

Firm, Fair & Consistent®

Guiding Students for School Success

Dr. Paul Walmsley

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When it comes to discipline, parents should be on the same page

In some families, parents may have different opinions and ideas about how to discipline their children. One parent may be tough while another is lenient. If more than one parent is responsible for parenting, it's important to be on the same page. To agree on discipline, choose:

- **A goal.** Decide on the behavior you want to correct or eliminate. For example, "We want Johnnie to be more responsible. We want him to do his chores without our nagging."
- **A plan.** Together, determine how best to achieve your goal. For example, post a weekly chore chart for the whole family. Give your child real responsibility—not busywork. Provide clear instructions. Instead of saying, "Clean your room," say, "Pick up your books and put your dirty clothes in the hamper."
- **A consequence.** If your child doesn't follow through, decide what will happen. What will be the consequence? Agree on a fair and logical outcome that both of you are willing to use.



Commit to working as a team. Be willing to compromise. If the conversation gets stressful, take a break. If you want your child to be respectful to you and to others, show support and respect for each other's opinions. Be united in front of your child.

Source: Lisa Dunning, "Agreeing On Discipline," *Los Angeles Family Magazine*, April 2006 (Family Magazines, 818/881-3264, www.lafamily.com).

Help your child own up to mistakes

Sometimes kids are so afraid to admit mistakes that they lie about them. Help your child learn to take responsibility. Say to your child, "It's brave to apologize for what you do wrong."

Explain to your child that yes, there are consequences for poor decisions, but experiencing those consequences will help her learn and have a successful future.

Source: Joshua Sparrow, M.D., "Discipline that Works," Scholastic.com, www.scholastic.com/earlylearner/age5/development/discipline.htm.

It's a brand-new school year and time to look at homework routines. If changes need to be made, discuss them with your child. Some kids need to let off energy after school. Make this suggestion: "You didn't like doing homework right after school last year. This year, how about playing for 30 minutes and then hitting the books?"



Eliminate arguments about assignments

You ask your child whether she's completed reading her science assignment. She tells you it's "not really due" tomorrow. Then you spend the next 15 minutes arguing about whether it's actually homework.



What should you do instead? Try this: The next time she tells you something "isn't really due" (but doesn't have an assignment sheet to confirm it), have her do it anyway. She'll be ahead tomorrow—and you'll avoid a fight today.

Source: Pam Abrams, "Homework Hassles," Parents.com, www.parents.com/parents/story/jhtml?storyid=/templatedata/parents/story/data/5562.xml&catref=prt24.

Save your breath—avoid lecturing

If your child messes up, you may be tempted to lecture him. But don't. Kids are masters at tuning out a

"lecture tone" the moment you lapse into it. So instead of ranting about his behavior, get your child to think through what he's done. "You forgot to bring this report to school, so the teacher made you sit out during recess. What could you do differently next time?"



Source: Marvin Marshall, Ed.D., *Discipline without Stress, Punishments or Rewards*, ISBN: 0-9700606-1-0 (Piper Press, 1-800-606-6105, www.piperpress.com).

Homework headaches? Try a fresh perspective!

“This is so boring!” If you’re tired of hearing that cry from your child as he studies, use the “Time Warp” technique. It may help him think differently—and stop complaining—about his homework.

If he’s studying about a historical event, for example, ask him:

- *What might happen* if this event were to take place now?
- *What if those people* were alive today?
- *How would our lives* be affected if the event had never happened?



Source: Linda Deal, *The Boredom Solution*, ISBN: 1-883055-55-5 (Dandy Lion Publications, 1-800-998-2208, www.prufrock.com).

Questions & Answers

Q: I have a horrible time getting my third grader to bed! Our rule is “lights out by eight o’clock,” but she drags her feet so much that she ends up being awake longer. Even worse, she’s cranky and exhausted the next day. What should I do?

A: You’re right to be concerned. An over-tired child is an over-tired student, which may impact her learning *and* her behavior. To ensure that she gets enough sleep, you need to enforce a consequence if she refuses to hit the sack on time. Just make sure you warn her about your plan beforehand. (It’ll give her a chance to change her ways on her own.) Here are three reasonable consequences to try:

1. **Take away a bedtime privilege.** As eight o’clock approaches, set a timer. “Okay, you have 15 minutes to get into bed.” If she isn’t under the covers when it buzzes, she loses one nighttime treat (such as a bedtime story or a backrub).
2. **Bump up tomorrow night’s bedtime.** If your child dilly-dallies and spends 10 extra minutes out of bed tonight, make tomorrow night’s bedtime 10 minutes earlier. If she continues to dawdle, try doubling the time you move bedtime up (from 10 minutes to 20, for example).
3. **Give her a chore to do.** “Since you’re not tired enough to go to sleep, why don’t you clean up the playroom instead?” The thought of tackling a large, boring task might be enough to send her running for bed.



Source: Shari Steelsmith, *Go to Your Room! Consequences That Teach*, ISBN: 0-9650477-2-5 (Parenting Press, 1-800-992-6657, www.parentingpress.com).

Your body language speaks volumes

When disciplining your child, don’t just watch what you say. Watch what you do, as well. That is, pay attention to your body language. If you always fold your arms across your chest or clench your jaw when you’re angry, your child will notice. And she may respond by getting angry right back—even before you’ve opened your mouth. So if you intend to correct her with love—not anger—make sure your body language reflects it!



Source: Scott Brown, *How to Negotiate with Kids ... Even When You Think You Shouldn’t*, ISBN: 0-14-200398-0 (Penguin Group, 212/366-2000, www.penguin.com).

Is negotiation a parenting ‘no-no’?

Is it ever okay to negotiate with kids about things like bedtime or when to do homework? The short answer is *yes*. It’s good to let your child know that you consider his opinions.

Once in a while, sit down for a calm discussion about rules. Listen to input from your child. But, of course, you make the final decisions—and expect your child to abide by them.

Source: “The Art of Negotiating With Kids,” PBS Parents, www.pbs.org/parents/issuesadvice/talkingwithkids/negotiate.html.

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