Importance of Imposition of Discipline on Children

The Effective Use of Consequences

In the 1980s, the notion of using "consequences" as a means of developing and reinforcing desired behavioral patterns in children was popularized among child specialists and parents alike. The methodology was probably best articulated for the public in a landmark book called *Positive Discipline* authored by Jane Nelson and published in 1981. The basic approach involved establishing consequences for specific misbehaviors that were aimed at helping children experience the results of their mistakes. The intent behind the approach was to promote responsibility, accountability, and cooperative problem solving between parents and children. The approach became so popular during the 80s that we found parents looking for a consequence to modify almost every action that a child undertook in any given day. As often happens, a very good tool was overused and weakened by inappropriate employment. I believe Dr. Nelson mentions this in the current edition of her book. Her stance is that there are many tools for improving behavior, and using consequences is only one of them. The key is to understand what consequences can offer, what they are, and when they are appropriate. If used in this way, they can be highly effective in assisting children with developing productive behavior patterns, emotional growth, and a positive self-image.

Before talking about the specific ways in which consequences can be employed, it would be helpful to lay out some basic assumptions regarding discipline. Very often the terms discipline and punishment are used interchangeably, however, they are not the same at all. Within the scheme of positive parenting, discipline is actually contrary to the notion of punishment. Let's take a look.

FUNCTIONS OF DISCIPLINE

Why do we discipline our children? The most obvious answer is because we need them to behave in ways that allow them (and us) to function on a day to day basis. There are many other reasons that can be cited such as to instill in them certain values we think are important for their ultimate well being. Or perhaps, we are helping them learn how to contribute as part of a group. We might be concerned about how they function at school, at church, at baseball practice, or in other social settings. Some of our reasons are concerned with what's happening at the moment and in the near future, and some of them are aimed at the child's future well being and capacity to function in the world when we are not there to guide them. In other words, discipline has both short-term and long-term goals. Short-terms goals are usually aimed at modifying, inhibiting, or changing behaviors quickly. Longer-term goals have to do with instilling values, promoting responsibility, developing self-discipline, and so forth.

When considering a method of discipline, we must consider both the short and long-term goals. More importantly, we must consider whether or not our short-term goals will give us the far-reaching results we're looking for in the future. Let's take an example to illustrate. Let's say that young Heather argues with her mother every night about setting the table, which happens to be one of Heather's daily chores. The scenario usually begins with mom calling Heather away from some activity she's enjoying such as playing outside. Mom tells Heather she needs to come inside and begin setting the table so it will be ready in time for dinner. Heather says okay, but continues to linger outside and play with her friends. Mom calls her a second time and Heather yells back that she needs a little more time to finish what she's playing. Mom reminds her she's already called her twice and says, "Come now!" Heather begins to argue and perhaps even cry, saying that she hates to set the table and why doesn't her brother have to do it instead of her. She laments that everyone has fewer chores than she does. Finally, mom has reached her limit and goes outside where she tells Heather in a raised voice to come inside right now. Heather continues to hesitate and now mom yells, "If you don't set the table right now, your grounded for the next month!" Heather comes in and goes into the dining room in a huff while muttering under her breath.

So what's been accomplished here? Heather is setting the table, but quite unhappily. Mom is feeling a combination of frustration and anger at having to go to such extremes to get Heather to do a simple chore. Heather hasn't really learned anything and she's mostly focusing on how to get revenge on her mother (which she's doing already by pouting and making mom feel pretty miserable). The method of discipline in this case was a sort of dragged out nagging followed by a threat, which eventually did the trick but not in a way that left anyone feeling good. Further, the longer-term goal of building responsibility and accountability has not really been fostered.

When deciding on a method of discipline, we must consider first and foremost what the long-term results will be. Will the method we choose help our child build mutual respect, accountability, responsibility, self-discipline, resourcefulness, and cooperative problem-solving skills? In Heather's case, I think we can conclude that the answer to all of these would be no. We'll come back and revisit Heather's situation later on in the article, but for now the main idea to keep in mind is that techniques such as nagging, cajoling, issuing threats, or other punitive methods of discipline do not give us the long-term results we're looking for. Said more succinctly, punishment does not equal discipline. Punishment may very well take care of a problem in the short-term, but it generally works against our long-term goals. Now let's move on to consequences.

NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

There are two types of consequences. These are natural consequences and logical consequences. Natural consequences are the easiest to employ because we don't have to formulate or develop them from scratch. They just occur as a natural result of some specific behavior. For example, let's say that your 13-year-old son needs his baseball cleats for practice everyday after school. In order to have them, he is supposed to put all of his practice gear (including the cleats) in his sports bag each night so it will be ready to take to school the next morning. Inevitably, he forgets the bag and around three o'clock in the afternoon you get an urgent call from him requesting that you bring the cleats to school right away so he is not late to practice. You comply as you have many times before, all the while complaining and threatening that this will be the last time. How to solve this situation? Quite easily as this one has a built-in natural consequence. You sit down with your son, discuss the problem, and come up with an agreed upon plan that requires him to not only pack the bag at night, but to put it out by the door so he will see it each morning as he leaves. If he forgets, you will not bring the cleats to school even if he calls and begs you. He will have to go without. The consequence is simply a natural result of having forgotten in this case. Most likely there will be a number of natural consequences in this particular situation such as dealing with an angry coach, not being allowed to practice that day, and perhaps even being benched for a game. Your son will quickly learn that his forgetfulness causes him a great deal of distress with unwanted results whereas more responsible and accountable behavior on his part will allow him to pursue his desires and goals.

Logical consequences are different than natural consequences in that they require the intervention of a parent. They must be developed and formulated and then spelled out ahead of time. They are necessary when the situation in question doesn't offer a natural consequence, or the natural consequence is not appropriate. For example, the natural consequence of riding a bike in traffic would pose a danger to the child. A good example of logical consequences was offered in the article entitled "Your Teen's Room." The logical consequence of not having the room clean by the appointed day and time (which was Saturday in this case), was to not be allowed to go out that night with friends as planned. In another example, a logical consequence of running up the phone bill without permission would be to pay the bill back by either contributing the money from a part-time job or working it off around the house. In both of these situations, a consequence had to be formulated by the parent and then enforced when the situation warranted. There is still more to the story, though. It's not only important to think of a logical consequence that fits the situation involved, but it is also necessary to understand the right methods for using the consequence.

EFFECTIVELY USING CONSEQUENCES

We've established that we want discipline to be a tool for teaching responsible and cooperative behavior that considers the rights of others and develops self-discipline. We also want to preserve a positive self-image in the process by letting our children know that making mistakes is normal and acceptable, and we think they are capable of learning and making use of these opportunities to develop emotionally and mentally. It follows then that our method of discipline must involve mutual respect between parent and child along with a focus on rational and logical problem solving. Jane Nelson translates these lofty goals into a practical and easy to remember scheme which she refers to as the "three Rs:"

Related - The consequence should be related to the behavior.
Respectful - Respectful behavior is required by both parent and child. Parents should not use blame, humiliation, or pain as a means of enforcing consequences.
Reasonable - Make the consequence reasonable. The idea is to teach, correct a mistake, make reparation, or get one's behavior under control. It is not necessary to make children undergo additional suffering. Keep in mind the goal.

Establishing a Consequence

Begin by planning ahead. One or both parents should sit down with the child and discuss the behavior in question. Be sure that there is a good understanding on everyone's part of what is expected and in most cases why. Why becomes more important to the older child, and especially the teen. During this discussion, encourage the child to voice her views, feelings, and suggestions. Once the expectations are agreed upon, complete the plan by coming up with a consequence in the case that the expectations are not met. Be sure the consequence is fair, related to the behavior in question if possible, and meets the criteria for your long-term goals, i.e., teaches responsibility, accountability, respect for others, etc. Let the child know that when she breaks the agreement, the consequence will be enforced automatically without any further discussion.

This last point is very important. The system is only as good as the parents' ability to follow through with the plan. Further, the phrase "enforced automatically" means exactly that. There should be no "I told you so's," or "you should have listened to me," or "why do you do these things," etc. This is called piggybacking. Piggybacking adds a punitive twist to the consequence thereby turning it into a punishment rather than a learning tool. You'll find that once you have issued a punitive statement, your child will turn her attention to feelings of anger and revenge toward you rather than being able to take in the lesson provided by the situation. The consequences speak for themselves. They allow the child to feel and experience the results of her own behavior without you driving it home.

Now let's return to our situation involving Heather, the little girl who doesn't want to set the table. There are several strategies that might be helpful here. First, mom should sit Heather down at a time other than dinner when both are calm, and discuss the problem. She can ask Heather what part bothers her the most about the situation. It could be that Heather has a difficult time making transitions from one activity to another. She would be more cooperative if mom could let her know a half-hour before it was time to set the table that she would need to begin the process of breaking away from her current activity. Mom could warn her again at fifteen minutes, and again at five. Another possibility is to redirect Heather's behavior by giving her more responsibility in this situation. Maybe she would like to be in charge of decorating the table, or helping with some part of the meal, or helping to plan the menu. This allows Heather to feel some ownership in what needs to be accomplished, and allows her to make a contribution by using some of her talents and strengths. Finally, a consequence needs to be considered. Mom can make it clear that she will not tell Heather to set the table more than one time (outside of the time warnings she agrees to issue). If Heather reacts by arguing or becoming angry, she will need to go to her room to cool off until she can calm down, and then return to the dining room to set the table. If she misses setting the table altogether, then she will have to make up for causing her mother to have more work to do that night. In other words, if she makes mom's job harder by not doing her part, then she will have to make mom's job easier in some other way by doing more such as washing the dishes after dinner. Be sure that all the details are spelled out ahead of time, and that Heather verbally agrees to them. The agreement is very important because it gives the parent something to refer back to when children stray from the expectations.

What to Expect at First

Almost anytime a parent initiates a new system of discipline, children react with resistance. After all, they already have a system in place that invariably works quite well (for them that is). At the beginning, there is usually a testing period in which the child's behavior may worsen. If you have been a somewhat permissive parent, been inconsistent, and/or used a good deal of nagging and pleading to get your children to behave, you will most definitely experience a strong reaction to the new system. It is important to maintain both kindness and firmness throughout this period. If you hang in there long enough, you will find that your children become cooperative, respectful, and much easier to manage. Moreover, you will be giving your children the gifts of responsibility, accountability, and the capacity to solve problems, thereby setting up a future that is productive, happy, and rewarding.

NOTE: Using consequences works very well in most situations and with most children, however, there is a group of children that need additional kinds of strategies for dealing with behavioral problems. These are children who are usually characterized as especially defiant or explosive, and for whom normal methods of discipline seem to make the behavior worse. For working with these children, read *The Explosive Child* by Ross W.Greene, Ph.D. For children who have ADHD, read *Transforming the Difficult Child: The Nurtured Heart Approach* by Howard Glasser, M.A. and Jennifer Easley, M.A. and/or *Taking Charge of ADHD* by Russell Barkley, Ph.D.

Top Ten List for Managing Your Child's Behavior

The following is our top ten list of guidelines for managing your child's behavior. While we consider each of them to be equally important, we purposely listed the first three ahead of the others as we consider these to provide the base upon which parents can successfully manage children's behavior.

1. **Parent/Child Relationship** - We put this one at the top of the list because all of the others are dependent upon it. Basically, if you have not established a solid attachment between you and your child that is characterized primarily by positive regard (on your part), you do not have the foundation necessary from which to successfully manage behavior. Children do what their parents say primarily because they care what their parents think of them or how they feel about them.

2. **Spending Time** - This one goes along with the one above. You must spend time with your child on a regular basis that is not centered around behavioral problems, and this time should be used for play, conversation, and relationship-building activities. The more loved and understood your child feels by you, the easier it will be to manage his or her behavior.

3. **Developmental Knowledge** - Be sure that you know what your child is actually capable of doing depending on his or her age. Very often parents personalize their children's misbehavior as something they are "doing on purpose." Sometimes this is true, but more often the behavior is quite natural for the developmental age. Knowing this helps you look at behavior management more objectively and less reactively.

4. **Clear Delineation of Rules** - This may seem like a given, but it is very easy to find yourself in the position of waffling on rules you have set. Likewise, it is equally problematic if you do not state every part of the rule in a clear and concise way. Don't lump a lot of rules together, especially for younger children. Make one very clear statement. The younger the child is, the more exact the wording must be.

5. **Positive Reinforcement** - Use positive reinforcement whenever possible. This is most helpful when a child successfully behaves in the way you have prescribed. Be careful, however, not to use material inducements for good behavior (such as buying new toys, etc.).

Reinforcements should be centered around feelings of self-esteem, accomplishment, and cooperation. Do something with your child such as play a game, go to the park, or simply give verbal praise and appreciation.

6. **Providing Consequences** - For rules that don't seem to be followed using positive reinforcement, the parent must establish consequences for failure to comply. These must be realistic, match the nature of the infraction, and teach something if at all possible. Further, they must be consistently enforced. Start with small, time-limited consequences, and then slowly increase the time or intensity of the consequence for repeating the same infractions. When you can, use natural consequences. An example would be having your child work to earn the money to replace something he or she has destroyed.

7. **Repetition** - Repetition is an integral part of all learning and mastery. "If at first you don't succeed, try again." Decide how many times you will repeat a command before acting on it. It really shouldn't be more than two or three times for the smaller child and less for the older child. You might start by giving a warning of what will happen if the rule is not followed, and then following through with your consequence after the warning is ignored.

8. **Consistency** - This is another given, but perhaps the most difficult to facilitate. Consistency in rules and consistency in following through with consequences are both extremely important. Children naturally look for loopholes such as trying your patience when you're tired, but these are the times consistency is most important and effective.

9. **Parental Accord** - If two parents are involved, they must be in accord with what the rules are, what the consequences are, and what the procedures are for carrying out these consequences. Never let a child restate what the other parent has said without first checking to be sure of the accuracy of the statements, and be sure that you and your partner are in complete agreement with rules before trying to enforce them.

10. **Model Behavior** - As always, who you are and how you act is the most potent guide and teacher for your child. Treat him/her with respect in all situations, and strive to manage his/her behavior with a calm attitude that comes from your understanding that self-control is ultimately necessary and good for your child.

The Proper Use of Time Out

Time-out is probably one of the most well known and widely used disciplinary techniques to emerge since the baby boom of the 50's. It was originally used as an alternative to spanking and other forms of corporal punishment, and became very popular with the advent of behaviorally oriented parenting programs. Today it is still considered a useful tool in the parents' bag of tricks, and it can be very effective if employed properly. We offer the following guidelines.

PURPOSE. The primary function of time-out is to interrupt a non-desirable behavior and at the same time provide an opportunity for the child to collect herself before continuing to act. The non-desirable behavior can include breaking a rule such as no hitting, or not complying with a request or expectation such as completing a chore after being told. Time-out is used to remind the child of the rule as well as reinforce the idea that deviation from it, or refusal to complete a request, are unacceptable behaviors that will not be tolerated. For very active children or overly reactive children, time-out is a way to gain some distance from one's emotions long enough to refocus and attend to a task or even remember and apply a rule.

WHERE AND HOW LONG? Time out works best in sight of the parent. I would suggest that you set up a chair in some part of the main house like the living room, dining room, or corner of the kitchen. There is no need to place the chair facing the wall. The only requirement is that it is out of the way of other activity and within your sight. The length of time should be relatively short. The standard recommended time is one minute for each year of age. The idea is literally to break up the current behavior and readjust the mindset. Long time-outs don't bring about better results. To the contrary, children lose track of why they were placed in time-out in the first place, or worse yet, they become resentful which defeats the purpose. You want them to have a moment to think about what they did or didn't do and reinforce compliance afterward. A short amount of time is all that is needed.

WHAT ABOUT SENDING MY CHILD TO HIS ROOM? As stated above, time out works best within sight of the parent. There is another technique called the "cooling-off period" or "positive time-out" which does usually take place in the child's room. This is used when there is a

power struggle resulting in angry feelings on one or both sides. The idea is to send the child to his room so he (and you) can cool off, and then return when calm to solve the issue at hand. It's similar to what adults do when they find themselves at odds and angry feelings get in the way of resolving the problem. They take a break from the argument and come back to it when they're calm. With the cooling off period, the child is allowed to soothe himself in his room by playing with toys, reading, or whatever he likes to do that can distract him from his angry feelings. Once calm, he's allowed to come out of his room on his own and resume dealing with the problem. This is a higher level technique that is useful for children who don't necessarily have a lot of impulse control problems. I would suggest not using both of these at the same time. For younger children, and especially for ADHD children, regular time-out is more effective. The cooling off period is better as children move towards adolescence.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT. If you have not used time out before, you will want to explain it to your child ahead of time. The explanation should include several points. (1) You realize you cannot make your child follow the rules if they decide not to, but you can provide a consequence any time they break a rule or do not follow through with a request. (2) The consequence you are going to use is time-out. Show them the chair and explain that when they break a rule or don't comply with a request, you will simply tell them to go to time-out. You should actually state the rule that was broken and then say "Go to time out." (3) There will be no discussion about this, and you will not talk to them while they are in time-out. There will be no getting up to go to the bathroom, no drinks of water, and so forth. While in time-out, there is no communication. (4) You will be the timekeeper and tell your child when she can get up. It's extremely important to stick to these rules. Allowing your child to pull you into a discussion or further explanation defeats the purpose and will ultimately render the technique ineffective.

PARENT'S DEMEANOR. It is very important that you remain both firm and neutral throughout the entire time-out process. The idea is to let the child feel the impact of his own actions which he will do best if you don't supply any other emotions to the situation that can distract him from this task. If you get angry, he'll be more concerned with what your anger means to him then he will about having broken a rule. Or he may become angry himself and focus more on plotting revenge. The idea is not to infuse the situation with energy, and especially negative energy. Keep in mind that time out is not a punishment, but rather a disciplinary technique. You should avoid adding any punitive elements to the process. Above all, refrain from verbal reprimands such as "How many times have you broken that rule now?" or "When are you going to learn?" You absolutely will dilute the power of time-out if you do this.

WHAT IF MY CHILD WON'T GO TO TIME OUT? You should physically escort her to the time out chair. If necessary, hold her firmly in the chair by standing behind the chair and placing your hands on her shoulders. When she is sitting still for 10 seconds, you can begin the timing. Don't engage in conversation while doing this, and of course, you should not use physical force. Usually a firm hand on the shoulder will do the trick. What you're really communicating is that compliance is not an option in this case. If you have a child that will not stay in time out even under these circumstances, then most likely the relationship between the two of you needs some repairing and rebuilding. Disciplinary techniques will only work if the parent-child relationship is intact, and the child cares about how you feel about her. Another possibility is that you have a child who has an extremely low tolerance for frustration. See Ross Greene's book called The Explosive Child for more assistance.

WHEN TIME OUT IS OVER. When time-out is over, return to the original problem. If a chore was not completed, then it must be done now. If a rule was broken, you can address what led up to the problem if that seems appropriate. An example would be if your child hit his sister because she broke one of his toys. You might want to discuss with him how he felt when she broke the toy, and then how he might better have addressed his anger. It's not helpful to lecture after time-out and you should avoid any further recrimination. Also, be sure to give positive feedback to your child for completing time-out, especially if he behaved well during the process.

FINAL THOUGHTS. Time-out is just one tool for effectively encouraging good behavior. There are many others including spending time with children, giving positive feedback, knowing and understanding your child's temperament and personality characteristics, taking the time to train and teach her how to use self control, and negotiating solutions to problems. Time-out should not be used more than several times in a day. If you find you need to use it more, you need to spend more positive time with your child. If this doesn't help, then you need to investigate other possible causes for repeated behavioral problems and/or seek professional help. Generally speaking, time-out used properly is quite effective during those times when positive feedback is not enough to help your child stay on track.

Giving Recognition

A powerful tool for enhancing the parent-child relationship and building self-esteem is to provide children with "recognition" on a regular basis. Recognition can be offered in a variety of ways, however, is particularly effective when given verbally. Howard Glasser has developed four types of verbal recognition that are easy to use and take a minimum of time to employ. Outlined in his book, *Transforming the Difficult Child: The Nurtured Heart Approach* (1998), he calls these "active recognition," "experiential recognition," "proactive recognition," and "creative recognition." Building upon each other, these variations of verbal recognition provide children with a sense of being noticed and appreciated which they translate as being cared for and understood. Let me briefly describe them and supply some examples of how to use them.

Active Recognition. Active recognition can be compared to offering a verbal snapshot that notices the child's ordinary actions and moods. It is simply describing in detail what you see your child doing or feeling in any given moment. Some examples are as follows:

> "I see you are building a house with two windows, a door, and a chimney. It looks strong enough to avoid being blown down by a storm."
>
> "I noticed you were practicing your free throws outside for a long time. You seemed frustrated when you couldn't get the ball to drop in easily."

In each of these examples there is recognition of what is being done - the activity itself and the child's involvement in it. In the second example the recognition extends to how the child is feeling during the course of the action. You'll notice that both statements are fairly detailed and are devoid of any sort of commentary or judgement. Both of these characteristics are very important. The detail lets the child know that you really are paying attention. If you said something more general such as "nice house" or "good free throws," the comments lose their punch. The details let the child know you are observing very carefully what he's doing. The added attention to the feeling or mood communicates deeper attentiveness and caring on your part, as well as understanding. The lack of commentary or judgement allows the statements to stand as they are, simply as recognition. The child feels both noticed and accepted.

Experiential Recognition. Experiential recognition is similar to active recognition in that you again offer verbal recognition of an action. However, this time you also have the added agenda of reinforcing the values and behavioral practices that you wish to instill or enhance in your children. Here are two examples:

> "Joey, I noticed that you were really angry at Jeff when he knocked down your legos, but you didn't hit him. You used words to let him know how upset you were. I like the way you controlled yourself."
>
> "I see that for the last ten minutes you concentrated very hard on your math homework. That's a good way to do it. Ten minutes at a time. You're being pretty creative, aren't you?"

There are two important elements in offering experiential recognition. The first is to capture and freeze in time any effort you see that is moving in the direction of a desired value or behavior. In the first example, you are extracting one piece of the activity and focusing on it. In this case, it is the use of verbalization as opposed to physical aggression to deal with anger. Even if the verbalization was somewhat aggressive, you are recognizing progress while also giving the message that anger can be handled verbally. If Joey was verbally aggressive,

then at a later time you can discuss with him how to refine the process and use healthier assertive phrases, but for this moment you have helped solidify his move away from physical aggression. The second element that's important is to energize the recognition by using statements such as "I like the way you controlled yourself," or in the second example, "You're being pretty creative, aren't you?" These statements are the icing on the cake. They serve to reinforce the value or behavior, particularly when offered with energy.

Proactive Recognition. Here the goal is to recognize your child's successes at not breaking rules. That might sound like a backdoor method of reinforcing rules and actually it is. Instead of the focus being on following rules, it is on not breaking rules. Implied here is your recognition that the child is struggling with a rule, but has made a choice to follow it rather than break it. Let's look below:

> "I see that you didn't want to admit that you didn't turn in all of your homework today at school when I asked you about it, but you decided to tell the truth even though you knew you might be in trouble. I really appreciate your honesty. It let's me know I can trust you."
>
> "I saw you getting ready to go into Ashley's house, but you turned around and came back home to ask permission first. That's good thinking!"

The key in using this technique is to try and catch any opportunity you can to comment on your child's success in sticking with rules. This is particularly helpful when a child has fallen into the pattern of getting into trouble daily. Usually what happens in these cases is that parents find that almost all of their interactions with the child are around issues of discipline, and there emerges a chronic sense of failure on both the parent and child's part. Using every opportunity to recognize even the smallest effort at self-control can assist in turning this pattern around. The goal here is to be sure that the successes outweigh the failures.

Creative Recognition. This is one of my favorites because it combines recognition with compliance toward parental requests. The idea is to make very simple and clear requests such as "I need for you to hand me that spoon," which happens to be situated easily within the child's reach and requires no planning or movement. Then when the child complies, offer appreciation and recognition. "Thanks for doing that so quickly. It helps me get breakfast ready faster." For kids who have a lot of trouble complying with rules, this technique can be used in ingenious ways to turn the situation around. For example, one parent reported that she literally found things to request that were already in the process of being complied with. As her daughter was on the way to the clothes hamper with shirt in hand, mom said "I need you to put your shirt in the clothes hamper." She then followed up with "Thanks, now I can get that washed for you to wear this week." An added comment might be "It looks like you were reading my mind. Thanks for doing that so cheerfully." The comment regarding "reading my mind" is aimed at directly enhancing the connection between you and your child, while the latter comment reinforces good attitude.

When using creative recognition for kids that have become particularly unruly or non-compliant, begin with very clear and simple requests that contain no opportunities for struggle. Some requests that fall in this category are:

> "Please hold this towel for a minute while I rinse the pan."
>
> "I need for you to grab the end of the sheet so we can fold it together."
>
> "I want you to hold the phone a minute while I go back to the other phone."

After each request, follow-up with appreciative statements that comment on the attitude or contribution of the action.

> "I love it when you help me with the dishes. It makes it more fun."
>
> "I really appreciate your help with the sheet. It's really hard to fold a big sheet by yourself."
>
> "Thanks for helping me with the phone. You followed my directions perfectly."

Final Thoughts. Verbal recognition can be used many times every day. It is particularly useful for mending distance between parents and

children, as well as for turning around the merry-go-round of chronic misbehavior and overuse of harsh disciplinary strategies. Being noticed and accepted is a strong human need, and parents can positively impact their children by meeting that need regularly. A cautionary word in using the above verbal techniques is to be sure that you are always authentic and energetic in your delivery. If you use these techniques in a perfunctory or patronizing manner, children will pick up on it. Also, these techniques are most effective with younger children. As children move into adolescence, they become skeptical of anything that seems planned or stilted. You can use these techniques with adolescents, but couched more within larger conversations that explore personality characteristics and identity issues. In other words, if you are able to establish a regular method of free verbal interchange with your teen, then recognition is easy to fold in as you make positive observations or help solve problems. Try out the techniques offered here on your younger children at first, and don't give up until you've worked with it for at least three weeks. You should see some positive results.

Cueing

A common experience for many of us growing up was learning how to respond to certain cues we got from our parents regarding our behavior. For me, it was the single raised eyebrow that appeared on my mother's face when I was getting dangerously close to being in trouble. That eyebrow, which sometimes barely moved, was an unmistakable message that I had better move in a different direction or pay the consequences. It was a very potent nonverbal communication that my mother established with me early on, and even today, the family jokes about mom's raised eyebrow. This practice which my mother engaged in, and many parents still use, is called "cueing." It is a special means of communication - a sort of disciplinary technique that not only aids in managing behavior, but also actually increases the intimacy between parent and child. Unfortunately, cueing can also be a source of confusion if the signals given are mixed and contrary to each other. Let's see how this works.

First off, what is cueing? It is a signal sent from one person to another to evoke in that person a feeling, thought, behavior, fantasy or all of the above. It may be as overt and dramatic as directly yelling a command, or as subtle as a tone of voice or a look in the eye. We are all familiar with the sound of a powerful adult (dad or the boss) clearing his throat before he says something which implies we need to do something different; or mom banging pots in the sink at the end of a long day. That, but the way means, "Don't make another sound!" The number of cues people use and their various meanings are enormous and can open the door for considerable misunderstanding and frustration. On the other hand, if the cues are acknowledged and responded to, they can lead to feelings of deep understanding, unique closeness and playful cooperation.

Now, how does all this relate to adult and child relationships? Well, I'd like to approach this from two directions, one having to do with discipline and the other having to do with intimacy. First, let's look at discipline. It has been my observation over the years that problem children respond very accurately to cues from adults. Furthermore, the child is often responding to cues that the adult may not be aware he or she is sending. I'll give you an example: Let's say Johnny is seven years old and hates to clean his room. Nonetheless, his mother has instructed him to clean his room each Saturday before he is allowed to play. What actually occurs each Saturday morning is that mom spends the entire morning nagging Johnny, who actively resists cleaning his room until finally she yells at him in frustration. He responds by crying and possibly saying "I hate you" or "You don't love me." Mom then feels guilty and more frustrated, not to mention somewhat worn down by

the whole affair. What's the result? Finally, after more tears and more guilt on mom's part, they make up and the room gets cleaned, often with mom pitching in and helping to get the chore completed. All goes well until next Saturday at which time the whole process is repeated.

What's the problem here? Very simply, Johnny acts with little self-control or self-discipline because he is picking up some very inconsistent cues from mom. As she goes through her Saturday litany of "I mean what I say - you'd better pick up your room right now," she also is silently saying that if Johnny can hold off long enough, she will end up helping him and relieve him of the responsibility of cleaning his room by himself. In actuality, she doesn't mean what she says - not really. I suggest she develop a new system of cueing that makes it clear to Johnny that she means what she says. I propose she tell Johnny what she wants him to do, how many times she will remind him, the consequences for not obeying her, and then carry through with her plan - period! If he bucks (and he will for the first month or two), she should prudently increase the consequences, tell him why she's doing it, remind him of what happened the last time and how he can keep the penalty at a minimum.

Well, you may be saying, "That's a bit too harsh for my taste and I'm not comfortable with it." This is where my thoughts about intimacy come in. Remember, we are trying to develop the process of cueing and that encompasses both the spoken and the unspoken - that is, language without words. The reason that strikes all people as profoundly intimate is because it has its origin during the first years of life when our mothers literally read our minds. To be understood that way remains one of the strongest and fondest longings in all human beings. Though the practicalities of life force us to give it up, we search for it evermore. I am suggesting you purposefully establish that mode of interaction with the child in question because you understand the need, but shape it in such a way as to be mutually beneficial to both you and him. For instance, you tell Johnny if you raise your eyebrows or use a mutually agreed upon magic word, he is coming dangerously close to a penalty. You should also help him by saying with a very particular tone of voice, "Remember?"

By doing the above, you will be forging a very intimate and unique bond with your child that you both grow to treasure and rely upon. Additionally, you will help him develop his memory, ability to anticipate, judgement, self-control, and perhaps most importantly, his ability to maintain self-esteem by learning to do what you expect of him. A major source of self-esteem in children is the feeling they are able to live up to their parents' expectations. If these expectations are vague, contradictory or changeable, the child is cut adrift in a sea of doubt, conflict and impulsivity. Thus, through this system you are offering the child strength and closeness at the same time.

The Cooling Off Period

The "cooling off period" (Nelson, 1996) is an effective tool for putting some space between you and your children when emotions run high, and communication breaks down. Basically, the cooling off period is a "positive time-out" that allows everyone a chance to readjust emotionally so that constructive solutions can be found to problems. You can use the cooling off period to:

- Stop a misbehavior that has gone out of control.
- Allow your child a chance to calm down and regain control of his/her emotions.
- Allow yourself a chance to cool off and move from a position of anger to one of thoughtfulness and kindness.
- Gain some time to think about the best direction to take in dealing with the problem behavior, which helps to avoid rash decisions and irrational punishments.
- Preserve a positive relationship with your child in the face of conflict.
- Promote problem solving versus revenge seeking.

The cooling off period is most useful when a power struggle arises between parent and child. Power struggles inevitably involve angry feelings, impulsive verbalizations, and rash decision-making. Hurtful things are likely to be said, and extreme punishments are often levied. Children may focus mostly on seeking revenge rather than on improving their behavior.

To effectively use a cooling off period, it is best to have your child to go to his room for awhile, giving both of you some physical distance from each other. Let him entertain himself in his room as a means of getting a handle on his feelings. It is not necessary to add punishment to the time-out by restricting his activities once in the room. You might even plan out with him at another time what kinds of activities he likes and can use to soothe himself when he's upset such as reading or playing with special toys. Then, when both of you are ready, allow him to come out of his room and resume working on solving the problem.

It is not necessary to make children stay in their rooms for a specified amount of time during the cooling-off period. This is not a punishment, but rather a method for learning how to manage anger and solve problems constructively. You may feel that you are reinforcing the negative behavior by not making the time-out more uncomfortable, but this is not so as long as the cooling off period is followed by continued efforts to solve the original problem. Ultimately, you are giving your child the tools for self-discipline and emotional stability.

NOTE: The cooling-off period is different than regular time-out. It works well for children that have difficulties with frustration tolerance and tend to get into power struggles easily, and who have difficulty getting their emotions under control. Regular time-out is another parenting strategy that works well in situations where one is trying to focus the attention upon rules. See the article entitled "The Proper Use of Time-Out" on this website for a fuller explanation.

How to Make Rules and Give Commands

Making and reinforcing rules is a primary parenting task that all of us must attend to throughout our children's growing years. This is because rules play such an integral role in helping our children learn how to conduct themselves in various situations and participate as a social being in one's community or culture. Equally important, rules help us govern our behavior toward each other to promote mutual growth and wellbeing. Ultimately, rules are the tools we use as parents to teach our children values as well as develop self-discipline. As such, the methods for establishing rules need to be very thoughtful and deliberate. We must carefully consider how each rule fits into our overall system of discipline, and specifically what the aim and intent is of the rule itself. For starters, lets look at the types of rules and their specific functions.

TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF RULES

There are three basic categories of rules that parents use. These are rules for how to conduct oneself in specific situations, rules for how to behave toward others, and rules regarding one's responsibilities.

Situational Rules. These are the rules that govern what one is supposed to do given a particular set of circumstances. Staying seated at your desk in the school classroom, raising your hand to ask a question, or listening when the teacher is speaking are all rules of conduct in a specific situation (the classroom). Other examples might be the teen's curfew, asking permission before going to a friend's house, calling in when there is a change of plans, and so forth. These rules describe specific modes of communication between parent and child as well as set boundaries around types of activities.

Situational rules function in these two important ways: (1) They establish rules of conduct in social situations by spelling out what is expected as well as what is unacceptable; and (2) they set up boundaries and limits within which children and teens can operate safely while moving forward with developmental tasks. For example, we allow our teen to stay out later with friends than we would our 10-year-old because our teen has developed a greater capacity for making complex decisions, and we expect that he or she will use good judgement. At the same time, we give our teen a curfew (a boundary) because we know that he or she is not yet ready to always make appropriate decisions about

activities that occur in the late night hours.

Rules for Behavior Toward Others. Rules regarding behavior toward others might be included under the heading of "situational rules," but because they are so important in developing one's conscience and sense of morality, I have separated them as a distinct category. These rules include things such as being honest, considering another's feelings in our actions and communications, avoiding hurting or harming another, and so forth. Sometimes these rules are stated in negative term such as no lying, no hitting or kicking, or no deliberately hurting the feelings of another with harsh words or actions. In the teen world some of these rules might be not talking behind a friend's back, not flirting with a friend's boyfriend or girlfriend, not divulging secrets, not squealing on a friend, and so on. These rules not only spell out how individuals are expected to conduct themselves, but also capture the accepted behavioral norms of the peer group. In other words, rules for behavior toward others specify individual behavior while also promoting the accepted social criteria of the group's values.

Rules of Responsibility. These are the rules that pertain to caretaking activities, chores, and work-related/organizational expectations. Brushing one's teeth daily, dressing for school, putting dirty clothes in the hamper, washing hands before dinner, and maintaining general hygiene are examples of caretaking rules. Chores are activities that contribute to the overall care of the home and family such as washing dishes, emptying the dishwasher, setting the table, taking out the trash, doing laundry, vacuuming and dusting, cleaning the bathroom, and keeping one's own room clean. Work-related and organizational expectations cover things such as keeping track of and doing homework, taking the right materials to school, planning ahead for activities and events, showing up for soccer or volleyball practice on time, and perhaps maintaining a part-time job. These rules outline performance expectations as opposed to conduct.

HOW TO ESTABLISH RULES

As you think about the three categories of rules, you become aware of the fact that some of these are more likely not to change over time whereas others will change a great deal. The rules governing behavior toward others are those that are least likely to change. They might be expanded as new situations arise requiring guidance as to the correct behavior, but overall these rules will reflect certain unchanging values you uphold and that govern your family relationships. Situational rules are very likely to shift as children move through various stages of development. Your four-year-old will not require a curfew as will your 16-year-old. Conversely, your 16-year-old will already know how to deal with friends and peers whereas your four-year-old is just beginning to learn basic social skills. Rules of responsibility will increase and become more complex as children get older. Chores for young children focus more on self-care whereas an adolescent's chores include more family-related tasks.

With that in mind, I would suggest you begin by making a list of the all the rules you have used or would like to establish in terms of the three categories. If you have more than one child, you would make separate lists for chores and perhaps some situational rules. You might feel that this is an unnecessary task, however, you will find that it helps you think carefully about the goals of each rule as well as how the rule fits into the overall values and habits you wish to instill. Here are some guidelines to use in assessing your lists:

- Measure your rules for behavior toward others against your value system. Also, be sure that these rules reflect your own behavior toward your children and spouse. (Don't make rules you can't follow yourself.)
- Check to see if your situational rules adequately cover the various kinds of situations each child encounters. In other words, are these rules clear and adequately stated? Sometimes parents have difficulty in reinforcing rules because they have not been adequately formulated or stated. Other problems with situational rules are that they are sometimes made up arbitrarily as situations arise, but are inconsistent over time.
- Make sure that situational rules take into consideration your children's ages and levels of maturity. For example, your ten-year-old should have a later bedtime than your seven-year-old, even if it's only a fifteen minute difference. You will have greater compliance if your rules reflect recognition of different levels of maturation.
- Chores should likewise reflect different levels of ability and responsibility. Just as the older child has greater privileges, they also have greater responsibilities. Be careful, however, to spread chores across the family so that one child is not overly burdened with caretaking and work responsibilities. Very often the oldest child lands in this role, particularly if they are competent and parents are overly stressed themselves. You want to be fair to all of your children while still recognizing limitations in terms of age.
- Be very specific in the statement of rules. For example, if one of your rules is "be honest," you are likely to run into trouble when reinforcing it. It is too vague. It would be better to state the rule in terms of both what's required and what's not acceptable. "No lying" is a better beginning. Next, specify your definition of "lying." You might include not telling the truth when asked a direct question, as

well as omitting information when responding. If you ask your daughter how she's doing in school this semester and she tells you about the A average in history but leaves out the fact she's almost failing in math, she has lied by virtue of omission. Make the rules very clear.

NEGOTIATION

You as the parent have the final word regarding rules, and it is your job to take the lead in establishing and reinforcing rules. There are times, however, when negotiation can be a valuable tool in both making new rules and adjusting previous rules to encompass new situations. Negotiation is particularly helpful with children who tend to be power-driven or defiant, or with teens. By engaging their participation in making rules, you have a greater chance of successfully reinforcing them.

How to Use Negotiation. Negotiation consists of a two-way conversation between you and your child where each is allowed to state his or her point of view. If for example you have set an 11 p.m. curfew for your 16-year-old son, and he thinks the curfew is too restrictive, give him a chance to state his case. Allow him to tell you the reasons why he believes the curfew is too early. Ask questions as he speaks to help him elaborate and show your interest in his point of view. If he makes a case of any kind, consider a compromise that takes into consideration his needs and desires and your concerns for his safety. State your case to him also pointing out why you believe a curfew is necessary and remind him of your concern. You have the final word, of course, but you might find that your teen has some points that make sense, and your ability to be flexible in view of his arguments will go a long way in being able to reinforce the curfew.

Many parents feel that this type of negotiation is "giving in" to their children. Certainly negotiation conducted when a rule is in the process of being reinforced is a dangerous practice because it sends the message that rules and limits are not really real. However, this is very different from setting aside a time for revisiting and negotiating rules based on logical and well thought out arguments. The first situation teaches kids that they can manipulate. The second situation teaches kids to formulate ideas and thoughts, present them in a socially acceptable manner, and develop skills of negotiation and problem solving.

Generally, you will find that rules work best when they are carefully and clearly stated, negotiated where possible, and reinforced consistently over time. Moreover, your careful consideration and use of rules will help your children develop self-discipline, empathy toward others, and independence built on responsibility.

MAKING REQUESTS (OR GIVING COMMANDS)

Now that you've successfully established the rules you want to reinforce as well as developed a protocol for negotiation and following through, you need to give some attention to how to deliver requests, or shall we say "give commands" to your children. Here are some pointers:

- DO state the request in the form of a command as opposed to a question. Say "I need for you to turn off the television and set the table." Don't say "Will you please set the table now?" The latter implies an option when there really isn't one.
- DO be very clear and detailed in your delivery. In the above example, the inclusion of "turn off the television" leaves no room for delay. The statement includes both what is necessary to make the transition from one activity to another, and exactly what new activity is required.
- DON'T make a request twice. Follow up failures to meet requests with consequences, and if at all possible these should be consequences that have been delineated ahead of time. For example, in the above situation you may have made it clear that for every minute the child lingers in front of the television before turning it off and coming to set the table, five minutes will be taken off of bedtime.
- DO allow for transition time. Instead of repeating commands, you can allow a child some mental time to make a transition from one activity to another by announcing that you will be making a request in the near future. Again using the above example, you might say to your child five or ten minutes earlier "I will be asking you to set the table in five minutes. You need to prepare yourself." Then in five minutes give the actual command which is "I need for you to turn off the television . . .
- DON'T negotiate a rule or request while in the process of reinforcing it. If you feel there is room for negotiation, do it at a later time.
- DO make requests and reinforce rules when you are calm and thoughtful. It is always better to withdraw temporarily and get your emotions under control before dealing with a problem. Your effectiveness depends on maintaining your equilibrium.

- DO have your consequences ready and thought out ahead of time.

The End