



Home is where the heart's tears can dry at their own pace.

Lesson 13

Parenting Styles and Discipline

How important is discipline in the family?

"One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached."

"The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart."¹

A mother was once asked, "If you had it to do again, would you have children?" After thinking about it for a while, she replied, "Yes, I would. But it wouldn't be the same ones!"

When parents are having trouble with a child, it's easy to think the problems are the child's fault. But what a child becomes is a dynamic combination of inherited tendencies, impacted by parenting styles and interaction.

Were your parents fairly restrictive? Or did you rule the roost? Were they loving and supportive? Or did you at times feel that no one cared? The way your parents treated you and the way you responded has formed the foundation for the person you are today. You have the choice to override mistakes and with God's help reprogram yourself; but once the original training is in place, change is difficult.

When you become a parent, you'll have the chance to teach and guide another

human being. It's an awesome task—one you don't want to botch up. Psychologist Louise Hart says, "Our children give us the opportunity to become the parents we always wished we'd had."

Increase your chances of having "good" kids.

Through the years research has confirmed that children's characteristics are influenced by the parenting styles of their parents. But before telling you what the experts have found, answer the following:

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being a parent who is **hostile and rejecting**, saying things like, "Don't bother me. I've had it! Just leave me alone!" and 10 being your most **loving and accepting** parent who is eager to hug, listen, encourage, and smile, where should the ideal parent score?

Hostile/rejecting					Loving/accepting				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

A 10? Right!

Now try this one! On a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being **restrictive** parents who make decisions for their children, expecting them to obey—or else, and 10 being **permissive** parents who allow their children to make choices whenever possible—even when they might not be equipped to do so, where should the ideal parent score?

Restrictive					Permissive				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

A 10? Wrong! (That's teenage wishful thinking!) A totally permissive parent actually neglects a child. Letting a child do whatever he or she wants—even if the child is out of control—leaves the child vulnerable to situations that could be dangerous and unprotected by reasonable boundaries for self-control and self-expression. Worse, a permissive parenting style that doesn't communicate warmth, caring, or emotional support puts a child in a lonely void. Not only is the child left to his or her own devices, but is also abandoned emotionally. Such a child is exposed to circumstances for which he or she lacks preparation and skill, and the child has no sense that the parents will be there for him or her.

The midline between restrictive and permissive is the best position for children, with parents leaning toward the more restrictive side in early childhood when children need to be taught responsibility and self-discipline, and moving toward a more permissive position in the later years, when teens demonstrate responsibility. We call

this type of parent an **authoritative** one. It's **the extremes on this continuum that cause dysfunction**. Any time a parent is overly restrictive, making all the rules and demanding exact obedience, or is overly permissive with few or no limits imposed, there is going to be trouble. The goal is to be **authoritative**—setting and enforcing limits where needed and encouraging the child to make appropriate decisions whenever possible.

Now, based on the research, here are the characteristics that your children will likely develop, depending upon your parenting style. If you are a loving but more restrictive parent, you will probably have children who are more submissive, compliant, and dependent. They will probably be more neat, polite, and obedient.

If you are loving and allow your children to make choices—especially as they demonstrate self-discipline and responsibility—your children will tend to be socially outgoing, independent, creative, and successfully aggressive—that means aggressive enough to get good grades in school or to get a good job.

The conclusion of the research is that **love** is the key factor to raising children who are able to function well in society. If parents are loving, regardless of whether they are more restrictive or permissive—as long as they are not overly so—the children will probably do well. It's when parents are hostile and rejecting that children develop anti-social behaviors. Children raised by hostile-restrictive parents often develop mental-health problems, being overly compliant

(leaning on their parents when they should be making their own decisions) and extremely shy with peers. And if restrictiveness continues into the teen years, they are likely to rebel.

On the other extreme, if parents are hostile and permissive, kids tend to be noncompliant and highly aggressive, perhaps even to the extent of becoming delinquents.²

Research done by Dr. Reuben Hill at University of Minnesota added the variable of parental **support** (involvement) to parenting styles and found that those parents who were high in both *love and support* had the most well-adjusted children, confirming the importance of maintaining a good relationship with your children. Children who felt their parents loved them and were supportive of them related best to authority figures, had the highest self-worth, and were the least involved in antisocial behavior such as gangs, truancy, drugs, and promiscuity. Parents who showed love but not much support ranked next in effectiveness, and coming in last were those perceived as low in love.³

Goals for Effective Parenting

Parenting shouldn't be something you fall into. Rather, you should prepare for it, so you'll know how to train up your children in the way they should go. Let your goals for your children determine your behavior. Three important goals for children should be:

1. To be self-disciplined.
2. To know how to prevent or resolve conflict.

3. To build and preserve feelings of self-worth.

If these are your goals, you must ask yourself before disciplining:

1. Will what I do help my children to become *self-disciplined*?
2. Will what I do *prevent or resolve conflict*?
3. Will what I do *build and preserve my children's feelings of self-worth*?

How do parents develop self-discipline?

Parents of young children should be "benevolent dictators," making good decisions for their children and allowing them to reap the rewards of those positive decisions. In time children will begin to model the way parents make decisions. When they question the wisdom of decisions, parents should take time to explain why they have made that choice. Parents must constantly teach. As their children demonstrate the ability to think rationally, instead of acting impulsively, parents should begin to allow them to make age-appropriate decisions. When children make good decisions, parents should allow their children to reap the positive consequences. When they make poor decisions, either the natural consequence or parent-imposed consequence should be extremely instructive.

Even though you begin your parenting career as a benevolent dictator, your goal should be to move toward a more democratic form of family government as soon as possible. Just remember, you as a parent are the "president" of your family government. You do have veto power, but the more you

can encourage good decision making, the less you'll have to exercise the veto power—and the easier obedience will be.

How do parents prevent or resolve conflict?

Many of the things children do that parents feel must be corrected would never happen if parents were more observant and helped children rechannel their energies before misbehavior occurred.

Children can only take so much pressure before they explode. If parents can see things aren't going well, they should forewarn their children. "It looks like you are just about ready to haul off and hit someone. That's not a good idea. Why don't you take some time out?" Intervention at critical times can help children gain control of themselves.

All parents want to establish joyful, loving, high-quality relationships with their children. Obviously, arguing, yelling, ridiculing, swearing, threatening, and hitting are not conducive to such a goal. After the battle, parents and children can kiss and make

up, but the bumps and bruises—the physical as well as the emotional ones—are not easily forgotten. It is better to prevent conflict if possible. However, in the interest of avoiding future conflict, current conflict needs to be dealt with and resolved. How much better to solve it in the early stages in such a way as not to provoke children's anger. (See Colossians 3:21.)

How do parents build and preserve self-worth?

Your children will become the persons they believe themselves to be. If they feel worthless, undesirable, and incompetent, these feelings are like a predictive script that they tend to follow in life. But when children feel they are special, when they feel desirable and competent, there is no limit to what they can accomplish. Their potential is great.

The way you as a parent discipline will either add to or subtract from a child's feeling of personal value. To monitor the effect of your discipline on a child's self-concept, think about the words you say. Thoughtless

Abuse is

1. Any physical punishment that is harsh, unjust, and unreasonably painful, even though it may result in changed behavior.
2. Any impulsive, irrational punishment that is inflicted merely as an appeasement for parental anger.
3. Any treatment of children that makes them feel embarrassed or belittled, especially when it occurs in public.
4. Any words that cut down children's self-respect or diminish the positive feelings they have about themselves.
5. Any behavior that causes children to feel alienated from their family or God.

words hurt. They can destroy. Before you speak, think how you would feel if the words were directed to you. If the words would make you feel worthless and stupid, don't say them to a child, for they are a form of abuse.

Child abuse is more than treatment that results in a physically battered child. It is any treatment that destroys the child's sense of personhood—his or her feelings of self-worth. It is the physical, verbal, or emotional mistreatment of the child. Abusive behavior doesn't have to leave visible scars. It can leave internal scars—the kind that over time leave their mark on the child's thinking and personality. These are the scars that destroy self-worth.

If you have unresolved painful issues with your own parents, you should make every effort to resolve them now. Anger, resentment, and other emotions about the way in which you have been treated by your parents are detrimental to a sense of self-worth and may affect the way in which you deal with your own children.

The only way to avoid irrational and haphazard discipline is for parents to adopt a disciplinary approach that is based on two principles and goals: (1) to prevent or resolve conflict and (2) to foster a sense of self-worth that makes it possible for a child to have the self-confidence necessary to make wise decisions and be self-disciplined.

What's the difference between discipline and punishment?

Many people confuse punishment with discipline, and a parent should understand

the difference between the two ways of dealing with children and teens.

Discipline is a teaching process. The primary aim of discipline is to help children improve themselves and learn the lesson of self-discipline. Discipline should lead to the prevention or resolution of conflict. It should relate to a child's inappropriate behavior. For example, Tim was late getting home from school and had not notified his mother. If she chooses a disciplinary action, she might not allow him to watch his favorite television program that evening so that he could have time to finish the homework and chores he had neglected by arriving home late. She might also set up some careful limitations for future behavior, such as, "Unless you call home and receive permission for a variance, you must be home thirty minutes after school each day, or no television that night." When discipline is effective, it avoids needless conflict and provides the child with the motivation for obedience.

Punishment, on the other hand, is arbitrarily imposed as a penalty upon a child for doing something wrong. Punishment involves the experience of pain, loss, or suffering for a wrong or a mistake a child has made. Parents usually punish with the intent to hurt a child (physically or emotionally) so that the child will learn that it is painful to do what is wrong and thus choose (or be forced to choose) to do what is right. In the example of Tim, the mother might punish him by taking his bicycle away for two weeks and spank him for his irresponsibility. Parents sometimes punish

their children to satisfy their own anger. At other times, parents punish because of a mistaken sense of justice that demands that children must pay a penalty for their disobedience.

Some parents also mistakenly believe that punishment produces a well-disciplined child; a literal “spare the rod and spoil the child” attitude. Actually, when parents punish (rather than discipline) to eradicate

childish irresponsibility and persistent challenging, they may be setting the stage for family conflict. Outward conflict develops when a child decides to fight against what is considered unjust treatment. The result is often feelings of rejection and intense resentment toward their parents.



Anchor Text

“Train a child in the way he should go,

Rules for Easy Obedience

1. *Spend enjoyable time with your children.* You can discipline only as much as you’re willing to love. The quality of your relationship will ultimately determine the effectiveness of your discipline.
2. *Expect obedience.* Children live up to parental expectations.
3. *Make sure your children know you mean what you say.* Tell your child one thing to do and then make sure you follow through.
4. *Be consistent.* If you set limits, keep them. If you threaten consequences, let them fall. If you promise rewards, give them.
5. *Take time to teach.* Let your children know their training is your top priority. Don’t let your children get by with misbehavior because you’re too busy to discipline.
6. *Give your child a choice.* Avoid resistance by offering a choice within a no-choice situation. “It’s time to take a bath.” (No choice.) “Would you like bubbles or boats?” (Choice.)
7. *Give freedom for responsibility.* Let your children know that if they can act responsibly, you’ll give them the freedom to make appropriate responsible decisions. If they don’t control their own lives, however, you’ll take control.
8. *Use behavior modification.* Reward the behavior you want more of, ignore obnoxious attention-getting behavior, and correct misbehavior.
9. *Keep a united front.* Don’t let your children divide and conquer you.
10. *Err on the side of mercy, rather than severity.* (See Ellen G. White, *Education*, 294.)
11. *Be the kind of person you want your children to become.* Children are great copycats!
12. *Seek God’s guidance.* Your children are not your own. They are God’s gift to you for a time to train them for an eternity with Him. When you don’t know what to do, ask God. He loves “His” children more than you do and has ways to reach them you may never consider.

and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Bible Search

1. The rod of correction

Proverbs 22:15 (NKJV) states, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him." (The NIV says, "The rod of discipline.")

- A. Is this a text endorsing the practice of spanking? Explain.
- B. Can the use of the "rod" ever be abusive? Explain.
- C. What is the principle being taught in this text?
- D. The Bible often refers to discipline as the "rod of correction." What is meant by the "rod"?
- E. Summarize the message of the following texts.
 - (1) Proverbs 10:13.
 - (2) Proverbs 13:24.
 - (3) Proverbs 23:13, 14.
 - (4) Proverbs 26:3.
 - (5) Proverbs 29:15.
- F. Read Psalm 89:30-33. What does it say about God's using the rod? Is God going to administer a literal spanking?

2. The shepherd's rod

- A. For what does a shepherd use a rod?
Read Psalm 23 and use a Bible commentary to learn how shepherds used rods with their sheep. (Think about this: If shepherds used a rod to beat disobedient sheep, how could the sheep—God's people—say, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me"?)
- B. What guidelines to discipline are found in the following texts?
 - (1) Proverbs 3:12.
 - (2) Colossians 3:21 (Read this in the KJV and NIV and note the difference.)
 - (3) Proverbs 10:12.
 - (4) Proverbs 15:1.
 - (5) Psalm 37:8.
- C. What is the best way to train up children "in the way they should go"?
To answer this question, ask yourself, "If I needed to learn an important lesson, what teaching method would be most effective?" Rank and list the following methods, beginning with the most effective and ending with the least.
Method I: If the teacher played learning games with you.

"Children have sensitive, loving natures. They are easily pleased and easily made unhappy. By gentle discipline in loving words and acts mothers may bind their children to their hearts. To manifest severity and to be exacting with children are great mistakes. Uniform firmness and unimpassioned control are necessary to the discipline of every family. Say what you mean calmly, move with consideration, and carry out what you say without deviation.

"It will pay to manifest affection in your association with your children. Do not repel them by lack of sympathy in their childish sports, joys, and griefs. Never let a frown gather upon your brow or a harsh word escape your lips."⁴

Reaction

Discussion Questions

1. What is the parenting style that you would like to have someday with your children? Why?
2. What is the most important characteristic for parents to exhibit if they want their children to be able to be well adjusted and get along with others?
3. What happens to a child's behavior when the child perceives parental hostility or rejection?
4. Why do you think the authoritative parenting style results in children who relate best to authority figures?
5. Why do you think the parenting styles without love rank lowest in effectiveness?
6. Would you rather be disciplined or punished? Why?
7. Would you consider punishment that the child considers unjust or unreasonable to be abusive?
8. Would you consider parental treatment that provokes children to anger to be abusive?
9. What should parents do so they don't provoke their children to anger?

Method II: If the teacher demonstrated the appropriate behavior.

Method III: If the teacher told you what to do (lectured you).

Method IV: If the teacher allowed you to learn through trial and error—making sure there was a reward for appropriate behavior and a signifi-

cant consequence for error.

Method V: If the teacher spanked you for every mistake.

D. Read the following paragraph and answer the questions: Should parents ever spank their children? If so, when? In your answer discuss how this instruction correlates to what you have read about discipline in the Bible.

"Do not, I beg of you, correct your children in anger. That is the time of all times when you should act with humility and patience and prayer. Then is the time to kneel down with the children and ask the Lord for pardon. Seek to win them to Christ by the manifestation of kindness and love, and you will see that a higher power than that of earth is co-operating with your efforts."⁵

Endnotes

1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1952), 32.
2. From a review of research in Martin L. Hoffman and Lois Wladis Hoffman, eds., *Review of Child Development Research* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), 1:198.
3. Research described in Dennis Guernsey, "What Kind of a Parent Are You?" *Family Life Today*, January 1976 and Alberta Mazat, "How Can We Turn Out Better Kids?" *Adventist Review*, 19 May 1994, 14-16.
4. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1952), 309.
5. Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1954), 245, 246.

Personal Response

When you hear the word *discipline*, what picture comes to your mind?

A child getting spanked?
Punishment?
Rules being enforced?
Other.

Does the word *discipline* have a positive or negative connotation for you? Why?

What do you wish your parents did differently when disciplining you?

Practical Application

Principles of discipline from *Child Guidance*

Read *Child Guidance*, chapter 44, titled "Administration of Corrective Discipline" and record at least twenty principles or guidelines that you would like to remember when it comes to disciplining your children someday. Quote the entire principle and give the page where it's found.