

iBlankie

every parent's security blanket



CREATIVE DISCIPLINE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	4
<i>PART 1: CREATIVE DISCIPLINE CONCEPTS</i>	4
<i>APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE</i>	5
Limits Is Not A Four-Letter Word	5
Parents As Role Models	6
Discipline Situations Are Learning Opportunities	6
Discipline Styles: Authoritarian, Permissive, And Creative	7
Evaluating Effective Discipline	11
What Can We Control?	13
Co-Parenting Differences	14
<i>AGE-APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS</i>	14
<i>ENCOURAGEMENT, SELF-ESTEEM, & SELF-DISCIPLINE</i>	15
<i>DISCIPLINE ISSUES OR NOT? EATING, SLEEPING, TOILETING</i>	16
Eating	16
Sleeping	17
Toileting	17
<i>PART 2: CREATIVE DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES</i>	18
<i>THE THREE BIG RULES: PICKING AND CHOOSING YOUR BATTLES</i>	18
<i>STRATEGY FOR NEGATIVE ATTENTION-GETTING: TOGETHER TIME</i>	19
<i>COMMUNICATION & YOUR CHILD'S SENSORY SPHERE</i>	20
<i>CREATIVE TECHNIQUES TO SET LIMITS & ENCOURAGE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR</i>	21
Props	21
Music	24
Transitions	25
Encouragers	26
Signals	27

<i>PART 3: CREATIVE DISCIPLINE IN-THE-MOMENT</i>	28
<i>I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED MODEL</i>	28
I See, I Feel-Limit, We Need Model: Details	31
Mutual Problem-Solving Techniques	34
Shortening The I See, I Feel-Limit, We Need Model	35
I See, I Feel-Limit, We Need Model: Examples	36
<i>CONSEQUENCES: BRIEF, RELEVANT, IMMEDIATE</i>	38
Brief	40
Relevant	40
Immediate	41
<i>NO TIME-OUTS</i>	41
<i>NO SPANKING</i>	43
<i>SUMMARY</i>	44

INTRODUCTION

Creative Discipline with Young Children explores the concept of discipline conflicts as growing and learning opportunities and provides effective discipline strategies and techniques that are respectful to both parents and children. [Part 1](#) examines different approaches to discipline, age-appropriate expectations, self-esteem, co-parenting differences and issues of eating, sleeping, and toileting. [Part 2](#) provides practical 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 with Young Children* explores how gentle, but firm, limits can encourage a child's self-discipline and enhance a child's self-esteem.

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

Limits Is Not A Four-Letter Word

Almost all parents of young children struggle with discipline issues and setting limits. If you are like most parents, you may not always be comfortable with the limits you set and how you set them and you may not always be comfortable with the limits that you don't set.

And, to complicate matters further, you and your child's other parent may not always agree on how to discipline your child; co-parents sometimes disagree on discipline issues.

America is often seen as the land of the free and many Americans are not comfortable with setting limits on behavior. There are often many debates on speed limits, safety limits, debt ceilings and personal restrictions. In the US freedom-loving culture, limits is often considered a four-letter word.

For your young child, fair and firm limits are positive and necessary. Appropriate limits provide safety and security. They provide a structure for daily living and they help your child pare a huge world into pieces that are manageable. Limits that are respectful to both you and your child are crucial to your child's growth and development and to furthering family harmony.

Some challenges and discipline issues are age-appropriate. A child's job is to test limits; a parent's job is to set limits. These are conflicting job descriptions! Power struggles and discipline issues often arise from this discrepancy.

There are discipline issues that are inevitable; there are "good" power struggles. One-year-olds are working on impulse control and act out, hit and bite; two-year-olds struggle with sharing; three-year-olds can be very independent one minute and very dependent the next; and four-year-olds test limits as part of their emotional development. Five-year-olds think their parents are dumber than dirt and six-year-olds often say "*I hate you!*" as they are working on separating from their parents and identifying with their peer group.

Children often first test out their independence and flex their emotional muscles in the safest place: their relationship with their parents. There are discipline issues and power struggles that are important to have.

Parents As Role Models

"One parent is worth a thousand teachers."—ancient Chinese proverb

This ancient proverb speaks to the extraordinary power that you have in serving as a role model for your child. So much of who your child becomes is determined by the messages and actions that you provide as a parent. The models that you provide for your child are crucial in your child's development.

If your child is met with respect, encouragement and compassion, they develop encouragement and compassion towards others and, eventually, this becomes internalized and they treat themselves with respect, encouragement and self-compassion. If your child is met with criticality, punishment, and judgment, then eventually they treat others and themselves with harshness.

Limits that are set on the outside by you eventually become internalized on the inside by your child. Whether we choose to bring compassion and mutual problem-solving to a discipline situation or whether we bring inflexibility and anger to a discipline situation is providing important instruction to our child on how to approach challenging situations.

Once I read a Hallmark card that read, *"Your home is in your mother's eyes."* How we perceive ourselves is a strong reflection of how our parents saw us.

So many of our parenting words and techniques are the same as the parenting words and techniques of our parents. The power of modeling cannot be underestimated. Our parents provided a road map for our own parenting and, like it or not, that is the go-to map that we often use. It takes a great deal of thought and effort to approach parenting situations—especially discipline situations—differently from our parents.

When you use specific discipline techniques, you are modeling how your child will approach challenging situations and how your child will view themselves, as well as modeling how your child will eventually parent. You and your discipline techniques are important teachers on many levels.

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, Permissive, And Creative

When I present parenting workshops, I like to illustrate the important points with a hands-on learning experience. At the beginning of the *Creative Discipline Workshop* I always ask for three participants to come before the group. I have a large zip-loc bag filled with candy: Hershey kisses, lollipops, and Smartees candy rolls. I invite the parent volunteers to respond in the activity as either themselves or as their young child would respond. Then I approach each volunteer.

To volunteer #1 I hold up the bag of candy and I say: *"Take one orange lollipop."* Then the volunteer either takes the orange lollipop or they sometimes say, *"I want chocolate"* to which I respond, *"You would really like chocolate. Now you don't have a choice, you can only take one orange lollipop."* Either the reluctant volunteer then takes the orange lollipop or, play-acting as their young child, they have a mini-tantrum (which we deal with).

To volunteer #2, I hold up the bag of candy and I say: *"Take two or three pieces of candy."* This volunteer usually eagerly takes two or three pieces of candy and I often say, *"I like the way you listened. Great control."*

To volunteer #3, I hold up the bag of candy and I say: *"Have some candy."* Sometimes volunteer #3 will take the whole bag, sometimes they will take two or three pieces of candy, and sometimes they take nothing.

At this point I go back to each volunteer and ask how they were feeling about the instructions during this exercise.

Volunteer #1 usually feels frustrated and unhappy because they didn't get to choose what kind of candy they could have and they had no say in how much candy they could have.

Volunteer #2 usually feels fairly happy because they were able to choose the candy they wanted and they felt satisfied with the number of pieces of candy. They liked being a part of the decision-making process.

Volunteer #3 is sometimes overwhelmed with the unstructured direction *“Have some candy”* and will sometimes look like a deer-in-headlights. At other times volunteer #3 is very controlled and only takes one or two pieces of candy; sometimes volunteer #3 grabs the whole bag.

At this point we discuss how these three interactions provide an experiential illustration of three different parenting styles of discipline. (Also, at this point we pass the candy out to other workshop participants so as not to promote sibling competition among the parents!)

To simplify talking about discipline styles, the following chart illustrates the three approaches to discipline exemplified in the above experiential exercise: authoritarian discipline, creative discipline, and permissive discipline. This chart exemplifies a continuum on limits, respect, and problem-solving.

TABLE OF DISCIPLINE STYLES

	AUTHORITARIAN	CREATIVE	PERMISSIVE
LIMITS	Child: no freedom. Adult: sets all limits.	Freedom within limits. Child: limited choices.	Child: all freedom. Adult: Sets no limits.
RESPECT	No respect for child. Total respect for adult.	Mutual respect.	No respect for adult. Total respect for child.
PROBLEM SOLVING	Adult is problem solver; Child gains no experience.	Mutual problem solving; Child is part of experience,	Child is problem-solver; Child is given no guidance,
STYLE	STRICTEST<----->MOST PERMISSIVE		

It is important to have a developmentally appropriate approach in setting limits, that provides mutual respect to both your needs and your child’s needs, and that provides your child with an opportunity to hone their problem-solving skills.

AUTHORITARIAN DISCIPLINE

"Take one orange lollipop" in the above experiential exercise is an example of an authoritarian approach to discipline. I was deciding what the participant would have, without regard to their wants or needs. Were they hungry? Did they like orange lollipops? My needs were paramount. There was no opportunity for them to make a decision—no opportunity for them to do some self-examination to see what they were feeling or wanting and then to express their choice.

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. Authoritarian discipline can be disrespectful of a child's needs and this discipline style deprives a child of the important challenges and learning opportunities inherent in making decisions and practicing solving problems.

At this point in the *Creative Discipline Workshop* I ask parents to raise their hand if they were raised by one or more authoritarian parents. Then I ask several of these participants if they have a hard time making decisions. Invariably, they usually answer that they do. I know from my own personal experience, having been raised by two authoritarian parents, that I have a difficult time making decisions. As a child, many of my life choices were dictated to me by my parents. I was deprived of the experience of making good decisions and of the experience of making bad decisions.

PERMISSIVE DISCIPLINE

"Have some candy" in the above experiential exercise was a permissive discipline approach. Some workshop participants are overwhelmed by these instructions because there are too many choices. Some participants love these instructions because they want the whole bag and don't have to allow for anyone else's needs. This permissive approach provides no limits for the participant and total limits on me; there was no respect for my needs—and I needed to have some candy left over to share with the entire workshop group! This approach limited me and put me in a bind. This approach also shortchanged the problem-solving process—the decision as to candy choices fell fully on the participant without any guidance from me.

Your young child needs to have fewer choices in order not to be overwhelmed by their universe. 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.

Your child needs help from you in paring down the size of the universe; you are your child's guide to life and when you abdicate this role, you diminish the experience and wisdom that you have to offer your child. Many decisions are too complicated for your child to make; your young child certainly cannot make wise decisions about safety and health. Certainly the permissive approach to discipline offers many problem-solving opportunities for your child, but often relieves anxious feelings of being overwhelmed with so many choices.

CREATIVE DISCIPLINE: FREEDOM WITHIN LIMITS

"Have two or three pieces of candy" in the above experiential exercise is an example of the creative discipline approach. The participant's needs were respected as they were invited to decide which candy and how many pieces of candy they would like. My needs were respected in that it would be fine for me if they took two or three pieces of candy.

The creative discipline approach created a situation in which there were limited choices—I set the parameters or limits to the situation and they had choices within those limits. This freedom within limits allowed them to problem-solve within the comfortable context of a pared-down universe. There was respect for their needs, respect for my needs, and an opportunity was provided within which they had the freedom for problem-solving 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 allows you to pare down the universe to within acceptable parameters for your own parental needs and then present your child with these limited choices.

Creative discipline is respectful of your needs and your child's needs. Creative discipline provides an opportunity for you and your child to strategize around a problem so that your child is practicing making decisions and you are helping your child in the decision-making process.

When my children were young, I was trying to find my way to my own discipline style. I certainly didn't want to be authoritarian like both my mother and father. However, as an adult, I found that their modeling had a strong hold on me. As a parent I wanted to be so different from my parents that in a discipline situation I started out being very permissive.

That didn't work well for me because my needs weren't being met and then I felt like a doormat, so I quickly became impatient and authoritarian. That caused power struggles, so I would then try the creative discipline approach, "using freedom within limits."

Sometimes all of this occurred within the space of five minutes! Over time, the creative discipline approach felt more natural and, with much practice, became my go-to method for discipline situations. Finding my own discipline style was definitely a growing and learning experience for me!

Evaluating Effective Discipline

Once during a parenting workshop on *Creative Discipline*, a parent volunteered that when her 9-year-old used words she didn't like, she put hot pepper sauce on his tongue and that stopped his bad words. She thought that was an effective discipline technique for changing his behavior. She said that it worked very well.

I responded that it depended on what she meant by the word "worked." I told her that, from my perspective, the behavior was changed, but the technique didn't meet both of my criteria for an effective discipline strategy. Certainly the mom was able to change her son's verbal behavior, but the parent-child bond was eroded. Her son was treated in a physically painful manner that showed a lack of respect. So, in terms of the two criteria described below, the discipline technique did not "work."

TWO CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES

- An effective discipline technique changes the behavior.
- An effective discipline technique strengthens the adult-child bond.

If discipline situations are opportunities for growth and learning, certainly a parent is trying to change a child's behavior. However, if the discipline technique causes an erosion of the adult-child bond in terms of not being respectful or in terms of being hurtful to the child, then there is a breakdown in the parent-child relationship and communication that hinders the learning and growing experience.

Mabel yelled at her son Christian when he would dawdle when getting dressed for school. Her yelling would hurry his dressing, but it led to tension between the two of them. She decided to use more creative strategies to change his behavior; she set a timer and challenged Christian to get dressed before the timer went off—The Beat-the-Timer Game. Christian liked beating the timer. This creative strategy changed Christian's behavior and strengthened the parent-child bond—Mabel and her son enjoyed the game. This was a learning and growing opportunity for Mom and Son in finding a way to facilitate cooperation without causing friction between them.

There is an acid test for a discipline technique to evaluate whether or not the discipline technique is valid and respectful: Take the discipline technique to the adult level. Mentally try it out in an adult-to-adult situation. Then the discipline technique and situation become clearer, mainly because two adults are on the same power level, while a parent and child often operate on different levels of power.

ACID TEST FOR A DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUE: TAKE IT TO THE ADULT LEVEL

For example, explore time-outs as a discipline technique. Many parents use time-outs. Time-outs are not effective and are not recommended as the be-all and end-all discipline technique. There is a full discussion of time-outs later in [Part 3](#). For now, let's apply the acid test to classical time-outs, where a child is sent to their room for misbehavior and then let's examine what happens when time-outs are applied at the adult level.

Say that you have a report due at work and you walk into your boss's office and hand your boss your report. Your boss looks at your report and says *"This is not what I wanted! Go back to your office and work on this report and get it right. You are 33 years old, so I want you to spend 33 minutes on this report. Do it now!"* You pick up the report and walk back to your cubicle. You are probably feeling bad about yourself and/or your boss. You stay in your office for 33 minutes working on the report, but you are not sure what you did wrong and what you need to do to make it right.

When I present the above scenario at my *Creative Discipline Parenting Workshops*, it gets a chuckle. But it's not far from the truth in terms of judging effective discipline techniques. Essentially, your boss has given you a time-out.

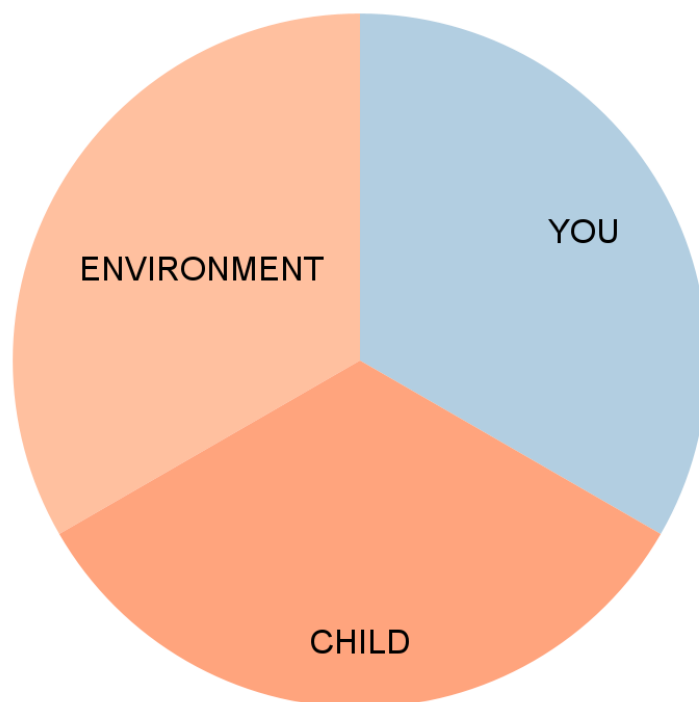
First of all, using the above criteria, this was not a growing and learning opportunity for you because there were no explanations given on what your boss wanted or didn't want, so it is hard to know how to change your report/behavior to produce a positive outcome.

Secondly, using the second criterion, the relationship between you and your boss is definitely strained. You are probably having strong negative feelings about your boss and/or yourself at this point. There is no partnership or teamwork here to help you with your report.

The above scenario exemplifies how time-outs are not an effective discipline technique because there is often no learning taking place to help change the behavior and often the adult-child bond is strained rather than strengthened.

What Can We Control?

It is important in any given situation to recognize what we can control and what we can't control. In any given situation there is a triangle of factors:



On a given day at a given time, certainly the environment can be a factor in a situation. If it snows and your child's playdate is canceled, that is not within your control. If it's Friday evening just before dinner and you and your child are tired and hungry and you go into the grocery store for a quick shop, that certainly can be a formula for disaster. In general, you may or may not have control of the environment or circumstances.

In most cases you don't have control of your child. What your child does or doesn't do or what your child says or doesn't say is not within your control at any given moment.

The one thing that you can control is yourself. In the best of all possible worlds, what you say and what you don't say, what you do and what you don't do, are the elements that you can control. It is important to recognize the locus of control in any given situation. It is important to have words, strategies, and techniques that you can use to help in any given situation.

Co-Parenting Differences

In my professional and personal experience, I have never met two co-parents who agreed 100% on discipline.

It is very common for co-parents to disagree on discipline. One factor is the influence of each parent's family of origin on their discipline style, how they were disciplined when they were a child. The second factor is gender difference.

Modeling is a powerful determinant for your natural parenting discipline style. It takes a great deal of thought, self-examination and self-exploration to try to change the patterns of discipline that were laid down for us during our own childhood. If our parents yelled at us or spanked us, it is often difficult for us not to yell or spank. And each parent brings a different set of their own mother's and father's discipline styles to the disciplining of their own child.

When we are speaking about discipline situations in a family, very often it is not just the two co-parents that are involved: there may be six adults present in the discipline mix—the two co-parents and their own parents (and possibly more if stepparents or grandparents are included). It is no wonder that two parents rarely agree completely on how to discipline their child.

There can also be gender factors involved in discipline issues. Sometimes mothers tend to take the nurturing and compassionate approach to discipline and fathers tend to take the school of hard knocks approach to discipline. Sometimes the roles reverse, but these two stances are often present in co-parents and this difference can cause conflict. Having these co-parenting differences can be a positive in raising your child, as long as these differences don't become polarized and more extreme.

In raising my own children, I was the disciplinarian and I often felt like "The Wicked Witch of the West." Their father, on the other hand, had the role of "Sugar Daddy." (I had authoritarian parents and he had permissive parents.) This sometimes led to co-parenting conflicts that required much discussion (out of the children's earshot).

AGE-APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS

It is critical to have an understanding of child development and to have age-appropriate expectations in terms of what is realistic behavior for your child. Often power struggles and discipline situations arise when you are expecting your child to behave in a manner that is beyond your child's capabilities.

According to The National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) “Young children don’t always understand and remember the rules.” It is often challenging for adults to understand and remember that young children don’t always understand and remember the rules. Expecting your young child to clean up their toys without structure and supervision is unrealistic. Expecting your young child to have patience to wait for ten minutes while you are talking on your cell phone is beyond many a young child’s capabilities.

Your young child is not always capable of being rational and flexible and obedient. Sometimes when it seems like your child is not listening, the truth is that your child is not capable of comprehending and acting on the information you are providing in the manner that you are providing it.

A question arises: How do you know what are realistic capabilities for your young child? What are age-appropriate expectations? There are two good sources for this information. The series *Your One-Year-Old, Your Two-Year-Old,....Your Ten-Year-Old* by Louise Bates Ames and Francis Ilg, provides down-to-earth expectations for the various age groups.

In addition, the National Association for the Education of Young Children NAEYC (www.NAEYC.org) has several brochures and books on developmentally appropriate practices, which provide guidelines for age-appropriate teaching methods for childcare facilities. By reading between the lines you can know what behaviors should realistically be expected at your child’s age.

ENCOURAGEMENT, SELF-ESTEEM, & SELF-DISCIPLINE

“Children who are truly loved unconsciously know themselves to be valued. This knowledge is worth more than gold...The feeling of being valuable—‘I am a valuable person’—is essential to mental health and is a cornerstone of self-discipline. It is a direct product of parental love.”

—M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

We have this amazing opportunity as parents to be loyal supporters and advocates for our child. We have this wondrous chance to enhance their self-esteem and make them feel loved and loveable as well as capable and confident.

I once read about a tribe in Africa where, if a person misbehaved, the entire tribe gathered in a circle surrounding that person and began telling stories. The stories were all positive stories about that person’s good deeds, character traits, and wise decisions in the past. Sometimes the story-telling went on for hours or even days. After every villager shared a story about the person in the middle of the circle, the ritual ended. The person was enriched and changed by the stories.

I truly believe that everyone, at any given moment, is doing the best they can. I am doing the best I can, my child is doing the best they can. Neither of us is perfect. But we are trying. And we need to be a team and support our best efforts, perfect or not.

Children who feel good about themselves are often self-disciplined. Solid self-esteem leads to stronger self-discipline and fewer discipline struggles.

Young children want what every person wants: to be deeply understood and to be deeply appreciated. It is crucial that you acknowledge both who your child is and what your child does. The challenge in using encouragement or positive reinforcement to change our child's behavior is that we must first change our own behavior and be conscious about catching our child being good. And, for your young child, acknowledging the process can be as important as acknowledging the product.

- "Jeremy, you carried those heavy plates off the table and put them next to the sink. I really needed that help from you."*
- "You waited and waited for me to get off the computer so that you could ask me a question. You were very patient, Rena."*

Two excellent books addressing these issues are: *The Magic of Encouragement: Nurturing Your Child's Self-Esteem* by Stephanie Marston and *Your Child's Self-Esteem* by Dorothy Corkille Briggs.

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

Often, parents and children engage in power struggles concerning food. It is important to give careful consideration to power struggles over food with your young child as your conflicts over food can become complicated with struggles over nurturance and love. Power struggles over food can be simplified with forethought and planning.

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. Power struggles over food are useless and unproductive. Food fights accomplish nothing except conflict. 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

The age for starting toilet-training in children varies greatly by culture. 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. In addition, toilet training should only be encouraged when your child has the bladder and bowel muscles to control their bodily functions. When adults impose an arbitrary age at which to begin toilet training, a child's self-concept and a child's body may not be ready to move on to a more mature place.

Power struggles over your child's toileting are counterproductive. Toileting issues should not be considered discipline issues, but opportunities for children to feel positive about their bodies and their maturing into big boys and girls. 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.

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, such as [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.

STRATEGY FOR NEGATIVE ATTENTION-GETTING: TOGETHER TIME

All children want attention and for most young 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 it seems like there is an increase in the amount and intensity of discipline issues with your child, it is important to examine whether you are spending enough one-on-one positive time together.

In order to ensure that the behavior is not negative attention-getting, be proactive about positive attention through one-on-one time! It is important to plan at least one or two times each week to focus solely on your child and to give them your undivided attention. This time doesn't have to be doing a special activity or buying a toy—the best one-on-one time is playing together with the games and toys that your child wants to play with.

One-on-one time with your child at least two to three times per week for 30-45 minutes each time is a powerful connection for both you and your child. During this one-on-one time be sure to engage in the play that your child chooses and be sure to listen and follow your child's lead. Allow your child to be directing the play. This is a time to hang out together and for you to understand your child on a deeper level.

Think of this time as a date with your child. You might give it a special name, such as Together Time, Dad and Daughter Time, Mom and Madeline Time, or, as one four-year-old girl calls it, Sparkle Time. Talk about it before—*"I can't wait to see what you want to do during our Rashid and Mom Time"*—and talk about it after—*"Clara, I smile every time I think of our Special Time together yesterday."*

During this Together Time your child should be the director of the play. You are observing and commenting in a non-judgmental way about the action. You are participating as your child wants—engaging with them and learning about them through their play. This is a time where you are totally tuned into your child and joining with them in their world.

If there are siblings, this one-on-one time may be difficult to arrange as siblings shouldn't be present and shouldn't be able to interrupt. But if there are siblings, this one-on-one time is even more important.

At every parenting workshop I always talk about the importance of one-on-one Time. It is awesomely powerful. I have seen positive changes in a child's challenging behavior after two to three weeks of one-on-one Time, several times a week, with Mom and/or Dad.

COMMUNICATION & YOUR CHILD'S SENSORY SPHERE

Your child explores the world with their senses. Your child is extraordinarily tuned in to their visual, tactile, olfactory (smell), auditory, and gustatory (taste) self. When communicating with your child, conceptualize a sensory sphere surrounding your child, that is, think of an egocentric sphere within which your child is the center and wherein your child is engaging with the world by vision, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

For your two-year-old, conceptualize a sphere that is two feet in diameter surrounding your toddler; for your three-year-old, imagine a three-foot diameter sphere encapsulating your child; for your four-year-old, that sensory sphere expands to four feet, and so forth.

In order for you to be sure that you are relating to your child, it is crucial that you be within their sensory sphere to be seen and heard. You must be up close and personal to your child to ensure that you are communicating. You must enter that two-foot or three-foot or four-foot sensory sphere to be sure that you are heard, seen, and on your child's radar.

Often, when you are outside your child's sensory sphere, you and your child are not communicating. To be talking to your young child across a room or across a hallway and not looking directly into your child's eyes and face often makes for confused or non-existent communication. Just because you say something, doesn't mean that your voice is heard.

You need to enter that sensory sphere and engage your child within their smaller egocentric world. With your very young child you may need to look at them eyes-to-eyes, perhaps touching them gently below the eyes, touching their earlobes if you want them to listen or gently stroking their cheeks or chin if you want them to respond. Communication needs to be within your child's sensory sphere to be received.

CREATIVE TECHNIQUES TO SET LIMITS & ENCOURAGE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Children relate to the world through their senses. It can be very effective to use creative sensory techniques in the environment to help you set limits. It is important to examine your physical and sensory environment to ensure that what a child sees and hears helps in setting appropriate limits and encourages positive behavior in a given situation. Let the environment work for you.

Props

When I do *Creative Discipline Workshops*, I bring out a big black leather bag, which I call my Prop Bag, and offer many nitty-gritty suggestions on how to use props to set limits on children's behavior and as encouragers to promote and reinforce children's positive behavior.

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. Take a piece of red construction paper, cut it into an octagon, write "STOP" on it, punch a hole in the top 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 a castle that one child has created to remind another child to leave it standing; put this on your home office door or hold it up

when you are talking on your phone and don't want to be disturbed. Do some of your electronic devices need STOP signs on them to remind your child to leave them alone?

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

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, when the castle can be taken down and put away, or when you can be interrupted at your home office.

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.

You can also make construction paper place mats by tracing plates, cups and silverware outlines on the paper and having your child match the items while setting the table. If your children share a room, you might want to color-code items with a dot for each child.

CHARTS AS ENCOURAGERS:

Some children love the concept of a chart and feel rewarded by giving themselves a sticker or a check. This chart can be a poster on the wall, a pad of paper or a clipboard with paper. Your child can help you create a list of chores or activities that they want to reward themselves for. Caveat: don't be surprised if the thrill of the reward only lasts a few days.

CHARTS FOR STRUCTURE

Your child may be more comfortable with a visual structure to guide them with their activities. For example, if leaving your house in the morning to get your child to school or daycare can be challenging, try using a visual chart with pictures, either hand-drawn, real photos or magazine pictures, to make a long horizontal poster of your child's activities.

Having pictures of your child waking up, getting dressed, having breakfast, getting their coat and backpack, etc., can help your child navigate through the morning. You can reference this chart and ask them where they are on this chart; you can also put scheduled times on this chart for your older child who might want to match their digital watch to the posted times. You can laminate this chart and have your child give themselves a sticker or a check mark as they progress through their morning routine.

Your older child may benefit from a weekly pictorial calendar chart of activities, especially if they are very busy or if there is shared custody and they spend time at Mom's House and time at Dad's House.

PUPPETS

"Engage a child's cooperation by engaging their imagination."

—Adele Faber and Elaine Maszlich in *How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk*

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.

Puppets can provide the distance between you and your child necessary to avoid power struggles, to encourage positive behaviors, to promote self-esteem, and to help set limits.

- "*Listen to Dragon puppet. He's saying, 'Time to brush your teeth. Do you want to brush his teeth after you've finished with your teeth?'*"

FLASHLIGHTS

Use flashlights for a family-friendly variation on dinner by candlelight. The dimmer light can calm your young child and make your entire dinnertime more peaceful. Use a flashlight to entice your child to find their way to their bedroom at night.

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. If your child is cranky, put 1/2" of warm water in the tub and give them a calm-down bath. 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. When an adult speaks to a young child, the words are processed on one side of the brain and there needs to be a neurological leap across brain hemispheres for these words to be processed into action on the other side of the brain. However, when a child hears music, the music is processed on the same side of the brain as action and so there is a more immediate action response to music than to words.

Many years ago, when I first started teaching preschool, I swore that I was not going to be one of those dorky preschool teachers that sang songs throughout the day. Within three weeks I was one of those dorky teachers because singing at clean-up time, coming to-snack-time, and getting-on-coat time spurred fifteen young children to action in a way that words never could!

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.

SONGS AND MUSIC FOR TRANSITIONS:

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 a coat, 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. You can play the same breakfast music every day when you prepare and eat breakfast so that this can add structure and calm to the start of the day. Clean-up songs can be magical.

SONGS AS TIMERS

You can use songs for timers for activities. During a baking project you can sing *Have You Seen the Muffin Man?* as *Have You Seen Darian Stirring the Dough?* to structure the length of mixing time. You and your child can create a *Toothbrushing Song* that lasts the two minutes it takes to brush teeth (You will have to sing the song and perhaps your child can make sounds or dance as they brush their teeth.) It has been suggested that people wash their hands for the length of time that it takes to sing *Happy Birthday*.

SONGS AND RHYTHMS FOR ACTIVITIES

Sometimes singing songs can encourage cooperation and help avoid conflict. If your child is having a hard time sharing blocks with their brother, you might try singing a *Building a Fort Song* to encourage cooperation and ease the sharing process. If you are having a hard time getting your child's attention you might start clapping a certain rhythm and that should get your child's attention to start clapping the same rhythm and to get their attention.

Transitions

Most young children are challenged by transitions. Stopping one activity and moving to another activity can be difficult. In addition to the [musical suggestions](#) described above, there are other techniques to help children switch gears.

FINGER COUNTING

Most young children benefit from a five minute warning prior to stopping an activity. Get up close and personal with your child as described in the [Sensory Sphere section](#) and say, *"There are five minutes left until playtime is over."* As you say this, put up your hand with five fingers spread out in view of their eyes and count each finger, 1-2-3-4-5, with your child. Repeat this at four minutes, three, two, and then one.

1,2,3-FREEZE PLEASE

Get within your child's [sensory sphere](#) and say *"1,2,3, freeze, please."* Freeze your body as an example and speak at most two sentences. You might say *"Good freezing,"* then *"We will be getting coats on to leave after we melt,"* and then say *"3,2,1, melt, and get coats on."*

1,2,3,4,5—PRETEND YOU ARE A STATUE AND NOT ALIVE:

Be within your child's [sensory sphere](#) and say "1,2,3,4,5, pretend you're a statue and not alive." Be a non-moving statue yourself. Give one or two sentences of simple instructions. Then say "5,4,3,2,1, now our statue time is done" and continue to the next activity.

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

Some of the simplest objects can be rewards or encouragers for your young child. 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.*
- Follow-up Questions: *"I am wondering who you will take with you when you use your key (ticket). What will you do when you get there?"*

Imaginative exchanges around encouragers enrich and broaden the experience beyond the reward itself.

Signals

Developing non-verbal signals with your young child can be very helpful.

THUMBS UP/THUMBS TO THE SIDE/THUMBS DOWN

At a young age, you can teach your child that thumbs up is a good/positive, that thumbs to the side (horizontal) is so-so, and that thumbs down is not good/negative. This can be helpful when you are asking your child how their day went and they might not feel like talking but they can respond to your thumbs up/side/down nonverbal query with their own thumbs up, side, or down. This non-verbal communication can also be very useful in providing feedback to your child or in requesting feedback from your child when they are far away on the playground or in certain social situations.

LIP-ZIP

Lip-Zip is a silent "*Quiet, please!*" signal. You can do a zip motion across your mouth for silence. Then in a few seconds do an unzip motion across your lips. This signal can be used quietly in social situations or at times when you or your child need quiet. And be prepared for your child's doing a lip-zip to you when they want quiet!

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

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.

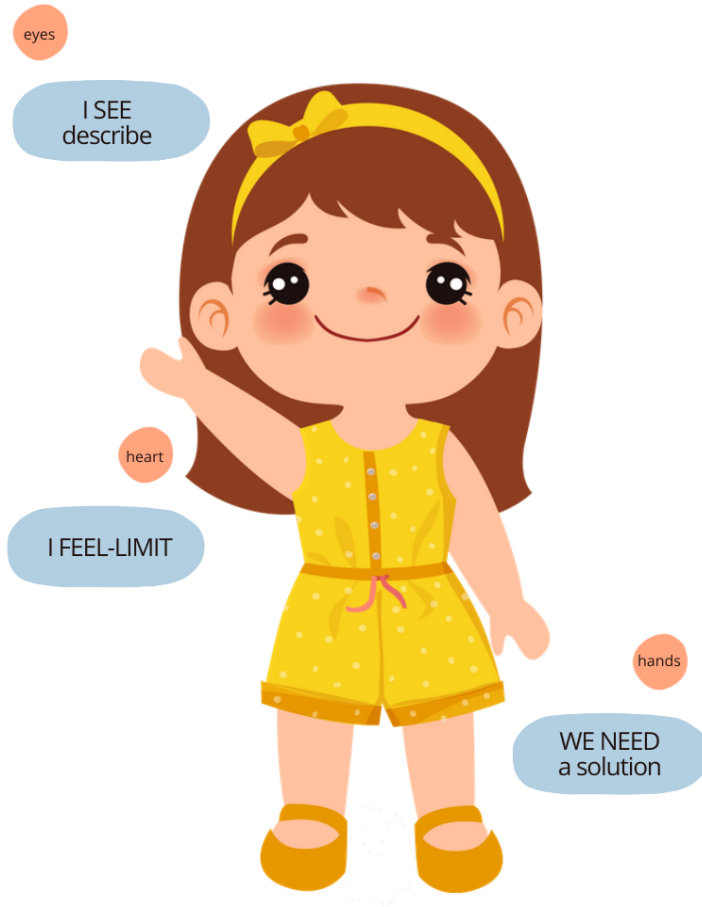
The I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model provides a template for discipline situations. It is a very solution-oriented technique: Let's describe the situation, talk about what happened or what needs to happen and do some mutual problem-solving to reach a conclusion or decision.

Discipline situations are vast and varied. This model can be modified to be used in most situations. First the model will be described in several ways and then examples will be offered to illustrate the use of the model.

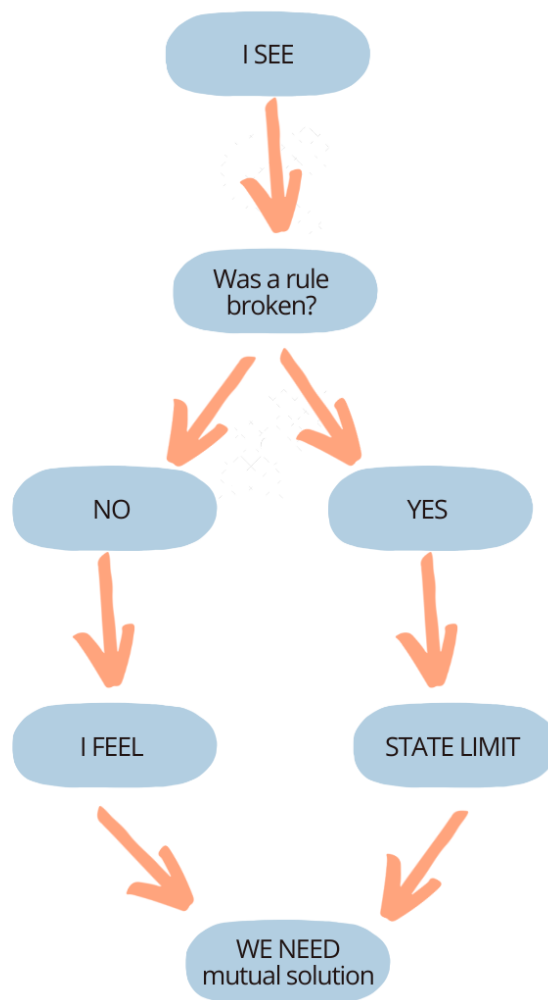
- ☑ I SEE — describe what your child is doing or seems to be feeling; be objective
- ☑ I FEEL-LIMIT — if no limits were transgressed, describe how you feel; if a rule was broken, restate the limit
- ☑ WE NEED — engage in mutual problem-solving with your child: find a solution, repair anything that was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

The following graphics and charts can help you remember and use the model.

I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model



*I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT,
WE NEED Model
DECISION CHART*



GUIDELINE	CONCEPT	WORDS/ACTION
I SEE	Objective description of child's feelings or actions	"I see you are doing..." "I see you are feeling ..."
I FEEL (no limits needed)	Express your feelings	"I'm feeling ..." "I'm concerned that ..."
LIMIT (if needed)	State limit	"Moms are not for kicking. Moms are for hugging." "Rule #1 is 'Be gentle with bodies.'"
WE NEED	Mutual problem-solving	"We need to wipe the crayon off the wall." "We need to find a way to"

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. The good news in all of this is: if at any time you feel that you did not use this model well, the odds are, given how young children test limits, you will have another opportunity to use this model again within a short time. Guaranteed, you will have many real-life opportunities to practice and use the I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model with your young child!

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

- Calm yourself with some deep breaths as you approach the situation.
- Get down on your child's level. Enter their [sensory sphere](#).
- Use a calm voice.
- Describe the situation. Describe what you see. Describe what your child seems to be feeling. This may provide you with an additional few moments to calm yourself and to think. Verbalize the feelings.

"I SEE..."

This step can be very important. Your child wants to be seen and understood, as do all people. Sometimes acknowledging your child's feelings first can help ease the situation. The situation can also be described objectively without involving feelings.

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

"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 dawdling and that we will be late for school."*
- "I feel frustrated when you don't want to brush your teeth."*
- "I am upset when you won't listen to me and I have to repeat myself over and over."*
- "I feel annoyed when we have these struggles over your getting into your car seat."*
- "I am tired of having these disagreements over computer time."*
- "I am concerned that you are..."*

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."*
- "I feel that you used your words in an important way. Great control."*
- "I like your words."*

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."*
- "Dogs are for patting. Pulling the dog's ears hurts him."*
- "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 ____."*
- "Spitting spreads germs. Your mouth is for talking."*
- "Paintings are to be looked at. It hurt Sarah's feelings when you ripped up her painting."*

"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."*
- "How can we solve this disagreement?"*
- "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.

- "We seem to be having a hard time working this one out. I am deciding that we will not do that now."*
- "You seem to be having a hard time deciding. If you can't make a choice, then I will choose."*
- "Since we can't agree, I am deciding what we will do."*

If your child cannot talk at this time, channel their intense feelings into an activity that helps them calm down. Your child may be so upset by the conflict they may need a short time and an activity, such as pounding playdough or jumping up and down, to release some of their feelings. They may need a hug for reassurance. They can then return to resolving the situation by talking and listening.

Mutual Problem-solving Techniques

USE "I WONDER..."

The phrase "*I wonder...*" engages a child, plants a seed, raises a question, offers an opportunity and—best of all—doesn't require an answer.

- "I wonder if..."
- "I wonder how..."
- "I wonder about..."
- "I wonder when..."
- "I wonder what would happen..."

OFFER CHOICES

- "Do you want to start cleaning up or shall I?"
- "Do you want to put away the red block or the blue block?"

OFFER CHALLENGES

- "Who can do this faster—you or I?"
- "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?"
- "I need help figuring out how to do this. What suggestions do you have?"

ADDRESS FEELINGS

- "I wish we didn't have to _____. It's not my favorite thing either. 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 a goofy-head? Should we sing a goofy song while we are doing this?"*

Shortening The I See, I Feel-Limit, We Need Model

Certainly the I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT, WE NEED Model can be shortened, depending on the needs of the moment.

SKIPPING THE I SEE

- "I feel concerned about your tantrum. We need to talk. How can we calm you so we can talk?"*
- "I am frustrated that you are not listening to me and coming to dinner. What can I say or do to get your attention?"*
- "The table is not for banging. We need to find something else for you to hammer on."*

SKIPPING THE I SEE, I FEEL-LIMIT

- "We need to find a way to talk about something other than candy. I am wondering if you would like to invite Ariel or Jon for a playdate?"*
- "We need to start getting ready for bed. What part of the bed-time routine do you want to start with—bath or brushing teeth?"*
- "We need to hurry so that we are not late for school. Do you want to eat your breakfast now or should we pack it in a Ziploc bag for munching?"*

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

- I SEE=describe what your child's behavior or feeling, using neutral words
- I FEEL=describe the way the situation makes you feel
- LIMIT=set a limit if needed
- WE NEED=mutual problem-solving

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."

"What if we have a race to see who can get dressed first?"

"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

You are in the grocery store and your five-year-old is screaming for candy.

- Note: Of course the element of embarrassment in a public place makes this an extremely difficult situation. And most young children know this.
- I SEE: *"I see you are very upset."*
- I FEEL: *"I feel frustrated/angry/concerned/impatient when you use tantrums instead of words."*
- LIMIT: *"I respond to words, not tantrums." "Now is not the time for candy. Candy is for after meals."*
- WE NEED: *"We need to talk about this."*

"We need to find a way for you to calm down or we will be leaving the store for a few minutes."

"I wonder if talking about buying the candy for later is a possibility."

"We need to use words to work this situation through."

- IMPORTANT FOLLOW-UP: Positive reinforcement for using words and using good control in frustrating situations. *"I like your words." "Your words make it so easy to understand what you want. Great control!"*

EXAMPLE #4

Your young child is not listening to you.

- ☑ Note: It is important to be in your child's [sensory sphere](#) when you want to be heard.
- ☑ I SEE: *"I see that you are still playing. It is hard for you to stop playing now."*
- ☑ I FEEL: *"I feel concerned/frustrated/upset that you are not listening to me."*
- ☑ LIMIT: *"This is a listening time, not a playing time." "This is a _____time."*
- ☑ WE NEED: *"We need to be communicating—talking and listening and responding." "I need you to hear me and to respond with words or with actions."*
- ☑ IMPORTANT FOLLOW-UP: Positive reinforcement when your child is listening. *"I am glad that you are listening so carefully." "Good listening." "Good cooperation. That is so helpful."*

EXAMPLE #5

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 for any given situation with your young child should be relevant, brief, and immediate. Often parents feel that consequences are equated with punishments—that a mistake needs to result in a situation of removing privileges or pleasures or treats. This is counter to research indicating that children respond to encouragement and positive reinforcement more than to punishment and deprivation.

Everybody makes mistakes. People, both young and old, grow and learn from mistakes. It is important to approach all situations with your child, especially hot moments, as opportunities for growing and learning. What is to be learned in this situation? How can

your child grow from this experience? How can you grow from this experience as a parent? It is important that you come with partnership and compassion to these conflict situations.

Big question: 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? If there has been a breakdown in your social relationship with your child, what is needed to repair your relationship with your child?

It is also important to remember that young children do not always understand and remember the rules. And we adults don't always understand and remember that young children do not always understand and remember the rules. Growing up is hard. Helping your child grow up is hard.

I always like to believe that, in any given situation, everyone is doing the best that they can. At any given moment, believe that your child is doing the best they can. At any given moment, know that you are doing the best parenting that you can. We are all doing our best at this moment. We are all working hard. We are in this together. We are partnered around helping your young child grow up. This helps in bringing compassion to the moment.

Some general guidelines and some examples are provided to cover various situations involving consequences.

It is important to note that not all conflict situations need consequences. If your child has not been physically aggressive or verbally aggressive and has a more self-contained, more mature level of response, such as crying or sulking, then there is no need for consequences, but rather for instruction and further rehearsals so that your child can have an appropriate voice, both the appropriate words and level of vocalization, to verbalize their feelings.

- ☑ *"I see that you are very disappointed, Derek. Great control in using gentle hands and gentle feet. Can you put your disappointment into words? Can you say, 'I am disappointed.' It's not easy, but we will practice that. Your feelings are important and so are your words telling me about your feelings."*
- ☑ *"Yes, Shoshana, I see that you are going to your room and that you don't want to talk about how angry you are. Great control. I will check on you in a few minutes to see if you want to talk about your feelings and put your anger into words."*

Consequences are needed if there has been some harm involving your child and a peer, sibling or you. If there are things that are hurt—bodies or possessions or relationships—then there needs to be repair. Consequences should repair damage, not inflict punishment.

Brief

Sometimes parents can forget how time moves much differently, much more slowly, for children than for adults. An interesting guide for understanding time concepts for your child is to compare your age and your child's age. Suppose you are 33 and your child is 3—you are 11 times older than your child. This can translate into conceptual time differences—what is 24 hours in your child's life is what 11 days would feel like to you as an adult.

Often when parents try to set limits or consequences for a child, the time frame is very incongruent with child development. To ask a child not to use a disputed toy for an entire day is not allowing for your child's time concept. To ask your child to share a doll for an hour is even asking a lot for most young children; by the end of the hour your child may not even remember the conflict.

It is important that consequences be brief so that they are congruent with your child's concept of time and your child's memory capacity.

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 or emotional or social, needs to be repaired.

It is important to realize what was breached, broken or eroded in the situation and what needs to be repaired. If there was physical damage inflicted, then the damage needs to be repaired. For instance, if your child injures you or another person or someone's creation, your child needs to verbally address and tend to the injured child's body or destroyed creation and try to help repair that; in this case, there will often be a rift in the social relationship and that also needs to be tended to in terms of feelings communicated between the two people involved.

If your child has not been physically aggressive but has been verbally aggressive, then the reparation needs to be with your child's social relationship with a peer or with you. In this case, feelings need to be addressed to repair the breach in the relationship.

More appropriate responses need to be suggested and rehearsed.

Immediate

Given the above discussion of your child's concept of time, it is important that any consequence be immediate. Using the consequence that six hours from now they will only have two books read at bedtime—not the usual three—will be long disassociated from the current conflict situation. 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.

- "Let's resolve this issue and move on. Let's agree, you and I, what happened, come up with a plan to repair whatever damage has occurred, discuss how to do things better, and then turn the page. We all make mistakes. This isn't easy, but we'll try to do better next time. And we'll rehearse some better strategies."*

NO TIME-OUTS

For some reason, time-outs were the discipline flavor of the 1990s and that flavor still lingers on. 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 say that they use time-outs again and again; my response: "Then they don't seem to be working." There are several serious concerns with time-outs:

LEARNING SOCIAL SKILLS IN ISOLATION

If you are trying to teach your child social skills, how can your child learn social skills in the isolation of a time-out? Social skills need to be taught and reinforced using direct instruction, not by ostracizing. Two things that are often learned by children who are timed-out: be sneakier in your misdeeds and be angry at the adult who put you in the time-out—the time-out is their fault, not yours. This is not effective learning.

TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

When your child leaves the time-out chair or room and a similar conflict situation arises, your child has no additional skills to use in that situation. There has been no talk or rehearsal to increase your child's behavioral repertoire for the next time your child feels angry or upset. There has been no practice to provide some additional behavioral and neurological pathways so that your child has new choices when a conflict arises again.

CONFUSION

Very often children who are sent to time-out are not clear why. If you ask your child, sometimes they will be uncertain or confused about the behavior or words that caused the time-out. If this is the case, how can your child know what to do next time? Young children need specific directions. It is important to remember and understand, once again, that children do not always remember and understand the rules.

PARTNERSHIP

There is no partnering in the time-out chair. Your child is there by themselves to tough out whatever. We have an important role to provide guidance to young children, especially in high-adrenaline moments.

WHO NEEDS THE TIME-OUT: YOU OR YOUR CHILD?

Let's be honest here—often when children are timed-out, it is the parent that needs the time-out! The parent needs space and time to cool down, not the child!

Some people say that they use time-outs effectively with young children. Some people use time-outs as a cooling off period. I think that 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 (using limited choices) *“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 angry feelings. 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 rehearsals over the next several days. This cooling off period should be step one in the process of working through this angry situation. The cooling off period can be a re-centering so that there can be some important learning and growing around angry situations in which you and your child are partnered in learning social skills and how to best express angry feelings.

Also, see Part 1 [Evaluating Discipline Strategies](#) for further discussion of time-outs.

NO SPANKING

Spanking is a hot, complicated topic. Different cultures have different guidelines regarding physically disciplining children. Some cultures encourage spanking children and view parents as weak if they do not use physical means to discipline children, and some cultures frown on physical punishment for a child.

It feels important to explore our own personal experiences with spanking or hitting children. Often our feelings about physical discipline originate from the families in which we grew up.

I have feelings about spanking from both a personal and a professional standpoint.

Personally, I remember being spanked as a child. My pride was hurt. I felt humiliated. What I felt was intense anger at my father or my mother. What I learned was to be more secretive and not to trust my parents to understand me or help me. I didn't learn any of the lessons that they tried to teach me by spanking me.

What I can say about spanking or hitting professionally is on another level.

First of all, when your goal for your child is for them to put their angry feelings into words, then it is hard to justify we adults putting our angry feelings into hits or slaps. If a parent is still working on impulse control, then how can we expect more impulse control from a child?

“One parent is worth a thousand teachers” speaks to the power of modeling—what we do as parents is far more powerful than what we say. 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 that rule as well.

Secondly, my concern is empirical. When I work with families, if a child has been hit or spanked by a parent, then within the next day or so that child will often hit either a peer, a sibling, a parent, or a teacher. In my experience, without judgment but with much observation, if a child is hit, then that child will hit soon after. (Important note: I am definitely not saying the opposite—that every child who hits has been hit. I am saying that a child who hits will very likely then hit. There is a definite distinction here.)

Most discipline challenges with your child concern impulse control. It is extremely important that you model impulse control and that you model verbalizing challenging feelings.

SUMMARY

Creative Discipline with Young Children 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, self-esteem, co-parenting differences and issues of eating, sleeping, and toileting.

[Part 2](#) provided practical words, strategies and techniques for limit-setting.

[Part 3](#) presented an in-the-moment model for challenging discipline situations. Consequences, time-outs, and spanking were also addressed.

Creative Discipline with Young Children explored how gentle, but firm, limits can encourage your child's self-discipline and enhance your child's self-esteem.

Copyright 2023 Blue Wildfire, LLC