



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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WHEN TO LET THE LITTLE BUZZARDS TUMBLE

Turning Everyday Hassles into Everyday Successes

Since actions speak more loudly than words, one of the most effective ways for authority figures to convey this message to children at times is simply to sweep the rug out from under them and “let the little buzzards tumble!” Fair and swift discipline delivered as a consequence of unacceptable behavior is very effective in teaching important lessons to children in ways that words cannot convey.

PRINCIPLES

- ***Be willing to make tough decisions.***

Practicing reality discipline consistently is difficult. It takes a lot of time, energy, effort and concentration, but in the end you will find the results well worth the effort. You might not be the most popular person in the room at the time, but if you care enough about the children in your life to keep them going in the right direction, being the “bad guy” for a time is a small price to pay.

- ***People are more important than things.***

If a total stranger comes to your front door and asks for the keys to your car or your house, you certainly wouldn't hand over the keys! You'd think the person was crazy! Don't be any less cautious with the children entrusted to you. Enjoy them, treasure them and protect them from any and all bad influences that might come knocking at their door. Your children are your most precious assets.

- ***Discipline in love, not anger.***

If you feel that your anger is bordering on being out of control at a given time, do not choose that moment to discipline a child. Whether you remove yourself or the child from the situation, allow time for your emotions to calm lest you fly off the handle and say or do something you'll be sorry for later. Let the child know that you are too angry to deal with him or her at that precise time, but that when you have calmed down, you will be back to deal with the issue at hand.

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

- ***Be sure that children feel loved—even if you do not “like” them much at the moment.***

While you should certainly tell your children that you care about them, there are also many ways for you to show your children that you care about them. Listen to what they have to say and make an effort to have quality discussion with them on subjects they are interested in and want to talk about. Look them in the eyes so they know you are giving them your full attention, but don't visually bore holes in them. Children find this threatening and eventually want to avoid this kind of scrutiny. Have fun with them and make sure they know that you enjoy their company. Show them your love and acceptance and let them know that you think they are special, valuable and fun to be around.

- ***Respect is a two-way street. You have to earn it just like children do.***

In reality, no adult should think that respect comes automatically simply by virtue of being in a position of authority. Authoritarian types in particular are in danger of falling into the trap of being “super authorities” who believe that whatever they say goes. Allow children to have some say and give some input into what is going on in their lives, and they will begin to feel that you respect them and care about what is important to them. Ask for their opinions; get their input as to how they would solve a problem; solicit their thoughts and ideas; answer their questions with questions that draw them out and force them to make decisions on their own; collaborate with them on a course of action. But never, never, never, put them down, insult them or degrade them when they offer a response that you have asked for. You'll pay dearly down the long run.

- ***Allow children to make appropriate choices and decisions.***

Obviously, don't ask your third-grader if he wants to take Dad's Harley out for a spin after dinner! Getting to know children and learning their strengths and capabilities are key factors in knowing what choices are appropriate for them. Choices are not simply open-ended options from which a child can make any number of imaginable choices, but situations in which a child can choose from a limited number of options.

Six-year old Sierra is tired of having her mother pick out her clothes for her in the mornings, because she thinks she should be able to choose what she wants to wear. Sierra and her mother stand in front of her closet every morning and sort through her clothes while Sierra rejects outfit after outfit.

Sierra's mother could save both of them a lot time and grief in the mornings if

she would limit Sierra's choices to two or three outfits. She could give her daughter some control over what she wears, but not total control. The task is too overwhelming for six-year old Sierra. Her mother should allow her limited choices instead of unlimited choices, then Sierra could make her own decision and feel good about it.

- ***Be brave enough to discipline and “pull the rug out!”***

Some authority figures think that reality discipline is one step short of cruel and unusual punishment. While reality discipline can be difficult and challenging, it is not in any way “unloving.” In fact, it is just the opposite. Yes, it can be tough to watch the children you treasure struggle through the consequences of their own behavior; but it is unloving and unfair to allow them to embrace a behavior style that may become habitual and unacceptable in all future relationships. Remember, the goal is to *bring out the best in kids by doing what is best for them!* And *doing* often takes courage and resolve.

STRATEGIES FOR THE DAILY HASSLES

Here are some practical suggestions for dealing with common hassles in day-to-day living.

- ***Courtesy***

Teaching courtesy to children must begin at a very young age to ensure that it becomes ingrained as natural behavior. Parents should confer and decide exactly what type of manners and what behaviors are expected of their children at home, because by the time a child reaches school age, teachers are limited in what they can do to make courtesy a learned behavior. They certainly do not have the time to teach it adequately! Teachers, however, can clearly outline what type of courteous behavior they expect and let children know that discourtesy will not be tolerated in the classroom.

- ***Homework***

Getting kids to do their homework is a universal struggle for parents and teachers. Help children set up a schedule and a place for them to do their homework and provide them with occasional assistance, but do not pore over their books or do their homework for them. If a child continually fails to complete his homework on a regular basis, then set up consequences to help motivate him.

Imagine that your son Kyle has repeatedly failed to do his science homework. Explain to him that if he doesn't get his science work done on time during the week, he can't play in his soccer game on Saturday. You will likely face an unpleasant situation on Saturday morning when Kyle realizes he really can't

play and then tries desperately to talk you into letting him play anyway. But stand firm! Kyle needs to learn more than anything that unpleasant consequences always follow unacceptable behavior. Not to stand firm, on the other hand, teaches him that he is stronger than you are in this situation.

- ***Peer Pressure***

The most effective counteraction to peer pressure occurs when a loving authority figure lets a child know that he or she is valuable, cared for and accepted. Peer pressure exercises a tremendous influence on children, especially beginning in the early teen years, because kids want to feel accepted and included, not rejected and left out by other kids their own age. Communicate with kids and tune in to what they are doing and what their needs and concerns are. Often undue pressure and criticism at home make children uncomfortable and push them into the arms of their peers who do not question, criticize, condemn, belittle, threaten or otherwise make them feel uncomfortable. Peer pressure cannot be eradicated, but it need not be the dominating force in children's lives.

- ***Television***

The United States has the largest percentage of obese children in the world, in large part because so many of them spend hours and hours a day in front of a television set. Do the best you can to monitor the amount and content of television your child is allowed to view, and look for interesting, informative and entertaining programs that are appropriate for children. In addition, look for programming that people of all ages can watch together. One teacher used to post a "show of the week" on her blackboard to give her students educational, content-appropriate programming options about which they might not otherwise know.

- ***Lying***

We all want our children to be honest, and it's quite normal for us to become upset when they lie to us. I believe children lie for two basic reasons: 1) to vocalize an internal fantasy, or 2) out of fear of some sort of negative reaction if they tell the truth. We can alleviate some of this fear by letting children know that all of us are imperfect creatures, even as we strive to model honesty in our own lives. Also, we must be sure to give children opportunities to be honest with us and allow them to "come clean" before we accuse them of being dishonest. Emphasize that the truth is always better than trying to cover up with a lie, and the consequences will reflect it.

- ***Talking back***

Most children talk back to their authority figures at some point in time unless

a particular authority figure frightens them. The difference between a child expressing how she feels, and the same child rudely talking back to an authority figure is a difference that is sometimes difficult to identify. Usually, however, you will just know when that line has been crossed. Let the child know that you will not tolerate being spoken to in a disrespectful way and clearly state what the consequences will be for a repeat offense. If another offense follows, immediately practice reality discipline.

IN CONCLUSION

It is as difficult to allow children to make painful and agonizing mistakes as it is to permit them to accept the consequences of their actions. By introducing children to your expectations and swiftly following through with appropriate consequences, you send them the message that you care about them. It is unfair to release children into the real world without having taught them how to behave. Let them know that you love them and want to listen to what they have to say. A child that feels loved and respected by the adults in his or her life is much more likely to be able to give that love and respect to others in return. Then “making children mind without losing yours” can become a reality.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some specific everyday hassles you deal with that are not mentioned in this lesson? How would you handle them using the principles of reality discipline?
2. Have your thoughts and ideas on discipline changed since chapter 1? If so, how?
3. How might you be a different kind of disciplinarian in the future? What might you like to change about your discipline style? Discuss with the group.
4. Share about a time when you should have let a child “tumble,” but didn’t.
5. As a group, share successful strategies you want to have in place for dealing with your children’s discipline problems. Be specific.
6. What are some ways that the power of choice can work in your dealings with children? Give an example.
7. How do you plan to use reality discipline with your children? Share specific ideas and plans that you have with the group.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Few things in life are as significant as the work we do with children. They are pliable, malleable, influential human beings who are molded by the leadership we give them in both word and deed. To be sure, reality discipline pertains to children, but it also pertains to adults as well. We must discipline ourselves to stand firm in our commitment to do the best we can as parents, teachers, principals or counselors as we use reality discipline to teach children how to be the best that they can be.

Anything is easier than reality discipline...until it works. Then nothing works better.

