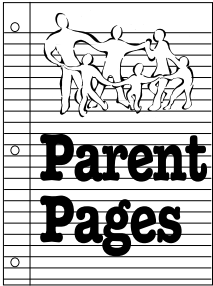
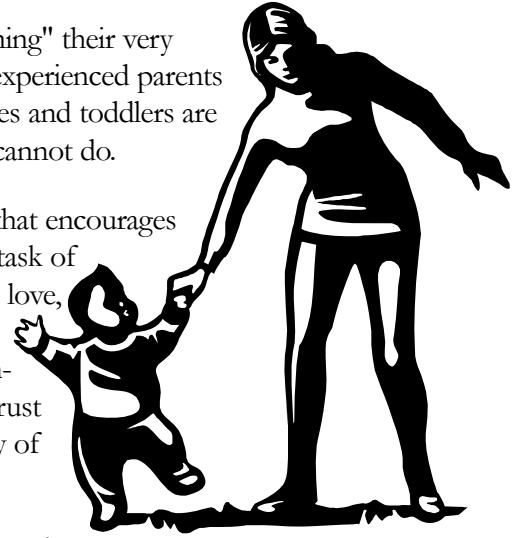


Discipline for Babies and Toddlers Does Not Mean Punishment



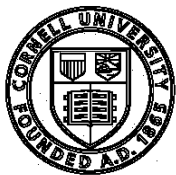
First-time parents often wonder when to begin "disciplining" their very young child. Child development experts usually agree with experienced parents that scolding, slapping, isolating or otherwise punishing babies and toddlers are not appropriate ways to let children know what they can or cannot do.

The key to good discipline is establishing a relationship that encourages babies to see their parents as important allies in the difficult task of growing up. When this relationship involves mutual respect, love, and pleasure, the foundation for effective discipline is in place. The goal of this kind of discipline is less directed toward obedience and compliance and more focused on helping children develop feelings of confidence and trust in their parents and themselves. For parents who find this a comfortable philosophy of child guidance, these suggestions may be helpful:



- ◆ **Adults should be sympathetic and understanding, even when babies engage in unacceptable behavior.** For example, a parent can say, "I know you want to touch the pretty cup, but I can't let you do that. Here are some toys for you to play with. Let's see what we can do with them." This example also illustrates a second important principle: distraction is a fine disciplinary technique to use with young children.
- ◆ **Remove temptations.** Even very young children will imitate the adults who care for them. Toddlers who observe an adult using a tool (such as a hammer) will try to use that tool as soon as possible. Good discipline in this case is keeping objects that are not for play out of sight and out of reach. At a later age, children will be able to understand that some adult possessions are not for them to use.
- ◆ **Telling or showing children what they can do is often more effective than telling them what not to do.** A baby who is squeezing a cat can be told "touch the cat gently-like this," as the adult takes the child's hand and shows her how to stroke. If this fails, a wise adult removes the cat from harm's way and saves the child from a potential scratch or bite.
- ◆ **Adults must know what behavior they can reasonably expect of children at particular ages.** Good resources about normal child behavior are available in public libraries and at Cornell Cooperative Extension. For example, children under the age of two very rarely share toys and play together cooperatively. Trouble arises when parents expect this behavior too soon.
- ◆ **Don't offer too many choices.** Too many choices may be overwhelming to very young children. When adults offer choices they should be certain they can accept the child's decision. "Would you like to have cereal or toast for breakfast?" is a more sensible question than to ask, "What would you like for breakfast?"

~ Continued ~



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- ◆ *When children seem to misbehave deliberately, use logical consequences instead of punishment.* A baby who repeatedly throws food instead of eating it can be removed from her high chair and told, "I see you've finished eating." Slapping her hands or scolding will only confuse or frighten her.
- ◆ *Provide young children with attention before they misbehave to get it.* A baby who is playing quietly with some toys will enjoy having an adult join his play (even briefly) before he becomes bored or tired and screams for attention.
- ◆ *Agree on a few basic rules for the family and enforce them gently but consistently.* For example:
 - You may not hurt any living creature (including yourself)
 - You may not destroy property.
- ◆ *Use words and actions to guide children.* Shouted instructions are rarely effective. If a baby is crawling toward a dangling light cord the adult will have to move quickly and gently say "No light cords -- let's find your toys" as she distracts the baby by moving him to other safe, interesting play things.

The ultimate goal of discipline is to help children become responsible for their own behavior. In the early years, babies and toddlers require patient, gentle, understanding help from adults as they learn what is and is not acceptable for them to do.

*Source: Jennifer Brickmayer, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. **Parent Pages** was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*