and being ready to step in to protect other children
- Comforting the victim first. Tell the biter that biting hurts. Involve the biter in comforting the victim
- Providing an object to bite, such as a pillow or chew toy
- Observing when and who the child bites
- Helping child to use words to cope with frustration

## 14. The child can't fall asleep

It may mean the child:

- Is learning a new routine
- Does not feel sleepy
- Feels afraid
- Does not feel comfortable
- Wants attention.
- Is interested in other things

So do not:

- Completely darken the room
- Reward or bribe the child
- Scold or punish the child
- Put the child to bed as punishment
- Tie or restrain the child
- Disrupt the entire naptime

You might try:

- Playing soft background music
- Seeing that the child's needs are met before going to bed
- Tucking the child in with true affection
- Allowing the child to look at books or play with quiet toys
- Putting the child back to bed kindly but firmly

## One thing I can start doing today is...

Write down some techniques you learned today that you would like to start implementing.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write down techniques they learned and want to implement.