

What to Know

It's not hard to grasp that a basic role of a dad is to discipline his children. But what might not be so clear is when and how you should use proper discipline, and that you must model self-discipline to raise children who behave properly.

Proper discipline starts with knowing the difference between discipline and punishment. Too often, dads think they're one in the same.

Discipline involves teaching and guiding your children to respect authority, to control their emotions, and to react properly to the behavior of others. The goal of discipline is to develop the character your children need to succeed, and to instill proper morals and values in them.

Punishment doesn't teach or guide. It involves causing physical or emotional pain in your children when they do something wrong. You must never cause your children physical pain, such as by hitting them or taking away what they need to survive, such as food.

The problem with punishing children is that it rarely works. That's why you should rely on discipline as often as you can and punishment only as a last resort. If you punish too often, your children will learn to ignore its effects. Use non-physical forms of punishment, such as taking away a privilege, putting your children in "time out," or grounding your children when they do something wrong.

After you punish your children, repair the damage. Forgive your children for what they've done. Tell them that you love them despite what they've done, and no matter what.

Raising children who behave properly also involves self-discipline. If you tell your children to do one thing and you do the opposite, it sends the message that you don't mean what you say. Your children pick up on even simple things. Take making the bed. If you tell your children to make their beds in the morning and you don't make your own, what does that say to your children about the value of keeping a tidy home?

You must walk the talk. Dads who smoke, drink alcohol heavily, become angry easily and yell at their children, and who can't stick to a healthy diet and a work out plan have a more difficult time raising children who behave properly than dads with healthy lifestyles marked by self-discipline.



What Else

Dads approach discipline in many ways. Which of the following styles of discipline best describe you? Which style is ideal? Which style would the mother of your children and your children use to describe you? Go ahead. Ask them.

Style #1: Dictator. This dad is always strict and never nurtures. He's clear about his morals and values. He leads with control and enforces rules with an iron hand. His children know what he doesn't want them to do but rarely what he wants them to do. This dad says, "My way or the highway."



Style #2: King. This dad is strict and nurtures when needed. He's clear about his morals and values. He leads by example. His children know what he doesn't want them to do and what he wants them to do. This dad says, "Let me show you the way."



Style #3: Joker. This dad is never strict and rarely nurtures. He isn't clear about his morals and values. He jokes a lot and makes fun of his children. His children don't know what he doesn't want them to do or what he wants them to do. This dad says, "Let's just have fun."



Style #4: Follower. This dad is sometimes strict and sometimes nurtures. He lets the mother of his children take the lead on discipline and backs her up when needed. He's sometimes clear about his morals and values. His children know some of the things he doesn't want them to do and some of the things he does want them to do. This dad says, "Do whatever mom says."



Style #5: Dreamer. This dad is never strict and never nurtures. He lets the mother of his children take the lead on discipline and doesn't get involved with it. He's never clear about his morals and values. His children don't know what he wants them to do. This dad says, "Whatever. Just leave me alone."



What to Ask

Reflect on each of the questions below. Take your time. Write your answers if you like.

1. Do I know the difference between punishment and discipline? Do I punish more than I discipline?
2. What do I need to learn so that I can properly discipline my children?
3. Do I need to change my style of discipline?
4. How self-disciplined am I? How can I become a better model of self-discipline?
5. Do I walk the talk? Do I have habits or addictions that send the wrong messages to my children? Do I need help to overcome any poor habits or addictions?

Learn More

Here are some ways to reward your children.

Praise: Tell your children how much you like their correct behavior and that they're good people for doing it.

Touch: Give your children a hug, massage, gentle pat on the back, or high five.

Freedoms: Give your children a new freedom they can do one time or all the time, such as stay up or out later, read an extra story at bedtime, have a second bowl of ice cream, or earn money for doing an extra chore.

Presents: Give your children a toy, stickers, a new phone, or some extra cash.

Bonus Tip: Rarely use freedoms and presents. If you use them too often, your children will learn to expect them. Make sure you'll give a freedom or present before offering one. Don't say you'll give one for correct behavior and then not give it when your children do the behavior.

Here are some non-violent ways to punish your children.

Say You're Disappointed: Tell your children you expect more of them, and that you expect them to behave the right way.

Pay it Back: Tell your children to make up for bad behavior, such as paying for breaking something, doing the behavior they were supposed to do in the first place, or saying they're sorry to someone they hurt.

Time Out: Tell your children to sit in a safe place like the corner, on the couch, or in their room for a short period of time. Time out works best with younger children between the ages of 3 and 10. A basic rule is 1 minute for every year of your child's age. But if you think your children have learned a lesson with a shorter period of time, don't require them to sit in time out longer than needed.

Grounding: Don't let your children leave the house for some period of time. Grounding works best with older children, such as teens.

Take Away a Freedom: Remove a freedom for a period of time.

Bonus Tip: Make sure the punishment fits the behavior. When your children do something minor, for example, don't take away a freedom when telling them that you expect more of them the next time will do the trick.