

Assertive Discipline

It is hard for most families to discipline well. We often confuse discipline with punishment. We also tend to repeat what our parents did with us.



Lectures



Hitting



Isolating Time-outs



Shaming



Power-over parenting

Much has been learned about effective discipline since our parents were experimenting on us. Effective or assertive discipline means clearly stating what we want from our children, then informing them of the consequences of their actions. It sounds simple, but is more difficult to consistently put into practice. **Assertive Discipline** is used when your child knows that they have broken a rule, and they did so willfully. For example: stealing.

It is very important that we act with confidence when carrying out discipline, as most children are acute observers, and will test us if we seem unsure. To feel more confident, try following the hints below.

Advantages

- Creates respect for parents.
- Teaches responsible behaviour
- Gives needed guidance

How to use:

1. Be very specific about what you did not like and what you want done.
2. Clearly state what is being corrected and why.
3. Clearly state the reinforcing consequence (e.g. When you do this, then this will happen.)
4. Follow through with the consequence, be it positive or negative.
5. Both parents (if there are two) need to enforce the discipline and learning that is being targeted.

How to make Assertive discipline work best:

- ❖ Both parents should discuss expectations and consequences and be in agreement about handling misbehaviour. This helps you provide a united front to the children, support for one another, and a sense of confidence when you act.
- ❖ Stick to the same standards as much as possible. For example, if you correct the children for hitting each other, do it every time.
- ❖ Calm yourself down before correcting behaviour. Use a matter-of-fact tone of voice rather than showing a lot of anger. If you are too angry, tell the kids you'll let them know what the consequences are later.
- ❖ Don't make consequences too severe. Otherwise, you will lose credibility because you'll probably back down from it later, or be seen as unfair if you don't.
- ❖ Connect your consequence to the infraction. The child will receive the discipline better if the problem and solution are linked in a logical way.
- ❖ Avoid hitting as a punishment – that's poor role modeling!
- ❖ Be sensitive to the issue of having step-parents providing discipline. It's best to not harm what can be a fragile relationship. Until that relationship between the child and step-parent is solid, the biological parent is in a better position to discipline.

5 Steps Toward Discipline

1. Collect your child's attention (Gordon Neufeld's technique)
2. Encourage settling down – create some calm space for the discussion
3. Coax conflicting feelings – contrasting the behaviour and related feelings with feelings related to your family or personal values
4. Clearly state what you expect from your child to make things right (e.g., "I need you to pay back what you took without asking")
5. Clearly state the consequences (e.g., "You will continue to do your assigned chores without earning an allowance until the debt is paid.")
6. Implement the solution and give positive reinforcement.

Example 1. You asked your 14-year-old daughter several times to let you know if she'd be late for dinner. She arrives home two hours past dinnertime.

"Sharon, you look like you have been rushing and you are all out of breath. You seem a bit worried. Is that how you're feeling?"

(child responds)

"So your reasons for being late are.....is that right?"

(child will confirm or clarify)

"I worry when you are late because....." "I know that you care enough about me that you don't like to see me worry about you if I don't have to."

(Parent creates time and place to both work their relationship and brainstorm for solutions)

“Tomorrow I need you to come straight home from school and help me prepare supper. I want to spend some time with you and discuss how we can help you remember to phone me when you will be late.”

Example 2

Your child was caught by her teacher stealing items from her friends at school. She was told that stealing is wrong and why it is so, and she agreed to apologize to her friends and return the items she took. Since then, there have been no other problems with stealing while at school.

However, recently you found a necklace in her room after she had been at a friend's house for a play date. The mother phones you and tells you that the necklace went missing and asked you to ask your daughter if she saw it. You assure the mom that the necklace is safe, but that you will be addressing the issue with your daughter and she will return it shortly.

How would you address this with your daughter using assertive discipline? Use the steps outlined above.

More practice situations:

Your 9 year-old-son has taken money from your change jar without permission. This was the third time that he's done it, and you have forbidden this in the past.

You get a call from school saying that you 16 year-old daughter has been suspended for smoking, and for swearing at the teacher who caught him.

For the third time in the past hour, two of your children were fighting and hitting each other, and the youngest came crying to you for help.

You find out that your child has been lying about not having any homework for the past month.

Your 8 year-old son has been shouting back at you lately when you ask him to do any work around the house. You have already asked him several times not to raise his voice at you.

