UT Extension

PB1161

Child Guidance Techniques

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE

Child Guidance Techniques

Credits

This publication is a revision of the original booklet written by Roberta C. Frazier and published by The Agricultural Extension Service, Washington State University, and reprinted with permission by University of Tennessee Extension. The revision was written by Denise J. Brandon, Associate Professor and Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Specialist and Clint E. Cummings, Extension Agent I in Knox County, Tennessee.

Child Guidance Techniques

Working with children, whether you are a parent or a childcare worker, can be one of the most rewarding things you will ever do. It can also be one of the most challenging. Some people seem to have a natural ability to work with children, but others find it very difficult. By learning a few simple techniques, you can improve your ability to work with children.

How children think affects their behavior. When we understand how children think, we can be more effective in improving their behavior. The guidance methods included in this booklet usually work well with young children.

Focus on DOs Instead of DON'Ts

Adults often use words like *don't*, *stop*, and *quit* when talking with children. Though these words are easy to use, they often don't work. When we focus on telling children what not to do, we don't help them to learn what they should do instead. In other words, they do not learn how they are supposed to act. Changing the *DONTs* into *DOs* shows the child a better way to behave.

DON'Ts	DOs
Don't throw the ball in the house.	Roll the ball on the floor.
Don't squeezed the kitten.	Hold the kitten gently.
Don't touch the cake.	Just look at the cake without touching it.

Build Feelings of Confidence

Children need to feel that they can do things and that they are valuable. If children have a positive attitude, they will want to try new things and will approach school and other situations with confidence. You can help build confidence in children by making positive remarks. Negative and belittling remarks cause children to lose self-confidence.

Situation
José spills the garbage he is carrying out for you.

Sophie is upset because her friends can't visit.

Brandon is frustrated because he can't get a puzzle piece to fit.

Negative Remark
Can't you ever do anything right?

Don't be such a baby!

If you don't stop that fussing, I will put the puzzle away.

Positive Remark
That's a hard job. Next time carry it this way, and it won't spill.

Your friends are busy today; let's think of something else to do.

Let's see why it didn't work. Try turning the piece this way.

Change the Surroundings to Change Behavior

When you don't approve of a child's behavior, it is important to look for the cause of the behavior. Sometimes you can solve the problem by simply changing the surroundings. If your child spills milk at every meal, try giving her a different type of cup. A wide, heavy-bottomed cup will reduce tipping. If children kick each other under the dinner table, you can rearrange the seating to relieve the problem. Use your imagination.

Give Only Choices You Can Accept

Sometimes we offer choices when we really don't intend to, and this creates problems for everyone. If Terence is not allowed to go outside without his coat, for example, you are asking for trouble when you ask if he wants to wear it. Chances are that he will choose not to. There was never really a choice in the matter, but Terence thinks he has a choice because he was asked for his opinion.

When you tell him that he cannot go outside without wearing his coat, there will likely be an argument. Fortunately, there is a way to avoid this problem. Choices should only be given when you can accept either answer. If you ask, "Do you want to wear your red jacket or your blue one?" you give a choice for which either answer is acceptable, and both parties are happy. If there is no choice involved, a simple "You must put on your coat before you go outside," gets better results. It is important for children to learn to make decisions. It is difficult for them when the decisions they make are not accepted.

Work With Children Instead of Against Them

Children have different needs at different ages and stages of development. You can avoid many problems by working with a child's natural tendencies instead of against them. For example, toddlers learn through their five senses. They need to touch, taste, smell, see and hear objects to begin to understand them. Children need a safe area in which they are free to use their senses, but parents and caregivers need to make sure that all of the child's surroundings are safe. One way to do this is to remove as many breakable or unsafe items as possible from areas where the child will be. As children get older, they will move into different stages of

development. They will have learned what will break and what is dangerous. You will be able to put back those things you had to put away when they were very young.

Children learn very quickly, and they should be encouraged to try new things as much as possible. If your child likes to pour milk at the table, you can provide a small pitcher that will be easy for him or her to use. Remember, everything is new to children. What may seem like a mess to you is actually a learning experience for children. Children also like to take things apart. If you punish a child for taking things apart, you are working against his or her natural curiosity. You can take care of this desire to take things apart by providing toys and safe household items that can be taken apart and put back together easily.

Plan Ahead

Children can get bored easily. Going to the grocery store or to the doctor's office is no fun for us, much less for our children. We may be able to wait patiently for a prescription to be filled, but half an hour can seem like an eternity to a young child. When children are bored, they often misbehave. Unless the place you are visiting is designed for children, you will need to take along some things for them to do. You can plan ahead for these situations by keeping some coloring books, crayons and toys such as small dolls or cars and games or puzzles in a bag to take along with you. You can change the contents regularly so your children stay interested. It may be important for your child to be quiet while waiting, so keep that in mind when you are choosing toys to include in the bag.

When taking long trips, you should plan for frequent stops, at least once each hour. Choose places where children can walk or run safely for a few minutes to help get rid of their pent up energy. Take along games, books and small toys to keep your children entertained. Pack some nutritious snacks and water to save money and have them ready when you need them.

Another way you can help children is to let them be involved in what you are doing. If you have time, let your children help you pick out items in the grocery store. You can also ask them to help you look for road signs or landmarks when you are driving. They can feel helpful and make your daily tasks more pleasant.

Set Limits and Stick to Them

Limits give children safety and security. Believe it or not, children want to know that there are limits to what they can and cannot do. Not only do they need to know the limits, children should also have the freedom to make decisions within those limits. However, don't offer too much freedom. Children who have either too much or too little freedom have some of the same emotional and behavioral problems. The best thing to do is set reasonable limits and stick to them.

The limits you set may be different for each child. Some children seem to need many rules, but others can manage with fewer. Deciding upon limits can be difficult. If you answer yes to the following questions, then you probably need the limit for your child:

Is the limit needed to keep my child or others safe?

Is it needed to protect property?

Is this a limit that is appropriate for my child's age?

Can I enforce this limit?

If you answer yes to the following questions, you may need to rethink whether this limit is needed for your child:

Is this limit mostly to make things easy for me?

Does this limit keep my child from trying new things and learning?

It is better to have a few limits for things that are important rather than having limits for everything. A long list of limits is hard for children to remember and may frustrate them. Also, parents need to be able to enforce the limits. Children need to know that

you will not let them get away with breaking the rules. They feel secure when you do what you say you will do, so you need to follow through with discipline. You can teach self-discipline to children by offering them the chance to help set limits as they grow older.

Sometimes we set limits with the phrase "because I say so" without thinking about the reason for making it. Other times we may slip into the habit of always saying "no" without thinking about what the child is asking. You don't need to explain every limit to your child, but you should know why you have set that limit.

Listen to Yourself and to Your Child

Stop and listen to yourself sometimes. If you hear yourself saying things like, "If I've told you once, I've told you a dozen times . . ." then it is time to try a new approach. If you have told your children something a dozen times, and they still don't listen, saying it again won't make a difference! If something does not work in the business world, good managers do not keep doing the same old thing in hopes that it will work eventually. Neither should you. You should try a new approach. Listening to yourself will give you the chance to make changes in the way you talk to children.

Listening to children will also give clues about what they have been learning. Children often learn something other than what we are trying to teach. They often learn ways to avoid getting in trouble!

Set a Good Example

Children learn by watching. If a father screams at his child, he is teaching that screaming is the correct way to talk to people. This parent shouldn't be surprised when the child starts screaming at her siblings or at the parent. The mother who sends her son to the door to tell a salesperson that she is not at home has a hard time convincing him that lying is wrong. The same is true for smoking, drinking alcohol, swearing, etc. The old saying "do as I say and not as I do" is simply a useless way to guide a child's behavior. Parents need to "practice what they preach" and "walk the walk" if they want to have a positive impact on their children. Adults who show concern for others, who talk through their disagreements and who respect the rights of others are teaching healthy behaviors to their children.

Show Children Love in Ways They Can Understand

One way you can show love for your children is by doing things for them. You give them nutritious food, send them to bed early, provide proper clothing, etc. Children, however, may not interpret this as love. They probably see it more as being bossy. You need to be sure to show love in ways children can understand.

There are many ways to send the message of love. Perhaps the easiest way (and one that is used the least) is the warm, friendly smile. Another way to show children love is to give them a time of undivided attention. You can also use words. Statements like "You did a good job on that picture," "That was a helpful thing to do," and "I love you," can

let children know that they are important. Sometimes it helps to listen to other parents talk to their children. Do they sound as if they love their children? You might ask yourself if a stranger would know that you loved your children from the things you say to them.

Major on the Majors

As you make decisions about how to handle situations with your children, think about how to help your child learn and become self-controlled. Do you make every conflict with your child a major battle, or do you save your energy and passion for the really important things? Many times parents make major issues out of minor disagreements and hurt their relationships with their children in the process. It is wise to make a stand on the really important issues and back off on those that are less important.

Helping a child grow from an infant to an adult is one of the most fulfilling and challenging experiences you can have. As you guide your child, remember to set high goals for yourself and your child. But, make sure that the goals are realistic for both of you.

The Payoff

These are just a few methods you can use to improve your child's behavior. They may take extra work at first, but they will save you time and energy in the end. These methods may not work with every child every time, but they will work enough of the time to make it worth the effort. It may take some time before you feel comfortable enough with these methods to use them. Even if you were to use these techniques all of the time with your children, there would still be times when they would not cooperate. The important thing is to have lots of different techniques from which you can choose.

It may help to remember that the early years are short compared to the rest of your child's life. However, the experiences children have in the early years lay the groundwork for the future. Our children are worth our best efforts, skills, love and devotion.

Let's Practice

1. Change these DON'Ts into DOs to show a child what he or she can do.

- Don't drag your sweater in the dirt.
- Don't scream at me.
- Don't talk with your mouth full.
- Don't run in the store.
- Don't talk back to me.

2. Change the belittling comment in the following situations to one that would build confidence.

Situation	Comment to restate
• Michael broke a glass when he was drying dishes.	Can't you ever do anything right?
• Four-year-old Corey wet his pants.	You're a bad boy!
• Tamika bumped a tree when she was riding her bike.	Don't be so clumsy.

3. Restate the questions in these situations to give choices that are acceptable.

Situation	**Question to restate**
• You promised your children a a treat after school,but you don't want them to spoil their dinner.	What kind of treat do you want?
• You are eating out and have a limited amount of money to spend.	What do you want to order?
• Your time is limited, and your child wants you to do something with her.	What would you like me to do with you?

4. Here a child is given a choice although he or she doesn't really have one. How could you rephrase each question?

Situation	**Question to restate**
• You are playing with your four-year-old and have to leave to pick up your older child at school.	Do you want to go now?
• You intend for your daughter to clean up her mess before guests arrive.	Do you want to put away your toys for me?
• Elisha is coloring, and it is time for dinner.	Do you want to put your crayons away?

5. How could you change the environment to change behavior in these situations?

- Five-year-old Tyvin tracks dirt across the kitchen floor as he goes to a chair where he sits to take off his boots.
- Shandra and Alisha are teenagers who share the same room. They fight constantly because Alisha doesn't keep her things picked up.
- Justin and Matthew often fight with each other at the kitchen table.

6. If your goal is to work with a child's natural tendencies instead of against them, how would you handle these situations?

- Two-year-old Alice climbs on all the furniture. You cannot let her do this.
- Four-year-old Pablo wants to walk to the park by himself.

7. What would be reasonable limits for the following situations:

- TV viewing for young children in the family
- Use of scissors by a four-year-old
- Use of the microwave by a preschooler

More Practice!!

1. For one day, write down the things you say to your child when you want him or her to:

- Go to bed
- Do a good job
- Turn off the television
- Change his or her clothes

2. Estimate the number of times you say *no*, *don't*, *stop*, or *quit* during a day. Then keep a record to see how many times you actually say these words.

3. Think about the things you do in terms of the values you have been trying to teach your children. Do you "Practice what you preach"?

4. How do your family members know that you love them? Keep a list for a day of the ways you show your family members that you love them. Have older children keep a list, too.

5. After you have had a struggle with a family member over some issue, ask yourself if the issue will make a difference five years in the future.

Visit the UT Extension Web site at
http://www.utextension.utk.edu/ and
the Family and Consumer Sciences Web site at
http://www.utextension.utk.edu/fcs/

PB1161-3.5M-2/07 E12-5315-00-019-07 07-0134

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development. University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating.
UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.