

# CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

DARLENE J. MECH, PH.D.

**"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:16)**

The goal of effective discipline is to teach our children self-control: children follow the rules because the rules are "right, good or necessary." Effective discipline teaches our children what to do by offering explanations, solutions, natural consequences, and teaching problem-solving.

Discipline is different than punishment which teaches our children that the parents are in control: if the children follow the rules, it is generally to avoid being caught. If there is little danger in being caught, our children may repeatedly misbehave. Punishment teaches our children what not to do.

As Christian parents, we know that God guides our behavior through the Ten Commandments and the "Golden Rule"- do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Ten Commandments can be summed up in one word..."LOVE."

(Commandments 1-3: Love for God, Commandments 4-10: Love for each other.)

Therefore, we strive to guide and shape our children's behavior through love, trust, prayer, forgiveness and faith. Just as Jesus is the model of love for us as Christian parents, we too must model Christ's example in all that we say and do.

"The rewards of good discipline are many. Good discipline fosters the emotional growth of a child and encourages his or her development as a moral person."

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**C**hildren, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord."  
(Col.3:20)

**H**onor your father and your mother as the Lord your God has  
commanded you..." (Dt.5:16)

**R**epentance: "...forgive and you will be forgiven." (Lk6:37)

**I**mpress (the commandments) upon your children's hearts." (Dt.6:7)

**S**peak the truth in love." (Eph.4:15)

**T**each the gospel and everything Jesus has commanded." (Mt.28:20)

**I**mportant to God: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children are a  
reward from him." (Ps. 127:3)

**A**dvice: "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you  
will be wise." (Pr.19:20)

**N**eeds: Children have the need to experience God's love in addition  
to getting their physical, emotional and intellectual needs met as well.  
"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in  
Christ Jesus." (Phlp.4:19)

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**D**istract the child! Change the environment rather than changing the child. It is better to be proactive and avoid problems than to have to be reactive.

**I**gnore minor misbehavior designed to get your negative attention (pouting, whining, baby talk, complaining, tattling).

**S**tructure the environment. Kids need routines, rules and guidelines. Use lists and charts to teach and model responsibility and independence. Responsibility builds self-esteem.

**C**onsistency. Teach your children to trust you: you say what you mean and mean what you say. Children need to know without a doubt, what they can and cannot do. Don't threaten, nag, or warn!

**I**nvolve your child through giving choices and consequences. Model problem-solving by teaching compromise and alternative ways of looking at things.

**P**ray for patience and praise the positive! Catch your children behaving! Tell them what you want rather than what you don't want. Use lots of encouragement for the "process," not just praise for the "outcome." Do not take for granted the "little stuff."

**L**isten! God gave us 2 ears and 1 mouth because He knew it was twice as hard to listen then to talk! Make eye contact, use "I messages," listen for feelings, don't interrupt, don't be too quick to offer advice (sometimes kids learn best by being allowed to make and learn from their mistakes).

**I**nvite and model forgiveness. Teach respect and consideration for others by demonstrating this. Teach humility and responsibility by admitting your mistakes and asking forgiveness. When your children "mess up," don't tell them "that's ok." Tell them "I forgive you."

**N**atural consequences. Nothing teaches a lesson better than allowing your child to experience the "natural consequences" of his/her behavior. Too tired to get up in the morning? Child goes to bed early that night. Too full to eat a healthy dinner? Child goes to bed without any snacks. Jumping on the couch? Child may not sit on the couch for the remainder of the evening.

**E**xclusion. Remove a misbehaving child from the environment through the use of time-out. Time-out is a wonderful tool to teach self-control. After time-out is over, always have a "lesson" about why the child was sent to time-out, what he/she will do differently the next time, and finish time-out with an apology to the one who was violated.