



MAKING CHILDREN MIND WITHOUT LOSING YOURS

*How to Bring out the Best in Kids
by Doing What Is Best for Them*

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Chapter 1

DARE TO BE COURAGEOUS

Putting Reality Discipline into Action

Reality discipline is an action-oriented way of holding kids accountable for their behavior.

In a society that faces a myriad of problems such as school shootings, increased violence, teenage pregnancies and drug use, adults face many daily struggles in trying to raise and train children to one day become productive members of society. *Reality discipline* is a key ingredient in the process. Whether you are a parent, teacher or administrator, you will find that reality discipline will be an invaluable tool for “making children mind without losing yours!”

This manual will help you understand reality discipline and apply it to everyday situations. If you’re a parent, you’ll learn how to strengthen your relationship with your child while at the same time teaching the child discipline. If you’re a teacher, counselor or administrator, you’ll discover how to deal with practical aspects of daily classroom life by maintaining a healthy authoritative approach with your students. In fact, any relationship can benefit from the principles of reality discipline, including business and professional relationships.

You will find this to be a realistic and practical study, presented by a teacher, former professor, clinical psychologist, and the father of five children from ages 9 to 29 (Just how smart could this man be?). We’ll tackle hassles in the home and classroom and offer suggestions for dealing with the students who cause trouble and always seem to be pushing the proverbial envelope. You’ll gain insight into why kids act the way they act and, more importantly, you’ll learn what to do about it. You’ll be prepared for parent-teacher conferences with new insights you’ve gained from this study.

As a parent, you are going to have a whole new set of tools for your parental toolbox. You’ll be ready to face the daily hassles of being a parent, including getting schoolwork done on time, dealing with finicky eaters, sibling rivalry, not getting to bed or getting up in the morning on time, problems of adolescence years, and much more. As one parent said so well, “Dr. Leman, I can’t wait for my kids to misbehave. I’m ready for them!”

TWO PREREQUISITES OF REALITY DISCIPLINE

1. The desire to love as unconditionally as possible

For parents, unconditional love is usually a concern. What about for teachers? Coaches? Administrators? Extended family members? Unconditional love is not easy to attain, but it is a necessary and appropriate goal. We’ll find that all of our

relationships are stronger if we look for reasons to love others, rather than for reasons not to love others.

Kids are perceptive. Ask them to name teachers whom they think really care about them and which ones they think don't care about them. Better yet, ask yourself which teachers made a real difference in your life. They were the ones you thought really cared about you, weren't they? You must have the foundation of truly caring for children as special individuals in order for reality discipline to be effective.

2. The willingness to take the time and make the effort to enforce reality discipline

Reality discipline is no small undertaking. It takes time, energy, and self-discipline, as well as a commitment and a desire to help children learn and grow. But as you practice the principles, they will become more natural for you to apply over time. Reality discipline is a big-picture, long-term solution that will help the children in your life succeed in the world.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF REALITY DISCIPLINE

1. Establish a healthy authority over children.

Your family or classroom is *not* a democracy. You are in charge, and the children in your life must understand that they are not the center of the universe. Children may even be shocked and unprepared when they enter the real world and discover that they cannot manipulate and whine to get their way. We must place a supreme value on children, to be sure, but we should not pamper them. For example, a child comes to her mother and says, "Mom, I can't straighten out my closet." A wise parent would respond with something like, "Honey, that's because it's a big job. It's going to take more than a few seconds to get it done. I know you can do it, and when you're all done, I'll come look at it, and then you'll be free to go next door and play with Josh."

In the classroom, this scenario might play out a little differently. Nine-year old Timmy complains that he can't do the math. The wise teacher responds, "Math can be difficult, Timmy. What are you having difficulty with?" Hear the child out and then after giving him a little direction, tell him that he still has time to finish his work before lunch; then he can join the other kids outside at recess.

The principle is not to accept excuses, because accepting excuses tends only to make the weak weaker. Encouraging words like, "I know you can do it, Timmy!" can really make a difference in the child who tends to be good at enlisting other people into his service. Kids will tend to test a teacher to see where the limits are in order to find out just how much they can get the teacher to do on their behalf. Kids want to know where the boundaries are. By setting limits and consistently enforcing them, you will be establishing that you are not a "push-over teacher" who can be

manipulated into “working for” the students instead of requiring the students to work for themselves.

Children need their teachers and parents to behave like adults, not like their childhood peers. You must be the adult and maintain a firm, consistent authority in the relationship. Keep in mind that you are the parent. You are the teacher. Act like it.

2. Hold children accountable for their actions.

Children must learn that their actions have consequences. We must teach them that everything they do has a consequence, whether it is positive or negative. Holding children accountable shows them that you respect their choices enough to allow them to reap the consequences or the benefits of the decisions they make. Accepting excuses really disables children and teaches them that irresponsible behavior has no consequences. If we do not hold our children accountable, then we are letting them control our homes and classrooms. So if you make a practice of accepting excuses, you are undermining your own authority and hurting the children.

3. Let reality and life be the teachers.

Allow children to fail. “Oh, no!” you gasp, “I cannot let my child fail! It will damage her self-esteem, and she won’t feel good about herself! That would be horrible!”

To be sure, failing is not the goal—succeeding is the goal. Failing, however, is a part of life. It is reality. We all fail at some time or another. If a child never learns the reality of making mistakes, then she will be in for a shock when she enters the real world. Make your home or classroom a loving, supportive environment where children feel the freedom to make mistakes—yes, to fail—from which they can learn and grow.

Example: A teacher has the students write on the board the math problems that they solved incorrectly. Benefits: This takes the pressure off the students and allows the children with incorrect answers to have a chance at the board. Plus, this allows the class and other students to see where the mistakes were made. Mistakes are not in and of themselves bad. Instead, they become teaching/learning tools for finding right solutions.

4. Use actions more than words. Words only go so far.

Kids often know what you are going to say before you say it. “Slow down!” “You’d better behave!” “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times!” Kids have heard this so many times they not only know what you’re going to say, they’ve stopped listening. Your words have lost their impact and, with that, so have you.

Instead of speaking with words, speak with actions. Once you have stated your expectations and let the children know what they must do to meet their responsibilities, follow through with reality discipline. If expectations are not met, allow the children to deal with the consequences of their behavior. This is the key to reality discipline. To make reality discipline work, you need to follow this plan. First, you state your expectations, and second, you . . .

5. Stick to your guns. Just don't shoot yourself in the foot.

Some kids will try every trick in the book in their attempts to wear you down. They have learned to use begging, whining, pouting, arguing, throwing temper tantrums and the like to manipulate adults into giving in to their demands. As a parent or teacher, you must remain firm in your commitment to reality discipline. If you give in, kids will learn that their behavior is stronger than your resolve. So remain firm, and they will learn that manipulative behavior does not work.

This does not mean that adults are never wrong or unable to change their minds. There are exceptions to sticking to your guns. If you see the wisdom in changing your mind or in following another course of action, then by all means, make that change. Never endanger someone's safety, well being or education for the sake of an initial decision that might be flawed. Be malleable. An original assessment may or may not ultimately bring the most favorable conclusion.

6. Relationships come before rules.

"Rules without relationships lead to rebellion." John McDowell

Getting along with children involves more than following a set of concrete rules—it is an art! If your discipline at school or at home consists merely of rules and "what-I-say-goes" authority, then the rules will not work.

Take the time to understand and get to know the children in your life. If you are a teacher, take the time to make at least one appearance at your student's volleyball game, etc. Again, you are establishing a relationship. You are showing that you care. Discover children's interests, talents, and personalities. The same approach does not work for every child and, in the end, everyone will be healthier and happier if you treat children as who they are, rather than to try to bend them into what you want them to be. Be flexible with your rules and put your relationships with children ahead of your rulebook.

Meet a child where he or she is. Not all children are mirrored reflections of ourselves, and we cannot force them to be. Enjoy a child for his special gifts and abilities and allow him *not* to be you.

7. Live by your values. Model the behavior you want to see in your children.

Children learn by watching adults. They learn by watching YOU! We can and will

impress numerous values upon them, such as honesty, generosity, compassion, patience, and so on. Society, however, tells our children, “do whatever you want,” “step on others to reach the top,” “looks matters most,” “money makes you happy,” and the list goes on.

How can we counteract all the negative images that bombard our children? We must model proper behavior for them. Teachers can tell students to obey certain rules all day long, and in return, these same students will be watching their teachers all day long—even when their teacher sneaks outside to break the district policy regarding smoking on campus. They will think that rules are made to be broken, and they will lose respect for their teacher. Take the time and expend the energy to follow your own rules and go out of your way to show children why your values work well for you.

Again, actions speak more loudly than words. Live by examples of courtesy and kindness. Children are looking for an example to follow. One teacher at the beginning of the school year was amazed that the students in her classroom seemed to lack everyday courtesies like saying “please” and “thank you.” Without saying anything to the class, she began using these courtesies even more than she already had been. She went out of her way to say, “Would you please get your books out?” instead of her usual “Get your books out.” By doing so, she was showing respect for her students while modeling the behavior she wanted to see in them. Soon her class began reflecting this to her and they, too, began to use “please” and “thank you” more consistently. Even the principal in one of her evaluations noticed what a pleasant atmosphere the class had.

Finally, be aware of negative reinforcements. When you punish with negative reinforcements, you can actually be creating—albeit unintentionally—a positive advantage for the student. Example: As a teacher you ask James to leave the classroom when he begins acting out and arguing with you. The next day the same thing happens. Now, several weeks later James decides he doesn’t want to sit through class. So what does he do? He already knows his ticket out of there!

INCONSISTENCY

People want children to win and be happy, and as a result, it is easy for discipline to be administered inconsistently. Too often teachers and parents punish when it is convenient, so authority becomes inconsistent. Here is an example.

Kristin talks constantly during class and interrupts her teacher and classmates. At home, she interrupts her parents and siblings at the table, on the phone, and whenever anyone has a conversation that does not include her. Her teacher and parents meet for a conference and decide that each time Kristin interrupts in class, she will get a check mark on an index card. The same will be done at home. If Kristen has more than five check marks at the end of the week, she loses her weekend privileges.

During the first week, Kristin goes home with 17 check marks on her index card. Since she has 11 check marks at home, she loses her weekend privileges and is confined to the house. Her dad and brothers are camping, so it's just her Mom and she at home all weekend. Simple, right? Wrong.

Saturday afternoon, Kristin's mother gets a phone call from a friend who invites her to dinner and the hottest play in town. Tickets are impossible to get, but her friend has an extra! Twenty minutes later, the phone rings. Kristin's friend Jamie wants her to spend the night. She already knows she can't go because she's confined to the house!

Mom, on the other hand, wants very badly to see the play. So Kristin gets to spend the night with Taylor, and learns nothing about consequences or accountability. Mom sends Kristin the message, "I'd rather see a play than parent you." In addition, Mom has disabled the teacher. The check marks no longer have meaning at school or at home, and most likely, Kristin will flaunt the lack of authority.

Examples of inconsistency such as this are almost limitless, although they may be varied in severity. Inconsistency sends the message that we see our relationships with children to be desultory and secondary. When we place our own convenience ahead of our children's welfare, we are suggesting that we value ourselves more than we value them.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

Individuals have long used reward and punishment in dealing with acceptable and unacceptable behavior of others. While the concepts of reward and punishment have been used for centuries and definitely have merits, they often provide short-term solutions to long-term problems. They may modify behavior for the moment, but they may not necessarily address the root of the problem. For example, the world today encourages children to think that they are the equals of adults, that "this is a democracy," and children can disregard adult authority figures. Kids begin to assume that they are their authorities' equals and that they can bargain and barter to get what they want. Real authority figures must reclaim the power that children mistakenly think they have been given. Do children matter and are they precious to us? Absolutely! Are they to be in authority? Absolutely not!

WHY REWARDS DON'T "WORK"

Children tend to see rewards as things they deserve, rather than things they have truly earned as result of outstanding achievement or behavior. Furthermore, most children know that their parents and teachers can often be worn down and may say, "I'll clean my room if you'll pay me," or "I'll clean the overhead everyday this week if you'll give me extra credit." Sometimes adults are so surprised or relieved at little Lindsay's or Ryan's offer of assistance, reward seems like a natural response.

When children start expecting to be rewarded for what should be considered normal responsibilities, they are in danger of developing a “payoff addiction.” They are also in danger of no longer seeing themselves as a contributing members of the greater whole, whether it be the family or the classroom.

WHY PUNISHMENT DOESN'T “WORK”

One of the key lessons children must learn is that unacceptable behavior brings unpleasant consequences—punishment—and that these consequences will be administered with fairness, certainty and swiftness. A danger associated with punishment, however, is that it can teach children that because adults are bigger, stronger, and in authority, they can push kids around and force their will upon them. In addition, because adults can get away with this, it reinforces the idea that it's all right for adults to push kids around and force their will upon them. In fact, punishment can sometimes reduce adult/child relationships to power struggles.

Furthermore, punishment is often administered in anger, reflecting the adult's desire to impose some kind of judgment or harsh justice on a child. Instead of punishing simply for the sake of punishing, we must emphasize important lessons that must be learned, behavior that must be changed, attitudes that must be corrected and respect that must be shown. Herein is discipline—teaching and learning administered in love for the good of the child who must grow to respect and honor authority figures.

The chart on the next page gives concrete examples that illustrate the healthy response vs. the punishing remarks. Notice also how the child's perception of self is greatly influenced by the response of the parent or teacher.

ALTERNATIVES TO REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

1. Emphasize encouragement instead of always focusing on rewards.
2. Don't reward children for tasks or achievements that fall within reasonable expectations.
3. Encourage the child to build him up, instead of simply focusing on the child's accomplishments.
4. Teach children that satisfaction and pride in their work are often their own reward.
5. Help children see that they are not loved only when they perform correctly.
6. Like encouragement, true discipline involves teaching and learning, thus building up the child.
7. Don't be afraid of relating discipline to behavior, but always emphasize lessons to be learned by the child.
8. The goal of discipline is to help a child learn and grow, while the goal of punishment should be to respond to unacceptable behavior with applying unpleasant consequences.
9. Again, the danger of punishment in and of itself is that it is often applied in anger, without explanation, and may be perceived by the child as an unfair, unwarranted

BEHAVIOR—RESPONSE—PERCEPTION

Behavior	Unhealthy Parental Response	Child's Perception of Self	Healthy Parental Response	Child's Perception
<p>Child "forgets" to do his chores and goes off to play with his friends (negative)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>Child helps Mom wash the dishes and clean up the kitchen (positive)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>Child is caught cutting classes at school (negative)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>Child cleans room by herself (positive)</p>	<p>"You are so irresponsible!"</p> <p>You will never amount to anything if you don't learn to get your work done!"</p> <p>You're grounded for a week!"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"Here's a dollar for helping Mom."</p> <p>"My, you are such a good boy for helping Mom."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"How could you do this to us?"</p> <p>"You're such a sneak and a liar!"</p> <p>"You'll wind up in a reform school."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"It looks all right, but you forgot to hang up your sweater."</p> <p>"You're such a dear for helping Mommy by cleaning your room"</p> <p>"You made us very happy."</p>	<p>"I am bad. I'm not worth much."</p> <p>"I'm being punished and it's not fair."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"Mom likes me as long as I'm good."</p> <p>"I can get money for help her."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"I'm no good."</p> <p>"All my parents worry about is how they look to the teachers at school."</p> <p>"I'm going to wind up a punk, so I might as well act like one now."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"I never do anything right."</p> <p>"Mommy loves me because I cleaned up my room."</p> <p>"They only love me when I do as I'm told."</p>	<p>"I really get upset when the chores aren't done. I had to hire the neighbor's boy to do your work. It cost five dollars, and it will be deducted from your allowance.</p> <p>"You won't be going to the scout meeting tonight because you have to stay home and do the chores you didn't do this afternoon."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"Thanks for your hard work. I appreciate it."</p> <p>"Having help has made this job a lot easier."</p> <p>"Thank you. The kitchen looks great!"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"I'm sorry to hear that you seem to dislike school that much."</p> <p>"Let's talk about it and try to find out what's bugging you."</p> <p>"I could be wrong, but I think you need school, for a lot of reasons."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"Your room looks great."</p> <p>"I'll bet you're proud of your work. Nice job!"</p> <p>"Your effort paid off. What a terrific looking room!"</p>	<p>"Mom is angry because I didn't do my chores."</p> <p>"If I don't do them, I will have to pay the price. She's giving me the choice."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"I am important. I belong to this family."</p> <p>"I am responsible and I do a good job."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"My parents are concerned about me."</p> <p>"They want to hear my side."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">----</p> <p>"I'm responsible. I can work without Mom being there."</p> <p>"I can discipline myself. I can do it."</p>

Chart from MAKING CHILDREN MIND WITHOUT LOSING YOURS by Dr. Kevin Leman, Revell Publishers

act by an adult who simply wants to use his or her authority to “put me in my place.”

10. Discipline, on the other hand, may be more easily perceived as a loving act designed to help the child learn, and practice appropriate behavior.

IN CONCLUSION

Reality discipline takes courage, commitment, and the effort to love unconditionally in order to work. Whether you are a parent, a teacher, counselor, coach or administrator, you can make it work for you.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss your understanding of the concept of reality discipline. Ideally, what can it help you accomplish in your life?
2. One of the seven principles of reality discipline is to establish a “healthy” authority. How would you define “healthy” authority? What is an example of “unhealthy” authority?
3. We are cautioned to beware of excuses. What are some common excuses that you might have a tendency to accept from children? How might you better handle these excuses in the future? Be specific.
4. What are some ways you can “meet a child where he or she is”?
5. Can you think of any ways to apply the principles of reality discipline to other relationships in your life? In the office, service club organization, the staff you supervise? Be specific.
6. What are some ways in which society promotes the idea that children should get whatever they want? Why do you think people feel they should give children whatever they want?
7. Discuss what you consider your strengths to be in “making children mind.” How would you like to improve in your ability to discipline children?
8. How would you define “discipline” versus “punishment”?
9. In your opinion, what is the true purpose of “reward”? What are some potential pitfalls of “reward”?

