

# *iBlankie*

*every parent's security blanket*



## ***CREATIVE DISCIPLINE AT HOME: MINI***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

*Creative Discipline at Home* explores the concept of discipline conflicts as growing and learning opportunities and provides effective discipline strategies and techniques that are respectful to both you and your child. [Part 1](#) examines different approaches to discipline, age-appropriate expectations, and issues of eating, sleeping, and toileting. [Part 2](#) provides practical words, strategies and techniques for limit-setting. [Part 3](#) presents an in-the-moment model for challenging discipline situations. Consequences, time-outs, and spanking are also addressed. *Creative Discipline at Home* explores how gentle, but firm, limits can encourage your child's self-discipline and enhance your child's self-esteem.

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# PART 1: CREATIVE DISCIPLINE CONCEPTS

- ☑ Discipline represents opportunities for growing and learning, for you and your child.
- ☑ [Creative Discipline](#)—freedom within limits—is the most effective discipline style.
- ☑ It is important to have [age-appropriate expectations](#).
- ☑ Strong self-esteem promotes strong self-discipline.
- ☑ [Eating, sleeping, and toileting](#) may be more developmental than discipline issues.

IMPORTANT NOTE: All situations regarding your child's physical safety are not considered discipline situations. These are situations in which you as the adult must take charge and physically keep your child from touching the stove, running into the street, or climbing onto a high surface that is unsafe. Safety situations are not the discipline situations that are discussed in this article.

## APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE

### *Discipline Situations Are Learning Opportunities*

Discipline situations are often viewed by parents as conflict situations that need to be dealt with as quickly and easily as possible to be able to move on to the next activity. Parents often want to state the rules and have their child unquestioningly obey these rules. In truth, discipline situations are golden opportunities for growth and learning for both your child and yourself. The word discipline has its root in the Latin word for "learner."

Conflict situations are at the heart of parenting rather than unnecessary bumps on the road of parenting. The important discipline goals are:

- ☑ To promote growth and learning for your child and yourself. What is to be learned in this situation by my child and by me?

- ☑ To foster self-discipline. What can I do to promote self-discipline in my child? How can I encourage impulse control?
- ☑ To encourage problem-solving skills in your child. How can my child and I engage in mutual-problem solving so that my child can learn to solve challenging problems on their own in the future?

## *Discipline Styles*

### *AUTHORITARIAN DISCIPLINE*

In an authoritarian approach to discipline, the parent is the authority figure that decides the limits and rules and expects the child to abide by the rules without discussions of any kind. There is no respect for the child's needs in the situation.

Also, the authoritarian provides the solution to the problem—the child is not given an opportunity to voice their needs or feelings, to participate in choices, to practice problem-solving strategies or to examine their internal process in the situation.

Discipline situations are not viewed by an authoritarian as opportunities for growth and learning, they are considered opportunities to teach a child how to do things according to the parent's rules.

### *PERMISSIVE DISCIPLINE*

Permissive discipline provides no limits for the child. This approach shortchanges the problem-solving process—decisions fall fully on the child with no guidance from an adult.

Your young child needs to have fewer choices to not to be overwhelmed. Often two, or at most three choices, work best within the framework of decisions for your child. Your child doesn't need it all, whatever all is. Often less is more. When parents are too permissive with young children, they do them a disservice—diminishing their own importance as adults and leaving a young child without the important guidance and limits they need.

### *CREATIVE DISCIPLINE: FREEDOM WITHIN LIMITS*

The creative discipline approach creates a situation in which there are limited choices—you set the parameters or limits to the situation and your child has choices within those limits. This freedom within limits allows your child to problem-solve within the comfortable context of a pared-down universe. There is respect for your child's needs, respect for your needs, and an opportunity for your child to problem-solve within appropriate limits.

Creative discipline is the middle ground approach to authoritarianism and permissive parenting. Creative discipline offers choices within limits for your child. Creative discipline is respectful of both your needs and your child's needs. Creative discipline provides an opportunity for you and your child to strategize so that your child is practicing making decisions and you are helping your child in the decision-making process.

## *PART 2: CREATIVE DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES*

- ☑ Pick and choose your battles guided by [The Three Big Rules](#).
- ☑ [Together Time](#) is a powerful strategy to promote self-discipline and self-esteem.
- ☑ Communicate with your child within their [sensory sphere](#).
- ☑ Using creative techniques, like [props](#), [music](#), and [signals](#), encourages cooperation.
- ☑ Limited choices—freedom within limits—is the foundation of creative discipline.

### *THE THREE BIG RULES*

Every family needs rules. These are THE THREE BIG RULES.

#### *RULE # 1. EVERYONE IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE'S BODIES*

This is a positive way of saying: no kicking, biting, scratching, pinching, choking, hair-pulling, punching, arm-twisting, tripping, etc.

#### *RULE #2. EVERYONE IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE'S FEELINGS*

This is a positive way of saying that we try not to hurt people's feelings with statements such as: "You're ugly," "You can't play," "You can't come to my birthday party," "I hate you" or "You're not my friend."

### *RULE #3. EVERYONE IS GENTLE WITH EVERYONE'S THINGS*

This is a positive way of saying that everybody should respect other people's creations and possessions, by not ripping up their painting or knocking down their block castle and by not grabbing their fire engine or breaking their toy.

These three rules are so basic and so fundamental that they could be posted at The United Nations!

The first two rules are of primary importance because they address rules for social relationships; the third rule, regarding things, is of less importance for your young child to learn at an early age.

These rules can be posted pictorially for your young child who cannot read. For Rule #1, you can have the number 1 followed by a photo or magazine picture of two children hugging or holding hands, that is, being gentle with bodies. For Rule #2, you can have 2 followed by a picture of two children talking together in a friendly way. For Rule #3, you can have 3 followed by a picture of two children playing together cooperatively. Then you can refer to the rules as your child is exhibiting positive behaviors associated with the rules.

- "Great job, Garrett. You are using gentle hands with your friend as you are playing. Good job with Rule #1."*
- "Your soft voice is so easy to listen to Carina. You are remembering Rule #2."*

### *The Three Big Rules: Picking And Choosing Your Battles*

With your young child, it is a classic comment: *"Pick and choose your battles"* or you could be having power struggles 24/7. Your young child is testing their emotional strength and emerging independence with you.

It is important on many days to decide that you will only require that your child get dressed, eat, and go to school or daycare. Decide which two or three issues are the most important in your daily life and ignore all the other power struggles for several days. These are *"Survival Days,"* where you are easing your family's way through your child's challenging growing-up. It is important to have realistic expectations with young children.

### *DISCIPLINE ISSUES OR NOT? EATING, SLEEPING, TOILETING*

Sometimes power struggles that seem like discipline issues are not really discipline issues, but are rather issues of autonomy. Whose body is it, anyway? You can't force your child to eat, you can't force your child to sleep, and you can't force your child to use the toilet.

And perhaps these are really not issues of discipline and power struggles, but opportunities for fostering independence and growth in your child. Who should have say over your child's body—you or them?

## *Eating*

Power struggles over food are useless and unproductive. One of the most important food goals for your child is to learn to monitor their own internal physical needs. You can provide healthy options in food choices and family meal opportunities, but you cannot force your child to eat and you cannot force your child to eat certain foods. See our [articles on food](#) for more guidance.

## *Sleeping*

Many struggles over sleeping and bedtime seem like discipline issues, but they are really issues of your child's separation anxiety. Saying goodnight to mom or dad and sleeping alone in their own bed for ten hours may cause your young child to feel abandoned and scared. It is important to set firm but fair guidelines around sleeping and bedtime routines, but it is also important to address what underlying anxiety may be present.

## *Toileting*

When parents impose an arbitrary age at which to begin toilet training, power struggles may take place because your child's body and your child's self-concept may not be ready. Toilet training should come from an internal place within your child where they feel like a big boy or a big girl and want to give up their diapers to use the toilet. Toileting experiences should be experiences whereby parents are partners in encouraging their children to feel like big boys and girls that want to use the toilet. See our article on [Toilet Training](#) for more help.

## ***STRATEGY FOR NEGATIVE ATTENTION-GETTING: TOGETHER TIME***

All children want attention and, for most children, negative attention is better than no attention at all. Sometimes your child may challenge limits and engage in power struggles as a way to get your attention, albeit in a negative way. When there is an increase in the amount and intensity of discipline issues with your child, it is important to examine whether your child is getting enough positive attention. You can remedy this by spending more

one-on-one time together. The best one-on-one time involves playing games and playing with toys with your child.

One-on-one time with your child at least two to three times per week for 30-45 minutes each time is powerful. Engage in play that your child chooses and be sure to listen and follow your child's lead. Think of this as a date with your child; give it a special name, such as Together Time, Dad and Daughter Time, or, as one four-year-old calls it, Sparkle Time. There can be positive changes in a child's challenging behavior after only two to three weeks of Together Time, several times a week, with Mom and/or Dad.

## ***CREATIVE TECHNIQUES TO SET LIMITS & ENCOURAGE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR***

It can be very effective to use creative sensory techniques in the environment to help you set limits.

### ***Props***

Most children are very visual and tactile, so that some limits can be set with props, such as pictures or creative objects, rather than by constant verbal reminders. Hopefully these suggestions can encourage your creative juices to find your own ways to use the environment to help you set limits and to encourage your child's positive behavior.

### ***STOP/GO SIGN***

Even a 2-year-old can learn to recognize a STOP sign. Cut a piece of red paper into an octagon, write "STOP" on it, punch a hole in it and put a string through the hole for hanging. Put the STOP sign on a sibling's bedroom doorknob to remind your child to stay out of their room, put this on your home office door or hold it up when you are talking on the phone and don't want to be disturbed.

You might want to get a green octagon marked "GO" to attach to the other side so that the STOP sign can be flipped to a GO sign when your child can enter their sibling's room or when you can be interrupted in your call.

Note: STOP signs are not enough when safety is involved. They are for setting visual limits when safety is not an issue.



## *HOURGLASS TIMERS*

Hourglass sand timers are great props because the sand can be a visual distraction to keep your child occupied while waiting. Analog and digital timers can also be helpful. Timers are excellent for helping children share. Holding the sand timer and watching the timer gives your child something to have, hold, and watch while they are waiting their turn.

Do a Clean-up Blitz with a kitchen timer. Set the timer for 10 minutes at home on a Sunday evening or before dinner. Maybe play some very fast music. Working double-time, straighten up like crazy for ten minutes, then stop immediately when the timer sounds. What doesn't get done, doesn't get done.

As in the best of all discipline methods, timers allow you to step out of the discipline picture as your child learns to use timers to regulate themselves.

## *PICTURE LABELS FOR MATCHING*

Clean-up can be much easier when there are pictures on each shelf or bin of the item that belongs in that area. Then clean-up becomes a matching game and a challenge and your child can be more self-directed.

## *PUPPETS*

Puppets capture the imagination. Most children respond to puppets, to puppet conversation, and to puppet requests. The puppets can be store-bought, an old sock, or even your bare hand moving like a mouth (with or without magic marker eyes).

When I taught 3 year olds, I had Bunny the Clean-up Puppet. Bunny would whisper in a child's ear, *"Please put either the big block or the little block on the shelf and come back for a bunny hug."* In many years of teaching, there was never one child who didn't follow Bunny's requests and every child always came back for a hug.

## *WATER*

Water play can be very calming for your young child. Fill up a plastic container on your kitchen floor or fill your kitchen sink with warm, soapy water and have your child wash dishes, dolls, matchbox cars, or dinosaurs while you are busy preparing meals. Give your child a wet sponge and have them wash tables and chairs. Outside, fill a container with water and give your child a big brush so they can *paint* the house, lawn furniture or trees.

## *Music*

Music and songs can be powerful tools in motivating your child to cooperate. The easiest songs are piggyback songs where you take a familiar tune, such as The Alphabet Song or Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star (same tune!) and put your words or your child's words to the music. Since most young children love structure, singing the same song for the same daily activity can help ease some of the following transitions: getting dressed, brushing teeth, putting on coats, going up or down stairs, cleaning-up toys, coming to meals and cleaning up from meals, and going to a bath or bed. You can do a Morning March to the car with high-stepping feet and each of you making the sound of an instrument. Clean-up songs can be magical.

## *Encouragers*

Encouragers, or rewards or bribes as some people may call them, can be helpful when used in moderation. Encouragers are especially effective when they are used in conjunction with promoting imaginative interactions with your child.

### *STICKERS, HAND STAMPS, KEYS & TICKETS*

Stickers and hand stamps are common encouragers. Two additional encouragers that your child will enjoy are old keys and tickets (carnival-type tickets that can be purchased in inexpensive rolls). These can lead to some interesting interactions between you and your child, so that the encourager/reward for a particular behavior doesn't become the be-all and end-all, but a starting place to share an imaginative experience with your child.

When I've used keys as encouragers with a young child, these are some of the exchanges that we've shared.

- Me: *"You were so helpful in putting your blocks away. As we agreed, here is your key (ticket). I am wondering how you can use this key (ticket)."*
- Various Children's Responses: *"This is a key to: a spaceship, a treasure chest, a race car, a castle, a jail, my grandma's house, my sister's room when she locks me out, a toy store full of toys, a fairy princess's house, a candy store. This is a ticket for: a ride on a submarine, a carnival, the movies, a ride to outer space, Disneyland, a pizza place."*

# *PART 3: CREATIVE DISCIPLINE IN-THE-MOMENT*

- ☑ The [I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model](#) is an effective creative discipline model.
- ☑ [Consequences](#) should be brief, relevant, and immediate.
- ☑ [Time-outs](#) and [spanking](#) are not effective discipline techniques.

## *I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED MODEL*

Having a structure or model for a reference in challenging discipline moments can be very helpful. The I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model helps you set limits as well as partner with your child in providing growing and learning opportunities in discipline situations. The I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model is very solution-oriented. Let's describe the situation, talk about what happened and do some mutual problem-solving to reach a conclusion or decision.

- ☑ I SEE — describe what your child is doing or seems to be feeling; be objective
- ☑ I FEEL-LIMIT — if no limits were transgressed, describe how you feel; if a rule was broken, restate the limit
- ☑ WE NEED — engage in mutual problem-solving with your child: find a solution, repair anything that was hurt, such as bodies, feelings or things

It is suggested that you mentally rehearse this I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model several times a day in cool moments by yourself so that it becomes part of your repertoire to use in conflict situations.

## *I See, I Feel-Limit, We Need Model: Details*

It is important for adults to keep their cool in hot situations. Calm yourself with some deep breaths as you approach the situation. Get down on your child's level. Enter their sensory sphere of sight and hearing. Use a calm voice. Describe what you see and what your child seems to be feeling. This may give you a few moments to calm yourself and to think.

## *"I SEE..."*

This step can be very important in that your child wants to be seen and understood. Sometimes acknowledging your child's feelings first can help ease the situation. Observe the situation objectively.

- "I see you are upset."*
- "I see you crying and wanting things your way."*
- "I see that you are throwing your toys."*
- "I see that you are having a difficult time sharing."*
- "I see that you don't want to put on your socks."*

## *"I FEEL..."*

If no action has occurred that caused a limit to be crossed, then describe how you feel.

- "I feel angry that you are throwing those toys."*
- "I feel concerned that you are..."*
- "I feel concerned that you are dawdling and that we will be late for school."*
- "I am upset when you won't listen to me and I have to repeat myself over and over."*

If your child used words, it is important to acknowledge and give encouragement.

- "I feel pleased that you used good control and used your words and not your fists."*

## *LIMIT*

A behavioral limit may need to be set. It is important to set clear, firm, fair limits.

- "Hands are for holding, not for hitting."*
- "The chair is for sitting, not for standing on."*
- "The markers are for paper, not for walls."*
- "Mouths are for talking. Biting hurts people's bodies."*
- "Rule #1 is....no hurting people's bodies. Use gentle hands."*
- "In our family, we do \_\_\_\_, we do not \_\_\_\_."*

## *"WE NEED..."*

Engage in mutual problem-solving with your child.

- "We need to talk and listen to each other so that we can find a solution to this problem."*
- "We need to figure out a way to get this crayon off the wall."*
- "I wonder how we can find a way that works for you and also works for me."*

If mutual problem-solving is not working, choose the resolution yourself.

- "You seem to be having a hard time deciding. If you can't make a choice, then I will choose."*

## *MUTUAL PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES*

- Offer choices: *"Do you want to start cleaning up or shall I?"*
- Offer challenges: *"Can you do this before the sand timer goes down?"*
- Appeal to your child's imagination: *"How would a T-Rex/ballet dancer/elephant/shark/super hero do this?"*
- Address feelings: *"I wish we didn't have to \_\_\_\_\_. But if we work together as a team we can get this done."*
- Use humor: *"I need a goofy-head to help with this. Can you be the goofy-head that helps me?"*
- Use this phrase: *"I wonder..." "I wonder..."* engages a child, plants a seed, raises a question, offers an opportunity and doesn't require an answer. *"I wonder if..." "I wonder how..." "I wonder what would happen if..."*

## *I See, I Feel-Limit, We Need Model: Examples*

### *EXAMPLE #1*

You go into your living room and your three-year-old child has taken a black crayon and scribbled on your white living room walls. (This is the first incident.)

- ☑ I SEE: (Take several deep breaths as you approach your child, calming yourself and your voice as much as possible.) *"I see black crayon marks on the white walls."*
- ☑ I FEEL: *"I feel frustrated/confused/angry/upset that you have written on the walls with crayon."*
- ☑ LIMIT: *"Crayons are for paper, not for walls."* Instructional limits are helpful.
- ☑ WE NEED: *"We need to find a way to wash these crayon markings off the wall. Do you want to carry the paper towels or help with the soapy water?"*
- ☑ IMPORTANT FOLLOW-UP: At other times, when your child is using the crayons correctly by drawing on paper you provide positive reinforcement. *"You are using the crayons on the paper. I like how you are using the crayons correctly. Good job!"*

### *EXAMPLE #2*

Your four-year-old is refusing to dress himself for school.

- ☑ Note: Four years old is a classic age for power struggles. Four-year-olds often test limits from sun-up to sun-down. Remember to pick and choose your battles.
- ☑ I SEE: *"I see that you are not getting dressed."*
- ☑ I FEEL: *"I feel concerned/frustrated/upset. We are going to be late."*
- ☑ LIMIT: *"It's a getting-dressed time, not a time to be playing."*
- ☑ WE NEED: *"We need to find a way to get you dressed." "You put on your socks and I'll put on your shoes. We'll be a sock-and-shoe team." "I'll set the timer. Can you beat the timer and get dressed in two minutes?" "I wonder how we can make these clothes jump onto your body?"*
- ☑ IMPORTANT FOLLOW-UP: Provide positive reinforcement for self-help behavior at other times. *"I like the way you are putting on your coat/brushing your teeth/putting your breakfast dishes in the sink."*

### *EXAMPLE #3*

Your three-year-old child is hitting you.

- ☑ I SEE: *"I see that you are angry and frustrated."*
- ☑ I FEEL: (optional) *"That hurt my body and that hurt my feelings. I feel angry/frustrated/concerned/very hurt."*

- ☑ LIMIT: *"Moms are for hugging, not for hitting."*
- ☑ WE NEED: *"I need to put a cold washcloth on my arm. How can you help? And then we need to talk about how you need to put your angry feelings into words."*
- ☑ IMPORTANT FOLLOW-UP: Rehearsals of expressing angry feelings in words, rather than fists, need to be practiced several times a day to solidify a new behavior for your child. Throughout your day, positive reinforcement should be used to encourage your child to use words. *"I like your words." "Keep using those words."*

## ***CONSEQUENCES: BRIEF, RELEVANT, IMMEDIATE***

Consequences should be brief, relevant and immediate. Often parents feel that consequences are equated with punishments, which is counter to research showing that children respond to positive reinforcement more than to punishment and deprivation.

The important questions are: How can we make this situation right? If someone's body has been hurt, how can we help them heal? If someone's feelings have been hurt, how can we help soothe them? If a limit has been crossed, how can we reinforce that limit for next time?

- ☑ Brief: It is important that consequences be brief so that they are congruent with your child's slower concept of time.
- ☑ Relevant: Consequences should be relevant to the mistaken choice in behavior. If your child's feelings were not expressed in a socially appropriate manner, then any harm that your child caused, be it physical, emotional or social, needs to be repaired. If there was physical damage inflicted, then that needs to be repaired by tending to the injured person's body or destroyed creation. If there is a rift in the social relationship, then that rift needs to be healed in terms of feelings communicated between the two people involved.
- ☑ Immediate: Any consequence should be immediate. Using the consequence that six hours from now your child will only have two books read at bedtime—not the usual three—will be long disassociated from the current conflict situation.

Young children have limited understanding of cause and effect; if consequences are immediate, then the cause and effect connection can be more easily understood.

Sometimes a rewind of the situation and then moving on is best. *"We all make mistakes. This isn't easy, but we'll try to do better next time. And we'll practice some better strategies."*

## *NO TIME-OUTS*

Time-outs are easy to administer and take no thought on an adult's part, but, unfortunately, time-outs provide little learning for your child. Parents often tell me that they use time-outs again and again. My response is: *"Then time-outs don't seem to be working."* There are several serious concerns and issues with time-outs:

- Can your child learn social skills in isolation? Social skills need to be taught and reinforced using direct instruction, not by ostracizing. When your child leaves the time-out chair and a similar conflict situation arises, there has been no talk or rehearsal to increase your child's behavioral repertoire for that situation.
- Who needs the time-out: you or your child? Let's be honest here—often when children are timed-out, it is the adult that needs the time-out! The adult needs space and time to cool down, not the child!
- Some parents use time-outs as a cooling off period. This can be a valid approach if two guidelines are followed: Your child is given a choice of where they want to be and for how long. Remember: creative discipline is freedom within limits. *"Do you want to take a cool down in the kitchen or the living room? Should I check on you in two minutes or five minutes?"* The cooling-off period is step one of a longer process of working with your child's feelings and actions. Taking some time and space apart may help you and your child come back together and talk about the situation, re-strategize for next time, and set up some models for further practice and rehearsals over the next several days.

## *NO SPANKING*

Spanking is a hot, complicated topic. Different cultures and different families have different guidelines regarding physical contact with children.

When your goal for your child is for them to use self-control and put their feelings into words, then it is hard to justify we adults putting our angry feelings into slaps. If we want children who don't hit, then we need to be parents who don't hit. If we want children who follow [Rule #1](#). Everyone is Gentle with Bodies, then we need to follow the rule as well.

Most discipline challenges with young children concern impulse control. It is extremely important for adults to model impulse control and verbalize challenging feelings.



## *SUMMARY*

*Creative Discipline at Home* explored the concept of discipline conflicts as growing and learning opportunities and provided effective strategies and techniques to deal with discipline situations that are respectful to both you and your child. [Part 1](#) examined different approaches to discipline, age-appropriate expectations, and issues of eating, sleeping, and toileting. [Part 2](#) provided practical words, strategies and techniques for limit-setting. [Part 3](#) presented the [I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model](#) for in-the-moment challenging discipline situations. [Consequences](#), [time-outs](#), and [spanking](#) were also addressed. *Creative Discipline at Home* explored how gentle, but firm, limits can encourage your child's self-discipline and enhance your child's self-esteem.

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