

# The ABC's of Discipline

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Before exploring the ABC's let us establish the definition of discipline. It's not nagging. It's not punishing. It's not lecturing or moralizing. It's not losing our cool and having a hissy fit. Discipline in its simplest terms means "to teach." Here is a definition from the Webster's Dictionary:

Dis'ci'pline, noun: The treatment suited to a disciple or learner; education; development of the faculties by instruction and exercise: training, whether physical, mental, or moral.

To discipline means to provide parental leadership by establishing a logical sense of routine and order that respects differences in age, skill, ability and experiences. This seems like a fine idea, yet, why would children choose to challenge the parameters parents work so hard to maintain?

Children act inappropriately for a number of reasons. The most common is to attract attention. Who doesn't want to be seen, heard and acknowledged? If children don't receive focused Mom and Pop attention from adhering to family limits they will get it by flailing and wailing. Other reasons children buck the parental system include wanting to get revenge, wanting to flex their power muscles, feeling angry, feeling unloved, feeling tired or irritable or simply experiencing a hormone surge of insanity.

## The A's of Discipline:

1. **Accurately** define your parental goal. What is your long term goal as a parent? Hopefully it is something like guiding your children to become healthy, compassionate and contributing citizens.
2. **Accept** responsibility for your part of the challenge. Perhaps you have not kept your agreements when you said you were no longer going to remind your children to take their lunch to school.
3. **Address** and name the problem. Describe the problem in behavioural terms—what you see and hear. "Today I saw you watch 2 hours of TV while doing 5 minutes of homework and doing no chores."

## The B's of Discipline:

1. **Before** disciplining consider these factors:
  - Do I model the behaviour I promote? If you want your children to listen respectfully to you, do you model that? Children's main learning comes from their main role models—you! How are you doing with your diet, respectful language, exercise, sharing feelings, selective and wise TV watching and rewarding yourself for a job well done?

- Do you provide age appropriate choices? Most of us feel depressed when we don't have choices. With a younger child ask, "Do you want your juice in the green or red glass?" With a teen you might negotiate chores, "Do you choose vacuuming the house or attending to the bathroom on our cleaning days?"
  - Are your household rules age appropriate? Bedtime will vary with need and age. Involve older children in establishing rules. They will be more committed to decisions in which they have input. Are the consequences of following the rules or breaking the rules clear?
2. **Be lovingly firm:** Can your children depend and count on you to carry through on your end of agreements—the enjoyable and the inconvenient follow-throughs?

### **The C's in Discipline:**

#### **1. Clearly Communicate:**

- Do you encourage and celebrate the behaviours you want? "Yeah! The dishwasher is empty. Thank you so much. I love coming into the kitchen to cook when things are orderly and in place." Do you put out more energy focusing on the behaviours you don't want or on the behaviours you do want? Remember that what you focus on tends to expand.
- Are the rules and expectations of the household clear and describable? There are over 30 rules in most homes to successfully get through a meal. What are they at your house?
- Keep "No" and "Stop" for emergencies so they will be well-heard and given appropriate attention.
- Use the Grandmother Law as an effective cause and effect teaching tool. "Yes, after your homework is complete you may turn on the television."

#### **2. Create Consequences that are logical and meaningful:**

Logical consequences teach children that for every action there is a consequence. They help children feel safe and supported. They give children a sense of predictability and choice; that is if parents follow-through with their end of the agreement.

- Are your consequences planned and discussed ahead of time? This allows children to make a choice of appropriate behaviour or not.
- Are the positive consequences of choosing appropriate behaviour as clear as the inconvenient or negative consequence? "When you have your pajamas on and your teeth brushed I have time to read to you the whole story."

- Do you involve older children in creating their logical consequence? Asking “What is your understanding of our agreement?” helps cement for parents and children that behaviour is about choice.
- Do you use consequences that allow you to take precise action such as removing a service or a privilege? Parents are required to provide basic shelter, food, clothing, guidance and love. The rest, including cell phones, eating out, TV, video games, chauffeuring and designer jeans are all optional. Parents have more influence than they often realize.
- Do you tend to overuse Time Outs? Often it’s the parent who would benefit from a Time Out as a breather from frustration.
- Are your family consequences reasonable, respectful, age-appropriate and enforceable-- meaning that you can (YES, again) follow-through?

As parent educator, Kathy Lynn asks *Who’s in Charge Anyway?* If you put some of the ideas above into action your discipline will be more effective. Even more, you will less often react with powerless efforts to control by whining, pleading, punishing or nagging. (924 w)

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