

Parenting Pointers

Parenting Tips on *Discipline*

Nancy Almond, EVICS Coordinator

The words punishment and discipline are often used interchangeably, yet they are actually very different approaches to teaching children appropriate behavior. The word discipline means "to teach". A person who is learning is a *disciple*. Discipline creates a positive learning process for the child. Children learn appropriate behaviors when parents and care givers set consistent limits enforced firmly with love. Discipline teaches children that actions produce consequences. Appropriate behaviors result in positive consequences and inappropriate behaviors result in negative consequences. We are all held accountable for our choices.

Punishment, on the other hand is a reaction to a negative behavior, doled out in hopes that the child will not repeat the misbehavior. The belief behind punishment is that pain must be felt in order for learning to occur. One problem with punishment is that when a child commits subsequent infractions, the severity of the punishment also must increase. Because the punishment, *example:* (spanking) is rarely connected to the actual misbehavior, *example:* (leaving shoes out in the rain), the child learns nothing about real-life consequences and grows up without the ability to discipline his or herself. Punishment is experienced externally while discipline is experienced internally. Punishment teaches children to be afraid of and resent authority, to lie, and to do things without getting caught.

More about consequences.....some consequences are natural and require little intervention from the parents. If a child refuses to eat dinner, he or she will be hungry at bedtime. Allowing the child to go to bed hungry will teach the child something about natural consequences. Repeatedly leaving a jacket at school and having to go to school the next day without a jacket, teaches natural consequences. Jumping on a bed and painfully falling to the hard floor, teaches natural consequences. Imposing a "punishment" is not necessary. When there are not naturally occurring consequences, imposed consequences must be enforceable, connected to the offense, and laid down firmly in love. *Example:* Child leaves homework at school. *Possible consequence:* Child misses sports practice the next day to make up missed homework assignment. *Example:* Child hits another child in playgroup. *Possible consequence:* Child is removed from playgroup for a period of time.

Sometimes imposed consequences look conspicuously like punishments, but when presented without anger or threats, and in a way that makes a clear connection between the misbehavior and the consequence, the lessons are learned and the outcomes are positive for everyone involved. Allowing children to experience consequences while showing empathy can be tough for parents, but it teaches

children that even when they make mistakes they are still loved. Unconditional love is an important ingredient in building a child's self-esteem..... a topic for a future column!

Information in this article was provided by *Estes Valley investment in Childhood Success (EVICS)* with permission from *Partners in Parenting, Colorado Family Education, Resource & Training, CSU, Cooperative Extension*.

EVICS offers free childcare referrals, parent information and resources, and childcare provider support and training in the Estes Valley. For more information call 586-3055 or email evics@frii.com