

Do as we say, do as we do

Ideas for teaching children good behavior and manners

The Mommy Check

When I became pregnant with my son, my 3-year-old daughter couldn't quite believe that a baby could fit in a tummy so flat. But as my belly began to expand, I explained to my daughter that Mommy's belly was getting bigger because baby needed room to grow. Soon after that, every time my daughter saw a woman with a slight pudge in her middle, she would ask, "Do you have a baby in your stomach, too?"

The first few times she did this, I was so embarrassed I wanted to melt into the floor. To get her to stop asking this question, and questions like, "What's wrong with your teeth?" (to people with visible cavities), or "You have a bump right here," (to those with acne problems), I explained that her innocent questions can really hurt people's feelings. I explained that it's impolite to verbalize people's imperfections.

Now, to make sure her words aren't offensive, she runs a confidential Mommy Check on each question before asking it. Explaining why a child should or shouldn't do something helps them grasp the concept and refrain from embarrassing behavior—or at the least, embarrassing inquiries.

Jessica Barrow, Cameron, Central EMC

No manners, no candles

When our son was 2, my husband usually walked through the door as I was putting supper on the table. This didn't give the baby much time to settle down from his excitement over seeing Daddy, so mealtime was a lot like wrestling an octopus. We couldn't keep him in his seat, much less teach him to use good table manners and eat properly.

Then I remembered how he loved to blow out the fragrant candle that I burned in the kitchen, and it gave me

an idea. I got three inexpensive taper candles and candlesticks and put them on the table as a centerpiece. At the beginning of each meal, we would light the candles—even hot dogs taste better by candlelight!—and each time we had to remind him of manners, we would blow out one candle. If any were left burning at the end of the meal, he got to blow them out. I'll never forget how excited he was when he got to blow out all three candles, and how excited my husband and I were that we had enjoyed a calm, peaceful meal.

Ten years later, he's a perfect gentleman. At least at mealtimes.

Shannon Whitehurst, South Mills, Albemarle EMC

Do unto others

I believe we have to teach our children to have compassion for others by teaching them not to be selfish. Don't hand them everything they want. Teach them a good work ethic. Let them know that there are consequences to bad behavior and enforce them, whether it means a good scolding or a good whipping.

Most importantly, we as parents should teach by example. The rules we set for our children we must live by as well. Don't apologize for disciplining them. Don't be ashamed to admit when you are wrong, because you'll teach them that you are honest and that you truly care about them. When they see this, they'll want to treat others the same way. They will truly value the feelings of others and wish to be at peace and in harmony with those around them, old and young alike.

You may wonder where I came up with my guidelines. The Scriptures. You can't go wrong.

Laura Horne, Marshville, Pee Dee EMC

How to banish the Whiney Voice

The behavior that drove my husband and me up the wall was the Whiney Voice. Even when the kids weren't trying to wheedle some treat or bemoan an injustice, they would use the Whiney Voice. Unfortunately, I usually ended up with a Whiney Voice of my own.

To cure this very annoying behavior, I became deaf to it. When the Voice started, I would let them whine away for a few moments, then politely respond, "I'm sorry, I can't understand you. What did you say?" By consistently declining to understand them whenever they used the Voice, all three kids would quickly and quietly revert to a calm, normal voice. We successfully banished the Whiney Voice from our lives.

Anne Fodor, Wake Forest, Wake EMC

Front porch discipline

When our children were small they fussed and fought a lot. We were beginning to think they would never be able to get along.

One day in the summer, they were at one another more than usual. My husband had finally had enough of their antics, so as their punishment he sat them on the front porch and made them put their arms around one another. When a car passed from the right, Haley had to kiss Caleb on the cheek and say, "I love you, brother." And when a car passed from the left, Caleb had to kiss Haley on the cheek and say, "I love you, sissy."

Needless to say, they were able to get along much better, at least in our presence.

Tim and Becky Benton, Pinnacle, Surry-Yadkin EMC

What we learned in kindergarten

We are told that children under the age of 7 learn most of how they behave from seeing those around them. It is my impression that many adults are not the best example of good behavior. (Think of any TV “reality show” to bring to mind a horror of manners.)

We adults must bear the responsibility for the lack of good manners in our children. In my own search for tips on how to behave, I realized that everything I need to know for me and my child, I learned in kindergarten:

Be kind

Be courteous

Say “Please” and “Thank You”

Don’t cut in line

Share

Keep your hands to yourself

Play nicely with others

Don’t chew with your mouth open

Don’t pick your nose in public

Seems so simple and yet I find many of these a challenge on a daily basis. If I am challenged by these rules as an adult, my child must find these hard to follow as well. I will persevere and learn to be the kind of person my kindergarten teacher would be proud of and my child can emulate.

Lori Kawulok, Huntersville, Energy United

Be consistent and follow through

I think one of the biggest mistakes parents make is not to be consistent in what they say and do. They may tell a child, “Stop doing that, or I’m going to punish you.” But when children continue to misbehave, they see no consequences. Children soon learn that even though Mommy or Daddy may say one thing, they really don’t mean it. This becomes especially confusing when there are punishments in some instances but not in others. If you tell your children that they will be punished for certain behavior, then you really need to follow through with that punishment.

It is even more confusing when the parents don’t agree on punishing certain behaviors. Parents should present a united front: if one parent corrects a behavior, then the other parent should

support that correction, especially in front of the child.

Most of all, instead of giving your child the impression that you do not love them, let them know it’s their behavior you do not like.

Darrell Kidd, Randleman, Randolph EMC

Take time to explain

I’m a firm believer in people being a product of their environment, at least to some degree. A kid that grows up in an angry home will be angry. A kid that grows up in a loving and giving home will be loving and giving.

These are things I always try to remind myself before disciplining my child. The knee-jerk reaction would be to yell or give him a slap on the wrist, but does that really have any long-term value? Of course not.

I take a deep breath, approach the situation, and then explain why whatever he did was wrong, even if it happens dozens of times. Eventually, he will understand. More importantly, he learns poise and control.

Conflict, revenge and abuse are never permanent solutions. Like with anything else, communication is the key. This way, the child and parent can understand each other’s position and adjust accordingly in the future. I also feel this will go a long way for him when building friendships in school.

Dan Moskowitz, EnergyUnited

Watching Grandmamma

My daddy made sure I knew he would not tolerate unacceptable behavior. He was a strict but loving father who was always there for me. I can still see him shake his head over an embarrassing display of poor manners or behavior from me or someone else.

He had two main ideas. First, everyone in the family was as important as everyone else, baby to grandma. Second, parents should set a few unchanging rules, enforced by appropriate rewards and punishments. Of course, challenging situations will always arise.

At the supper table one evening, I watched as my grandmother, who suffered from unwieldy false teeth, mashed

up her pinto beans, crumbled cornbread on top, and used bean juice to soften it. To a child of 5, that looked like the thing to do, and I copied her. Daddy looked at me, then at Mother. He opened his mouth but didn’t say anything.

Later, when I was scolded, I was confused. I had used my fork and my napkin. I had eaten it all. But the hardest part for Daddy to get around was, “Grandmamma did it!”

Linda Sinclair, Boone, Blue Ridge Electric

Give us an inch

There are many ways my Mom and Dad have tried to get our attention and get us to behave. But nothing has worked better than writing pages. Depending on how bad we are, my parents give us five pages to write or sometimes 20. But it works. The sentences always start out: “I will not...” or “I will...” When we misbehave, we can always count on writing our hearts out.

Another tactic Mom and Dad use on me is to threaten to take my cell phone. Or they just confiscate it without warning. Then I realize that I did something wrong! But at 16 years old (almost 17), I am pretty well-behaved.

For my younger sisters, who range in age from 8 to 2, Time Out and losing privileges such as watching television are pretty popular.

I have learned from my parents that the key is sticking to your punishment. If you let up and go easy, kids will keep pushing you. If you give no discipline now, you get a brat now and a bad citizen later. Give us an inch and we will take a mile! 📌

Hannah Daniel, Walnut Cove, EnergyUnited



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Thanks to everyone who sent us ideas for teaching

discipline to children. You can see more at our Web site. One month remains in our “Nothing Could Be Finer” series. Next month we’ll publish stories about your strange family traditions. (Deadline was Oct. 15). Check out our new “I Remember” series on page 18 to learn how to submit your stories and pictures.