

## Your Discipline Toolbox

The key to practical discipline is *having and using* the right tools. There are many different tools we use for discipline. Most we've learned from our parents and a few others we picked up along the way. Too often we end up in situations needing a discipline tool we just don't have. When that happens, we may end up using the discipline we know and that can cause a bigger mess than we started with.

## Discipline that Doesn't Work

Discipline can be tricky because we want our children to choose to do what's right because of good character. We don't want to raise punishment-avoiders or good liars; *we want to raise kids who learn to make good choices even when we're not around.*

Using good discipline tools will teach and guide a child toward better choices. But bad discipline tools may only stop a behavior in the moment and give a child a deep desire to hide disobedience in the future.

### *Harmful Discipline Tools*

1. **Yelling**—scares a child into behaving or upsets them so much they stop the behavior. The angry emotions likely send a message that the child, rather than the behavior, is the problem. Using yelling as a discipline tool teaches children to yell when they're angry or frustrated.
2. **Shame**—is when you say things like, "what is wrong with you?!" or "I told you not to do that, don't you ever listen?!" It makes a child wonder if something is very wrong with them. It also doesn't teach them the important skill of empathy, which is understanding the feelings and emotions of others. Nor does it address the behavior; it attacks their person.
3. **Hitting or spanking**—may stop a behavior but doesn't teach a life skill or good decision-making.
4. **Heavy criticism**—causes a child, over time, to question their abilities and intelligence. This is similar to shame, but it may only criticize the behavior.
5. **Excessive consequences**—causes a child to feel powerless and that life is unfair.

## Discipline that Works

Discipline that works can be broken down into three different categories like drawers in a toolbox. In each drawer we are going to give you three different discipline tools you can start using today. You choose the ones that work best for your child's personality and the situation.

### *Drawer One: Proactive Tools. Proactive tools are things you can do before you run into a parenting issue.*

1. **Melt-Down Avoidance Tool:** When a child's routine gets messed up, meltdowns can occur! Make sure your kids get adequate sleep and they get meals and snacks on time.
2. **Boundaries Tool:** One of the best proactive tools you have in your box are boundaries. Boundaries are clear and consistent rules your children can follow. Be sure to explain these rules in age-appropriate terms they can understand.

3. **Modeling Tool:** Teach children right from wrong by modeling the behaviors you want them to have. Make sure that when you're angry or frustrated you act in the same calm way you want them to. This is a tool that doesn't change behavior immediately, but if you use it proactively, then you'll see your good behavior modeled back to you years later.

*Drawer Two: Positive Tools. Positive tools are ways you can react to bad behavior with a positive response.*

1. **Time-In Tool:** One response to bad behavior is to ask your child to spend time with you. If they're misbehaving while you are working on a project, then have them join you as you teach them about what you are doing.
2. **Reward Tool:** This tool isn't giving a consequence, it's creating a reward for good behavior.
3. **Listening Tool:** This tool is stopping and listening to your child's concerns, emotions, and troubles. Let your child finish the story before helping solve the problem. Let them express their emotions, even if they seem irrational. Let them know you hear what they are feeling and comfort them as needed. Watch for times when misbehavior has a pattern, like if your child is feeling jealous or insecure. Talk with them about this and help them see the connection between their feelings and their actions. And, after you have heard them out, work with them to come up with a positive way to display their feelings.

*Drawer Three: Responsive Strategies. The most important rule of responding is to do so with love and control. You shouldn't be angry when deciding what discipline tool to use. If you are, then you'll probably end up picking a much harsher tool than you meant to.*

1. **Walk-On-By Tool:** As long as your child isn't doing something dangerous and gets plenty of attention for good behavior, ignoring bad behavior can be a great tool. It can also teach natural consequences for their actions.
2. **Removal Tool:** The most common discipline tool is the removal tool. This is when you reduce privileges to fit poor behavior.
3. **Additive Tool:** Sometimes you will need to add chores, work, or monetary punishment. If your child has repeatedly disobeyed or done something that they clearly knew was wrong, the additive tool is one you may want to consider.

### Using a Variety of Tools

No one tool is going to be right for all situations; and the same one won't work the same with different children. You have many options. Stay away from the tools of yelling, shame, hitting, and excessive consequences. Then, choose the best tool for the situation. Switch it up, see how different tools work in different situations. Raising children takes some common sense, consistency, and remembering that they're only little children—NOT little adults. Their minds are still developing. They will be foolish, childish, and selfish. They will push against boundaries and structure. That's what kids do. And *we need to be patient, kind, and above all else, loving—even when it's hard.*

1. <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/6/e20183112.full>  
2. de Vries, E.E., Verlinden, M., Rijlaarsdam, J. et al. Like Father, like Child: Early Life Family Adversity and Children's Bullying Behaviors in Elementary School. *J Abnorm Child Psychol* 46, 1481–1496 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-017-0380-8>