

Peak at parenting

What's the best tool for the job?

Becoming parents is one of the most natural things we do. Knowing how to raise our children to be happy, well-adjusted, people - is not. In a society where few people are afraid to tell you what you're doing wrong, it is difficult to know how to do a good job.

Often the easiest way to figure out what to do is to first remind yourself of your overall goals as a parent. For most of us the job of being a parent can be summed up in a few sentences. It is to raise happy, healthy, kids who are loving, respectful and self-disciplined. We want to teach our kids right from wrong in such a way that they will *do the right thing* in the future. We want other people (teachers, friends, potential employers...) to look at our child and think "hey, what a great kid."

Most of us don't naturally know how to do this. While we might respect the way our parents raised us, lots of the tools they used are no longer viewed as acceptable. Punishment – spankings, the strap, threatening, to bed without supper, etc – are all tools that while they haven't exactly been taken away (from the home anyway), most of us understand that in the long run they aren't the best way to teach right from wrong. We can certainly understand that compliance through fear is not very effective, as it can damage self esteem and sends messages most of us try not to promote (i.e. when you are bigger than someone you can hit them...). More importantly, our world has changed since we were growing up and with it our stress levels. Give those tools to someone who is angry enough to overreact and you have a very scary situation indeed.

It seems then that punishment tools don't really support our goals as parents. So what are we supposed to do to 'control' our children? How do we walk the fine line between providing structure and learning experiences, while not letting our children walk all over us?

There is no simple *one size fits all* answer. You might start by taking a look at how you're doing as a parent. Are you using punishment on a regular basis? If so, perhaps it's a good idea to try learning some discipline tools. They won't always work and in times of increased stress they won't be the tool you reach for, but at least they'll be there to practice with on those days when you feel a bit more self-control.

Quick notes for beginning to use discipline

- Establish clear, concise boundaries (i.e. acceptable versus unacceptable behavior)
- Let your expectations be known, then allow your child the chance to make mistakes
- Let your child take age appropriate responsibility for his/her behavior
- Help your child figure out healthy ways to 'fix' his/her problems (don't do it for him!)
- Practice communicating in ways that build your relationship and role model this important skill

In summary: Treat your child the way you would like to be treated

Using discipline when your child is pushing all your buttons is a definite challenge. By choosing to be proactive and trying to 'learn new ways', you begin making changes that will impact on generations to come. It takes hard work and a willingness to try new ideas, but when you're ninety looking back it will all seem worthwhile.

Debbie Pokornik is the owner of empowering NRG. She is the author of *Peak at Parenting; Natural, Realistic Guidance for the Busy Parent* (releasing late 2009) and believes all parents can use support at some point in their parenting experience. For other great parenting tips or to book Debbie for keynotes/workshops, go to <http://empoweringnrg.com>