

Common Sense Parenting

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Begin with Yourself!

Parenting can only be done with the power and grace of our Lord. (Ps 127:1; John 15:5)

Recognize that children are a blessing and gift from God. Thank the Lord for your children regularly. (Ps 127:3)

Set the example in everything you want your child to be and do. Your consistency and self-discipline have far greater influence than any direct instruction. Be a parent who can say, "Do as I do." (1Cor 4:14-16; 11:1)

Develop your affection for Jesus so that your relationship with the Lord is progressively becoming ever more intimate. Out of a heart full of affection for Jesus you will be able to express complete affection for your child (Php 1:3-8).

Since the sin of parents is passed on to children, it becomes imperative for you to get rid of sinful habits, both in attitude and behavior. (Deut 5:9; Prov 20:7)

It is important to distinguish your responsibility to your child in terms of the behavior you are to demonstrate and the responsibility of your child for his own behavior. Don't blame yourself for your child's bad behavior. Blame yourself if you withhold love, attention, correction, discipline or warning that might influence your child to avoid the wrong. (Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:1-21)

The best training cannot instill God's wisdom in a child's heart. All you can do is to provide an environment in which the child's access to God's wisdom is unhindered. The child must ultimately seek God for himself. (Prov 2:1-5)

Your chief and best resource for all the challenges of parenting is the Word of God, taught with loving persistence. (Eph 6:4)

Remember that children are not morally neutral or little adults. They can be impatient, unkind, envious, boastful, proud, rude, selfish, easily angered, delighted by evil things and maintain a lasting memory of broken promises and wrongs suffered. Yes, your darling child can be these things and more. Keep your expectations in perspective. (Prov 20:11; 1Cor 13:4-11)

Encourage Your Child

A child that grows up without love and affection or, conversely, victimized by physical, sexual or verbal aggression will likely develop bitter resentment and serious behavioral problems. Positive encouragement is therefore vital to a child's spiritual, mental and emotional development. Let's follow the example of Paul who said, "For you know that we dealt with you as a father, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His Kingdom and glory." (1Th 2:11-12)

Recognize achievement and accomplishment, no matter how small. Give verbal "attaboys," like "that's great," "terrific," or "I appreciate that." Give reasons, too, for your praise so the child can understand why his behavior was praiseworthy. Conversely, undeserved praise will unnecessarily feed a child's pride and egoism. (1Th 2:19; 2Th 1:4)

Common Sense Parenting

Closeness and physical affection are vitally important to the child's development. A child should receive affection and attention from both parents. For mothers who don't nurse, hold the baby whenever feeding with a bottle. Fathers who have daughters must give them plenty of affection. A father is a daughter's standard by which she relates to men as an adult. Standing close, touching, an arm around the shoulder, pat on the back, hugging and kissing communicate your acceptance and love. (Php 1:3-8; Titus 2:4)

Have compassion on your children. Don't carry grudges or withhold forgiveness when a child apologizes. Your child will make many mistakes and blunders. Your heavenly Father will treat you the same way you treat your child regarding forgiveness. (Ps 103:13; Matt 6:15; 2Cor 1:3)

Pray for each child directly and individually. At bedtime or in a family worship setting, you could place your hand on the head of each child and pray for him or her. Be specific and ask God's blessing on the child. (Matt 19:13-15)

Share yourself with your child — your times of sadness or joy, as well as your hopes and dreams. Disclosing your inner self can encourage your child to be more disclosing, which may be crucial in the teen years. (1Th 2:7-8)

Take time to listen to your child without distraction. Use eye-to-eye contact and parrot back what your child says so he knows you were listening. Show an interest in the child's feelings, interests and dreams. (Prov 20:5)

Give your child a treat or special privilege as a kind of serendipity when there has been no request or expectation.

Demonstrate the same courtesy toward your child that you expect from him or her, e.g., "excuse me," "please," "thank-you," and "I'm sorry." Your tone of voice and facial expression indicate your sincerity.

Keep your promises!!! Don't delay or make excuses. It is better not to promise than to promise and not fulfill it. If you have broken promises, ask your child's forgiveness and fulfill the promise, if it is still possible. (Eccl 5:5)

When introducing your children to others, say "This is my son [name]." or "This is my daughter, [name]." Say it with affection and a smile. Also, complimenting your child (in a truthful manner, not flattery) in front of others will be a blessing to your child. This type of introduction communicates pride in your child. (1Cor 4:17)

Tell your child verbally "I love you" often. Love is only known through expression and deed. (John 13:34; 15:9; Eph 5:1-2)

Remember your child at birthdays and other special occasions of the year with an appropriate card and gift.

Allow your child to have his or her friends over to your house. Provide snacks as you're able.

If someone else compliments your child to you, pass the compliment along to your child.

Be present at any school or church event in which your child is a participant, such as a game, play, concert, etc. Compliment his performance and the group's performance.

Progressively give more privileges and freedom to a child as he grows older. Too much freedom too soon contributes to haughtiness. Too little freedom may

Common Sense Parenting

encourage rebellion. Granting freedom to the child to be his own person (within moral limits) encourages initiative and responsibility. God gives his children significant freedom for personal taste and preference. (Gen 2:16-17)

Play family games, sing songs together, read stories together or anything that binds you together. Also, plan a special time alone with each child to do something special. Give equal attention as much as possible.

Give your children chores to do. Keep it simple at first and increase the responsibility as the child grows older. Demonstrate how you want the chore done and encourage your child to copy your effort. Compliment your child on his effort and thank your child when he is finished. Don't yell at him if the chore isn't done right — simply have him do it over.

Train Your Child

The familiar proverb says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Prov 22:6) This verse sums up the entire life cycle. The "child" covers infancy to adolescence and "old" refers to a mature adult, at least 40 and perhaps as old as 50 to 60. The phrase "the way he should go" literally means "according to the measure of the way." One view is that "the way" refers to the child's ability, temperament and physical development. More likely is that Solomon meant "the Way," i.e., the "Way of the Lord," which refers to a course of life manifested by the "fear of the Lord" and conforming to God's expectations (cf. Prov 1:7; 8:13; 15:9).

Training is the parent's responsibility, not the child's. It's mocking a child to tell him to "grow up" and act like an adult. The child must be taught what that means. Letting a child do whatever he wants only reinforces self-centeredness. Instruction in the Word of God need not be strictly a formal function at the dinner table. The biblical principle of teaching children is to bring up God's Word at various times of the day as life events occur. By this method the child learns to turn to God and His Word immediately whenever a concern or problem arises. (Deut 6:6-7)

There are many ways to teach God's Word:

- Direct injunction — "God wants you to..." (Prov 4:4)
- Singing spiritual songs — (Prov 29:6; Col 3:16)
- Reading stories or recounting family history — (Deut 6:20ff)
- Discussing nature analogies to human living principles — (Prov 30:24-31)

Correct wrong thinking lovingly and without put-down. Children are ignorant about many things. Don't poke fun at a child's lack of knowledge or difficulty in comprehending. Don't refer to him as stupid or dumb. There are many things you do not know. (2Tim 2:25)

Answer a child's questions to the best of your knowledge. Don't put off questions that make you uncomfortable. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Make a project of discovering answers together. (Matt 11:25)

Do your best to pass on your knowledge of many things to your child. Teach him or her household skills, social etiquette, maintenance of mechanical things, safety precautions and other practical wisdom. Demonstrate how something should be done (or how you want it done) and encourage the child to copy your example.

Establish some family traditions related to special days of the year. These become significant and special memories in later years.

Common Sense Parenting

Discipline Your Child

Perhaps no subject causes as much debate and discussion between parents than the subject of discipline. What do you do when a child misbehaves? The two extremes of discipline, that is, no discipline (Prov 29:15) and child abuse (Col. 3:21), must be avoided. Proper discipline is an act of love (Prov 13:24; Heb 12:6).

Get control of your own anger. Never punish your child when your anger threatens to explode. Anger and rage are incompatible with the love that gives discipline. Pray that God will enable you to feel His sorrow for our wrongdoing. (Matt 23:37-39) Give correction in a calm tone of voice with humility. Treat your child the same way as you would want your heavenly Father to treat you.

Discuss in advance with your spouse, if married, what household rules are desirable. Inform your child of your expectations. Don't expect your child to read your mind or just "know" what he is supposed to do. Be reasonable in your rules, one standard for everyone.

Similarly, consider in advance what forms of discipline will be used for breaking rules. Let the child know in advance the kind of discipline he may incur so that he sees a clear choice. When he misbehaves you can say, "You chose to be disciplined with...because you did not choose to do what I said."

Once you have decided on a reasonable course of discipline and warned the child of it, keep your word to the letter without delay. Don't accept excuses designed to avoid both the obligation and the punishment. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

There are four categories of discipline to consider: verbal, restrictive, physical, and natural.

Verbal: this category includes admonishment, correction, warning and rebuke. Verbal discipline does not put-down character or presume what the child may have been thinking and feeling, but focuses directly on actual behavior. Avoid asking a lot of "why" questions — an abstract concept. Children may not really know "why" and such questions only lead to arguments and frustration. "Why" is irrelevant. Children have a sinful nature and there is a Devil loose in the world — that's enough "why." Rebukes should be simple and straight to the point. Repeat the expectation you had, what the child did, give an appropriate warning if safety is a concern, admonish him again as to your expectation and have him perform the expected behavior. You could also have him repeat the expectation back to you to be sure he understands. Verbal discipline is probably the primary category to be used with teens. (Prov 3:11)

Restrictive: this category of discipline places limitations on the child's freedom and privileges. For young children the "time-out" commonly used in public school may be used. A time-out usually involves standing in a corner facing the wall or sitting in a chair away from others without any privileges and lasting ten to fifteen minutes. Other restrictions include confinement to one's bedroom, limitation on a certain privilege and "grounding" from peer activities. An important consideration is how much a restriction will restrict you. The restriction should be one you are comfortable using and something the child does not like. (Ps 139:5)

Physical: spanking is most effective from about 2 years to 9 or 10 years of age. Contrary to popular thinking appropriate spanking is not child abuse. The purpose of spanking is not to crush the child's will and prove your power, but to prove your word that failure to obey will result in punishment. Spanking should only be administered to the bottom and, if possible, in privacy away from others. Swats

Common Sense Parenting

should be few and painful, but not of a severity to leave bruises. Never kick or hit a child with your fist or feet or use a random object at hand when angry. Spanking should primarily be reserved for defiance or deliberate disobedience. If spanking were to be the sole discipline, it would eventually prove ineffective. A child needs more than pain to motivate him to do right. (Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; 29:17)

Natural: Perhaps the hardest category for parents to apply is allowing a child to suffer whatever consequences would automatically result from misbehavior. If a child forgets something he was responsible for, don't take over and assume his responsibility for finding the object. If the child breaks community law, don't spare him from experiencing the punishment of community justice. Don't side with your child if a school teacher keeps your child after school for misbehavior. Be sure not to add insult to injury by saying "I told you so." Affirm your love and concern, but he must accept whatever consequences come. (Prov 19:19; Rom 2:9)

Here are some communication tips to follow in all your discipline:

General

- Use "I" messages instead of "you" messages. "I want you to walk in the house," not "You never listen to me, you're always running through the house." "You" messages usually put-down and make you sound like a suffering martyr.
- Tell your child what you want him to do rather than using a constant barrage of "don'ts."

Positive

- "Close the door quietly."
- "Bow your head and close your eyes for prayer."
- "When you finish playing, put the toys back in the box."
- "Shh - lower your voice."

Negative (Don't say these things.)

- "Don't slam the door!"
- "Don't look around while I'm praying!"
- "Don't leave your toys all over the place!"
- "Don't make so much noise!"

Drop "maybe" from your vocabulary when responding to a child's request for something. Say "yes" or "no" or "I'll think about it and let you know by" "Maybe" doesn't take a child seriously and makes you look indecisive. Don't be afraid to say "no." A child doesn't have to have everything he wants, and you're foolish for giving a child everything he asks for.

Don't spank your child for a mistake. Everybody makes mistakes. You make mistakes, and your child knows it, too. Admit your mistakes to your child — he will be more encouraged to admit his own.

Never spank a crib-baby. A baby will wiggle and cry and will not understand punishment. A baby is very curious, so remove dangerous items out of his reach when he starts crawling. A baby will naturally explore and you can help him in his curiosity, but keep your list of "no-no's" short. Once a baby is mobile, a slap on the back of the hand with a "no-no" may be used for dangerous items, like electrical sockets, hot stove or running out in the street.

Common Sense Parenting

All discipline should be immediate. To put off discipline with "wait 'til Dad gets home" is more harmful than helpful. This sort of message also tends to create alienation between father and child and makes mother look weak and "childish." Father can certainly add an admonishment to mother's discipline and reinforce your parental unity, but father should not increase the punishment.

Discipline can involve confession of guilt. Ask him, "what did you do?" This question gives the child the opportunity to acknowledge his wrongdoing. Don't try to force the child to say he is sorry, because you may be encouraging him to lie. Ask him if he is sorry, but don't press the matter.

Even in discipline a parent needs to reassure the child of his love. Of course, you should never apologize for the discipline you used. After the discipline you can put your arm around your child and tell him he is loved.

Discipline may require restitution. If your child destroyed someone's property, he should be required to replace it. You may choose to require him to use his savings, do extra chores, do odd jobs for others, or replace the broken item with one of his own of similar kind.

Don't punish a child for verbalizing his feelings, even if they're negative feelings toward you. Discipline is for behavior. Stifling feelings leads to harboring of resentment that may last many years. Temper tantrums, however, (hitting or kicking parents) should bring immediate correction and if necessary, punishment.

High school teenagers should be treated more like adults. When discipline is needed, it should not be physical. Restrictions may be most effective in relation to things, places and people in that order. Restriction of things may relate to use of the phone, car, television, etc. Restriction of places may relate to going to a school athletic event, a concert or a dating night. Restriction of people may include friends or dates. Restrictions should not include something of spiritual value to the teen.

Consider convening a "family council" at the kitchen table periodically. Grant that a majority vote can decide issues with the father having veto power (to be used sparingly). Allow the children to express their concerns. Any issue is fair game. Take a vote, secret or open. Make contracts with one another to carry out responsibilities and agreements.

Consistency is the most important factor in discipline for it to be effective. Don't threaten to discipline — discipline! Don't laugh at his misbehavior when you're in a good mood and yell when you're in a bad mood.

Conclusion

Parenting is the greatest challenge any adult will ever face. Children need encouragement, training and discipline. Accomplishing these tasks require the sacrifice of your time and energy. Your children deserve priority in devotion and care. Remember the admonition of the God's Word:

"Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you, in order that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God." (Deut 12:28)