

# Discipline as Guidance

By P. Donohue Shortridge

Your child wants to do what is right, even at the youngest age. First of all, she wants to because she loves you and wants to be just like you. She also has a powerful inner drive to adapt to the world around her, the world of your home, and to do so she needs to know what the rules for life are. She looks to you to show her.

As parents, if you can keep that in mind, you can create an approach to discipline that is positive, less stressful on everyone and it will assist your child in developing into a competent, civilized, compassionate and joyful person.

So, what are some strategies that you might employ?

First of all, model the correct behavior for your child. For example, if you do not want your child to leave the

---

*If you do not want your child to yell,  
then don't yell.*

---

dinner table in the middle of the meal, then don't you leave the table to take a call or to check an e-mail. If you do not want your child to yell, then don't yell.

Here's another tip; your child is so much more competent than we can even imagine. Even the youngest children can do chores around the house. In fact, so much of the trouble we have with our children at home stems from our children not feeling useful.

The younger the child, the less that verbal instruction alone works. Show him how to sweep the floor, giving him the tools that fit his hand. Name the tools as you use them, "This chore is called sweeping the floor; I'm sweeping the floor with the broom, then into the dust pan and now I'm throwing it away in the trash." "Now, it's your turn." Do the task together for the first few times, so that you know that she knows how to do it.

Also, remember that every activity has a beginning, middle and an end. Show your child how to go get the broom and dustpan, use it, and then put it away.

Cooperation and engaging in chores as well as the fun of family life is a sure way to elicit the good will of your

---

*Busy hands in purposeful activities  
calm your child.*

---

child. And remember that busy hands in purposeful activities calm your child and help her sort out her emotions.

Next: Limits are essential. You set the limits clear, firm and kind.

"In our family, we use our kind words."

"In our family, we always clean up after ourselves."

"In our family, we finish one thing before we do something else."

"In our family, everyone helps with dinner."

"In our family, the parents tell the children when it is time for bed."

Most important of all, if you say you are going to do something, then you must do it, and do it without

---

*If you say  
you are going to do something,  
then you must do it.*

---

anger. Saying, "I'm almost done with my phone call." then talking for another twenty minutes blows your credibility.

Tip: When giving a direction, you do not need to repeat yourself, your child heard you.

---

*Do not repeat yourself,  
your child heard you.*

---

Also, do not put the instruction in the form of a question if there is no choice. Say, "It's time to go now." Do not say, "Are you ready to go?"

Also, "OK?" at the end of a declarative statement changes your instruction into a choice for your child. "It's time for bed, OK?" will lead to grief for everyone.

When you need to redirect the behavior of your child, be clear, quick, decisive and most of all, respectful. e.g. "When you go back and put your toys away then you may join us in here for a board game." Period.

So, the keys are:

- Model the appropriate behavior
- Include your child in the life of your family
- Set clear limits
- Use accurate language
- Be clear and respectful when redirecting

What Doesn't Work:

- Yelling
- Shaming
- Teasing
- Begging
- Repeating Yourself
- Inappropriate Negotiating
- Spanking
- Ignoring

---

*P. Donohue Shortridge, a Montessorian since 1980, speaks and writes about children and their families in the American culture. She conducts parent night talks, staff in-service sessions and workshop presentations. Visit her website at [www.pdonohueshortridge.com](http://www.pdonohueshortridge.com)*

P. Donohue Shortridge

*fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture*