

The Basics

(taken from atriptothewoodshed.com)

You CAN do this. You really can teach your children to obey you willingly, so that you can all live together peacefully in that perfect, happy, child filled, godly home you've surely dreamed of. The basics are not that difficult. In fact, they are simple. If I seem a bit wordy in my efforts to convey these simple ideas, it is only because, after talking to many mothers, I realize that they aren't all coming from the same place I am. They may be looking at things from a different vantage point due to their background, previous childrearing experiences, number of children, the influence of books they've read, etc. So, at any rate, as I've written, I've tried to explain these few truths in many different ways. Please try to bear with my repetitiveness and wordiness and hopefully one or the other of my attempts will be successful.

A few basic rules for mom:

Be reasonable and fair in your requests.

Say what you mean, and mean what you say.

Be vigilant.

Be just in your discipline.

An immediate, negative consequence is usually best (because it is easily understood and free from psychological repercussions).

Be merciful in overlooking genuine accidents, as well as when you observe genuine repentance.

Be consistent.

Be loving always and especially so when your child is behaving well.

Teaching obedience so you don't have to do anything else.

Most parents spend literally years and years, painstakingly correcting their children over and over again, trying to teach them the many rules of their household and of life. The need for discipline never ends, it just changes from subject to subject. At ages 2 and 3 the parents work on teaching them to come when called, then to share their toys, then to eat their beans. When they get a little older the parents focus on teaching them to pick up their room, and to wash their hands and to not talk back or tell lies. When they reach the teen years mom and dad try to teach them to call when they are going to be late, and to get their homework done on time, and to help in the yard once in a while. The focus is always on different tasks or actions. The discipline changes according to age and offense, but it is taken for granted that it will always be needed.

In our house when the kids are small, we begin by teaching only one thing: obedience. We discipline only for that, and then we don't have to do any of the rest.

Okay, what do I mean? Once your child knows and agrees with the fact that he must obey you every time, and that he must do so with a willing and pleasant attitude, then you scarcely have to teach him anything else, do you? Once he knows he must obey you, then you can simply "ask" him to pick up his toys and he will. You can just "ask" him to get ready for bed and he will. You can even just "ask" him to "Stop crying please," and he will do it. What could be simpler?

Sure, your child isn't perfect, and neither are you. You will still need to do some correcting on occasion, and you'll still have to do a lot of teaching and guiding, but do you see the potential? In my experience, once you've convinced your child that his rightful duty is to obey his parents (*"Children, obey your parents: this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you."* TLB Eph 6:1), then your discipline needs will be cut to a bare minimum. THEN you can spend the vast majority of your time teaching, and nurturing, and enjoying, and LOVING your child. Sounds like a real deal to me, and it WORKS.

My discipline secret:

Someone recently asked me what my "secret" was for raising children. Here is my quick, off the cuff, answer: **"Say what you mean and mean what you say."** Yes, I think if I had to put it in one sentence that would be it. Of course I could go on for hours, but that's it in a nutshell. To get a little more specific, here are some things I do and don't do, in general, all the time:

1. I believe in God and have as my ultimate goal raising godly children who will in turn raise godly children.
2. I love good and hate evil.
3. I keep my children away from other people's children as much as possible within reason: we home school, no nurseries, no babysitters outside of family, no Sunday school (gasp!), no preschool, no "over-nights", etc.
4. I teach them obedience early. I start before age one.
5. I do teach them "NO".
6. I am just and fair, but I recognize that I am the parent and they are the child.
7. I don't "count to 3". I expect them to obey the first time I tell them.
8. I don't do the classic "time outs". (Although I do do the old fashioned "stand in the corner" or "sit next to me until you can behave".)
9. I don't "distract".
10. I don't lose my temper, nag, whine, yell, beg, bribe, or "reason", to get my children to obey.
11. I do spank, but I rarely have to do it after age 3 because I don't use it as a "punishment" as much as I use it as a "training" tool. By the time they are 3 they are obeying quite well and I just don't need it.
12. I try to be VERY consistent. I don't have a long list of rules. My only "rule" is that they must obey me immediately with a good attitude.
13. I focus on their attitude and character more than their actions.
14. I have high standards and am not afraid to make them different from the world's standards.
15. I try to include my children in all that I am doing, rather than "entertaining" them or focusing life around them.
16. We enjoy each other, which is easy if they are obeying as they ought to, and we parents are being loving and fair as we ought to.
17. I have a visible attitude of loving kindness and approval toward my children all the time (except when they are doing wrong of course.)

There are many more things, but those are what come to mind immediately. Of course they are no secret, just common sense.

GENERAL CHILD TRAINING HOW TO'S:

So how do you get started? If you have a child who is old enough to understand you, and is capable

of following your instructions, you can begin teaching him to obey. In most cases, the following general pattern can be applied:

1. Call them over to you. Make EYE CONTACT. (It is not necessary to "get down on their level". Having them look up at you will remind small children that you are bigger than they are, and that perhaps they should obey you.)
2. Tell them clearly what you expect. (SAY WHAT YOU MEAN)
3. WATCH to see that your instructions are carried out.
4. Correct them (with some immediate, negative consequence) after the FIRST refusal to obey (MEAN WHAT YOU SAY). No threatening, nagging, pleading, begging, bribing, yelling, etc. These are all forms of parental whining and they teach your child to disrespect you, and that you do not really intend to follow through on your threats.
5. Direct them to go back and do it again until they do it correctly.
6. Repeat the above (as many times as it takes) until the child obeys WITH A GOOD ATTITUDE, one of cooperativeness and willingness to obey.
7. From that time forth, vigilantly WATCH your child, and correct every future misbehavior in a similar way. Be consistent.

Now those are the bare bones basics of how to teach a small child to obey. There are other principles and techniques to keep in mind that go a long way toward insuring that your teaching is successful

USE COMMON SENSE:

Although most of us tend to expect too little of our children rather than too much, still we should ask ourselves some questions BEFORE we begin disciplining: Did they understand me? Are they capable of doing what I asked? Is there some underlying problem here that needs correcting first? Am I being consistent? Am I looking at actions only, or at my child's heart and correcting that? Am I correcting because I am angry, or because I truly want what is best for my child? Try to ask yourself these and similar questions *before* you first instruct your children. Most definitely before you correct them. When you do correct them, please do not raise your voice. This will teach them to respond *only* when you raise your voice. Call and instruct your children in a regular voice. Be firm if necessary (especially at first), but always be pleasant if possible. Paul M. Landis, in *The Responsibility of Parents in Teaching and Training Their Children* says, "Consistency with gentleness, a quiet manner and voice, and firmness, rather than anger with a loud, high-pitched voice, will convince a child of our sincerity and purpose."

CONSISTENCY:

You *must* be consistent. I think that lack of consistency is the biggest problem most people have with their disciplining techniques (if they have the other basics right). The success you have is directly related to the *consistency* with which you apply the above rules. Don't wimp out. Don't give up. Don't make excuses. Watch your child and correct all disobedience. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Don't be afraid to set high standards and maintain them. Teach them to act the way *you* would like to have them act, not the way everyone else lets their children act. Consistency does not mean "do exactly the same thing with every child or with every incident". Not every child has the same personality. Every child has a different emotional makeup. Not every circumstance is the same. A child's motivation will vary from time to time and incident to incident. Try to look at the end result and then do whatever you have to do to get there with each child.

Learn to read your child and anticipate what corrections are needed.

What consistency means is that *every single* time your child needs to be corrected, you get up and do it, *and* you stay there and keep doing it until the message gets across. I remember talking on the phone one time and telling someone that I knew my daughter was jumping on the couch in the other room and that I should go stop her, but.....then it hit me. Yes, that was it. That's exactly what I needed to do, *every time*. Now *that* would be consistency.

So, I started doing just that. I made it my top priority. I didn't go anywhere or do anything or even spend any time on the phone for awhile. I kept my children closer to me so I could see them, then I stopped what I was doing and corrected them *every* time they needed it. EVERY TIME. At first there were a lot of corrections and I had my doubts about it working, but by the end of the third day things were very much improved. By the end of the third month, I had a new family. Hardly any major disciplining was needed after that at all. It was a miracle!

If you are disciplining a lot, it is a good indicator that you are not being consistent. You can correct a child 10 times, then skip once, and you will have undone everything you accomplished the last 10 times. Now maybe if you correct them diligently 100 times in a row, then you overlook something (maybe when they are at super sympathetic grandma's house), it won't take too long to get them back in shape, but remember that you will have had to be consistent 100 times *in a row* first. Now I don't mean you should have to correct them 100 times for the same thing, just 100 times for *any* disobedience. IN A ROW!! You have to convince them that you "mean what you say and say what you mean".

Try being *extremely* consistent for one month. I don't mean to be a tyrant. Don't expect a 14 month old to sit still on the couch all day with her hands folded. Be reasonable in your requests, but be *sure* they do as you say when you do say something. Many parents feel that *any* type of correction is cruel and mean. They feel sorry for their child and cannot seem to bring themselves to discipline them. "Often the problem is not too little sympathy, but too much sympathy of the wrong kind." (from an editorial in the Detroit News/Free Press - Jan or Feb 1994) Or, as the Bible says: "*Sometimes mere words are not enough, discipline is needed. For the words may not be heeded.*" Proverbs 29:19

LOVE:

When I first began writing about child rearing, I focused mostly on the subject of discipline because so many of the parents I met were failing in that area. They loved their children, but didn't know how to discipline them. But then I began receiving criticism for "never writing about loving my children". Huh? I guess I thought that was just a natural thing that all parents knew how to do and no one had to explain it to them. Wrong. I have come to find out that there are indeed some parents who go overboard with discipline and don't have a clue about how to express love to their children. With that in mind I am now trying to include advice on that extremely important part, no, *mandatory* part, of successful child rearing as well.

Once your children have been taught to respect your authority as they should, you will quickly find that the peace and order in your home will allow ample time for the love and affection most parents long to give their children. If you take advantage of the opportunity, the joy both you and they will experience will be above and beyond what you would ever have expected.

As long as your children are obeying you, enjoy them. Hug them, kiss them, talk to them, do things with them, and especially include them in things you are doing. Smile at them when they come and talk to you. Welcome their attention. Answer their questions. Let them crawl in bed with you now and then. When they say "Can I go?", try to say "Yes." When they ask to help, say "Sure, you can do

this for me." Laugh with them. Joke and kid with them. Be interested in the things they are interested in. Be excited about their accomplishments. Enjoy them in everything. These are the types of things you should be doing with your children *most* of the time. Disciplining, if you are doing it wisely, should only take up a very small percentage of your day. I know all moms have chores to do, but again, those things should not exclude your children. Do as much as you can *with* your children. Have them help you. Teach them everything you know. Fellowship with them. Tutor them in all the things of your life.

The Bible says not to "*provoke your children to wrath*". Are you fair in the way that you treat your children, or do you betray their trust and confidence in you by letting them get away with certain things, then punishing them for the same thing at other times? Do you emotionally abuse your children by praising them one minute then yelling at them the next? Do you consistently show them love and affection the majority of the time, or are you constantly picking on them for the smallest transgressions? Do your children know what is expected of them, or do you spring unreasonable demands on them without warning? Do you discipline them just as severely for a simple accident as you do for outright defiance, or do you lighten up when it is really an accident and overlook truly innocent mistakes? Are you flexible when possible, or are you unreasonably regimented for no good reason? Do you trust your child and let him know it by your approval and your smiles, or are you always suspicious and convey that by constant accusations and criticisms? Do you think the best of his intentions or do you always suspect the worst? How do you treat your child? Are you loving and pleasant? Or a critical, controlling ogre?

Your disciplining should be free from emotional abuse. Be straightforward and direct with your children. Tell them clearly what you expect of them. Be reasonable in your requests, and fair and just in the way you discipline. They should know that they can depend on you to correct them as needed, and to enjoy them when they behave, and that you love them always. (One of the best definitions of love I've heard is: "Seeking the best for the other person".) ENCOURAGE AND ENJOY YOUR CHILDREN!

PRAISE:

I tend to think that praising your child goes without saying, but I have met an occasional parent who doesn't seem to ever do this. They never say anything nice to their child. They constantly find fault and criticize. They control every breath the child takes and still criticize. I have met many other parents who praise to excess, but do it the wrong way and/or at the wrong time. They are so worried about building up self-esteem in their child they over-praise and create pride instead.

There are right ways and wrong ways to praise a child. Be free with your love and praise for your child, without going overboard. Don't create pride in your child by lavishing them with false flattery, but be generous with sincere and modest praise when it is warranted. Don't praise your child for anything and everything. Don't praise them for things they had nothing to do with such as looks and intelligence. Don't praise them constantly for every little thing, but do praise them when they overcome a temptation, or when they make a good effort, or when they need encouragement, and especially when they "go the extra mile".

With my own little ones, I do not praise them for obeying me after they have just finished defying me. For example, if I tell my little boy to go get my shoes for me, and he cheerfully obeys, I usually say, with a smile, "thank you", and sometimes I will compliment his attitude also. "Thank you, Josiah, I like your happy smile when I ask you to do something." However, if I ask him to do something and he does it grudgingly and reluctantly, I will first correct his bad attitude: "Now, go back and do that

again with a smile this time." Then, when he obeys the way he should have, I might say matter-of-factly, "Good, that's much better." And I might add, "Now remember to do it that way the first time I ask you." (I don't always add this second part because it can quickly turn into parental nagging and whining.) Sometimes I'll say, "Good, it is so much nicer when you obey with a willing smile." I think the most important part of praise is not the specific words or timing, but having an attitude of approval in general, all the time. Look for the good in your child, and let them know by your attitude (and words and actions when appropriate) that you are very pleased with them. When you assess them, look at their hearts and motives, not just their outward accomplishments. Praise them when they make a choice to do the right thing. Praise them for kindness, generosity, hard work, and other indications of good character. Praise your child when he is being obedient and good. You don't have to use a lot of words either. Simply letting your child know that you are pleased with him is praise, and it is the best kind, and should be done very frequently.

ANGER related to child rearing:

If you train your children early, with reasonableness and consistency, there should be no reason to become frustrated or angry with your children. If your child will readily do what you ask him to, and you know how to handle the situation if he doesn't, the reasons for you to become angry will be gone. It is when a child is out of control, or when a parent doesn't know what to do about it, that the parent becomes frustrated.

Sometimes wrong parental expectations and wrong priorities enter into the picture as well. Some parents want their children to just "go away" while they go on with their lives as if the children didn't exist. Some parents expect their children to act perfectly well behaved without any effort at instruction or training or discipline on the part of the parents themselves. These attitudes will lead to failure and frustration and anger. Get your priorities right. Recognize that parenting is a full time job, and do it to the best of your ability.

SPANKING:

There should be no need to fear spanking if the parent is reasonable and does not spank in anger and frustration. IF the above rules are followed with *consistency* you will find that spanking will become rare and need not be severe. One swat on the bottom is usually all that is needed.

Spanking is commanded in Scripture. Don't omit it. After your child is under control, it will often be enough to call a child over, look him in the eye, and say, "Don't do that again," or similar.

I occasionally have to give a more severe spanking for an offense that was more severe or one that I did not catch in the act. For example, one day, when our 2nd oldest daughter was about eight-years-old, she came inside with tears in her eyes holding Dad's umbrella, obviously broken. She confessed something about "the wall." After a little questioning, we learned that she and several of our other children had thought it would be fun to try jumping off the brick wall by the side of our house, thinking that the umbrella would let them down slowly (like Mary Poppins, I suppose). Each child was sternly lectured about the foolishness and danger of their actions. We asked them what they were thinking. Did they ask if they could do this thing? Didn't they think they might get hurt? What if one of the younger ones had broken his leg, how would they feel then? What about the umbrella? Did they have Dad's permission to use it? Did they know they were doing something wrong? Would they have done this in front of us? We didn't badger them or intimidate them, but we did convey serious concern. Afterward, each was spanked. Tearful and genuine remorse was sought and achieved (and they never tried the Mary Poppins jump thing again).

Many parents think of a spanking as a one time punishment or a payment for a particular misdeed.

This is not the correct idea. Instead, spanking should be thought of as a training tool, used consistently, until the desired results are permanently accomplished. This way the child will not think: "Oh, I can do what I want, all I will get is a spanking." Instead, he will think: "Uh-oh, I can see that I'm going to *keep* getting spanked until I stop this." Your child should not think that it is okay to sin as long as you are willing to pay the price. Doing what is wrong should not be considered an option at all, ever.

Beware of the popular definition of spanking as "hitting." Today's world has convinced millions that ordinary spanking is child abuse. They say it will teach your child to be violent. Is this really true? For thousands of years, parents have been spanking with no apparent ill effects. The people in our own country have never been as violent as in the last 50 years. It has only been in the last generation or two that permissive parenting has become overwhelmingly popular and violent crime has, "coincidentally," flared out of control. Prior to this, spanking was considered a must. *"Don't fail to correct your children: discipline won't hurt them! They won't die if you use a stick on them! Punishment will keep them out of hell." Proverbs 23:13 TLB*

OTHER HELPFUL HINTS:

CONFRONTATION: Don't be afraid of a confrontation. It is helpful to set up a confrontational situation in the case of a toddler who is "out of control." For example, tell him to sit on the couch next to you. When he tries to get down, give him a firm swat on the bottom and say "No" in an 'I mean business' tone. Continue this every time he tries to get down until he stops trying. If he actually makes it off the couch, tell him to climb back up himself, if he is big enough, or replace him if needed. Don't restrain him. Don't give in. Ignore his crying. You are not done until he sits there *quietly* for as long as you want him to without resisting. Let him fall asleep if he likes. Even after he stops resisting, don't let him down too soon. Ten or 20 minutes or even an hour is not too long. Once you have done this, continue to expect him to obey *everything* you tell him to do.

ROUTINE: Children respond very quickly to routine. If you buy your child a piece of candy at the check-out counter once, you may be certain he will ask for candy the next time, and the next time, and the next time, and so on forever. Think before you start something. (If you have already started this 'candy at the check-out' counter routine, and want to stop it, do this: Wait until you have established your God-given authority in private, then, when you enter the store tell them, "Don't ask for *anything*." If you haven't been consistent enough at home yet, and they ask anyway, *tell* them, don't whine at them, that they will be disciplined when you get home. *Then do it.*)

AMBUSH: Don't keep reminding, instead--ambush. If you've told your toddler not to touch the piano for example, he may obey you while you are watching, but not when he thinks you aren't. He must obey you always so the thing to do is to watch him and catch him when he doesn't think you are watching. If you see him touch the piano, walk quietly up behind him and give him a swat on the rear. When he turns to look, sternly tell him "Don't touch". The fewer words the better once he knows what he should be doing and not doing. Don't assume your toddler is too dumb to remember such things. They are not. Truly forgetting in a case like this is rare.

WATCH YOUR CHILDREN: A special word about watching your children: Allowing them to do whatever they please while you 'watch' to see that they don't get hurt, or even to 'watch' that

they don't do anything wrong, is *not* the correct idea. You should certainly be observing their behavior and especially their attitudes in everything they do, but keep in mind that you are their teacher and tutor. You are not to be a mere spectator or even a coach. You should be involving them in *your* life as much as possible and teaching them how to live as you do. Do this *together*. This starts with the little ones and continues as they grow older.

DOING IT OVER: Here is another technique that works well to "train" children in certain circumstances. If one of them runs down the hall, I'll tell him to "walk". Of course he will forget since he figures it's not all that serious an offense. So the next time he runs down the hall I'll tell him, "Now go all the way back to where you started and *walk* down the hall this time." A couple of times of that and they seem to remember. It works very well for unwanted pounding up and down the stairs too. I don't usually spank children for these types of little things, I just "train" them by making it unpleasant when they forget. Of course if they don't learn the easy way then I do spank.

THINKING ABOUT IT: In order to bring your child to repentance, a spanking or other verbal correction alone may sometimes not be enough. Often sitting near you quietly to "think about what you've done" is helpful. Sometimes a soul-searching lecture (for children old enough to understand) is needed as well. Always be sure the correct attitude is obtained. You are not finished until your child and you are in agreement about what happened and what should have happened and what will happen next time. This should not be a "force" agreement. Your child should be repentant if he or she has done wrong and should be accepting of your discipline, while your discipline should of course be just and merciful according to the situation.

SENDING YOUR CHILD TO HIS ROOM: Don't send your child to his room as a form of discipline. This will only encourage him to sit and stew about the unfairness or his plight (self-pity). Instead, have him remain with you and watch his attitude carefully. You are not finished disciplining until a good attitude has been obtained. It will be one of genuine repentance and submission, followed by cheerful obedience. (Side note: I have, once or twice, sent a child to his room after a serious offense and the necessary discipline, because: "I don't want to look at you." This is in order to instill a sense of shame and should be done rarely and carefully and only when you know it will work. The child must be repentant. If he is still rebellious, it will likely turn into self-pity and anger. If done on the right occasion, it may succeed in getting the child to realize the seriousness of his offense. He should be of a mind to grieve over the loss of fellowship with you.)

PRAISE YOUR CHILD: Don't forget to encourage and commend your children when they do good. Don't praise them only for academic accomplishments, but rather praise them especially for right attitudes and acts of unselfishness and kindness.