

Discipline vs. punishment: What works best for children?

November 5, 2018

Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

Article type: [Parent Plus](#)

Ask a room full of adults how to handle a child's bad behavior, and you will get a rainbow of answers. Parents across generations have tried time-outs, reasoning, yelling and even spanking.

What do pediatricians recommend?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents to use *discipline* strategies, not physical or verbal *punishments* to stop unwanted behaviors in children and teens.



Teaching children to recognize and control their behavior is an important job for the adults in their lives. How adults respond to a child's behaviors has lasting effects on her development, according to the AAP. It shapes how the child thinks, behaves, feels and interacts with others. It also teaches the child how to behave as an adult.

Discipline teaches kids what is acceptable. When children are taught how to control their behaviors, they learn how to avoid harm.

Punishment might work fast to stop bad behavior. But it is not effective over time, according to the AAP.

Corporal (physical) punishment also does not work. The AAP is against physical punishment in and outside of school.

Nineteen states still allow public schools to use paddles or other means of physical punishment on kids. This adds up to about 163,000 students who are physically punished in school each year, according to recent data.

Most Americans do not think schools should use corporal punishment on children. Even schools that can legally use corporal punishment do it less because they do not find it effective. Studies show it has the opposite effect. Children who are physically or verbally punished are more likely to use negative physical and verbal behavior.

The AAP urges parents to use healthy discipline methods for children and teens.

- Praise good behavior.
- Be a role model for good behavior.
- Set limits and expectations.

- Ignore bad behavior or redirect your child away from the bad behavior.

For behavior tips by age, visit www.healthychildren.org/discipline. If you suspect that your child may have a behavior problem, talk to your pediatrician.

Related Content

- [AAP News story "AAP policy opposes corporal punishment, draws on recent evidence"](#)

Copyright © 2018 American Academy of Pediatrics