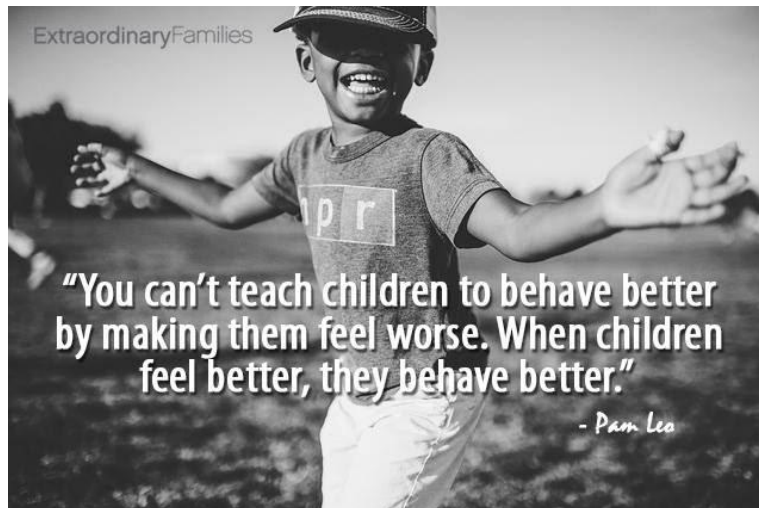


## **Discipline Policy for Resource Parents**

This handout is intended to explain our discipline policy and guidelines regarding the children, youth, and non-minor dependents (NMD) in your care and serve as a resource for you while fostering.



### **Children Learn What They Live**

- If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
- If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
- If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
- If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
- If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
- If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
- If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
- If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
- If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
- If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
- If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
- If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
- If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
- If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
- If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
- If children live with fairness, they learn justice.
- If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.
- If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.
- If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

- Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.

# Discipline

**Discipline** comes from the Latin word which means *to learn*. It is the policy of Extraordinary Families to regard disciplinary procedures within the context of a learning process, and strategies and techniques of discipline must be understood as teaching opportunities and not just consequences for behavior. Children are disciplined so that they will:

- Learn behaviors that meet the standards of the community,
- Learn to live cooperatively with others,
- Develop skills that will help them cope with adult life,
- Develop the confidence that is basic to self-discipline, and
- Develop to their fullest potential and become independent.

**Negative discipline** (i.e. punitive, threatening, spanking, etc.) does not offer the child opportunities to learn and develop these skills and confidence, nor does it teach the child alternatives to unsatisfactory behavior. Rather, it damages the child's feelings of self-worth and hinders their development. Physical discipline is strictly prohibited by Extraordinary Families, as well as by state and county rules.

- **Examples of unacceptable forms of discipline include the following:**

- Extraordinary Families does not permit physical discipline *of any kind*, including but not limited to spanking, hitting with a hand or object, pushing, tweaking ears, pulling hair, pinching, washing the mouth out with soap, and enforcing excessive physical activity. Such discipline is a direct violation of personal rights, is reportable as child abuse and could lead to the removal of the child(ren) placed in your care and the withdrawal of your certification/approval and home study approval.
- Giving over the counter sedatives to manage behavior or sleep patterns
- Exclusion or isolation
- Restraint (should only be used to protect the child from self-harm or harming others. Any use of physical restraint must be reported to Extraordinary Families immediately. This does not include appropriately using standard, agency approved infant and child safety restraints, such as car seats, highchairs with safety belts, toddler safety gates, etc.; nor does it include intervening physically to ensure safety when a child demonstrates dangerous or impulsive behavior. An example of this is holding a toddler who suddenly tried to dart into the street.
- Deprivation of basic needs, such as food, medication, sleep, or clothing
- Denying court ordered visits with loved ones
- Emotional abuse, such as threatening to deny court ordered visits or removal from the resource home.
- Any discipline that is a violation of personal rights
- Locking a child in any room or vehicle
- Any act that may re-traumatize or re-victimize. This requires a thorough assessment of trauma histories and identifying triggers so as not to inadvertently use a tactic that is a trigger or reminder of abuse that threatens any sense of safety. Be sure to talk to your FFA/Adoption social worker about your child's trauma history. For commercially sexually exploited children, for instance, the dynamic between the exploiter and the child often includes trauma-bonding, an emotional attachment that forms over the course of cycles of love and abuse – physical or emotional. For a young child with a history of sexual exploitation, the emotional isolation and withdrawal of love during timeouts mirrors the cycle of trauma bonding and may be a trigger for their abuse or otherwise re-victimize them. Commercially sexually exploited children are also more likely to respond to interventions by parents who embody a non-judgmental approach. This reinforces the importance of using positive rather than punitive techniques and focusing on the *behavior* as a concern and not the *child* as being bad or wrong.

## **POSITIVE DISCIPLINE**

- **Disciplinary Attitudes and Attributes**

Overall, discipline is a part of the care and guidance required to maintain a healing environment for each child in your home.

Methods of discipline may vary from one home to another, but they always require a basic set of attitudes and attributes, such as:

- Having clear and realistic expectations
- Teaching without blame or 'put downs'
- Sharing genuine concern and care for children/NMDs
- Maintaining consistent responses to behaviors

- Being firm but caring
- Having patience
- Being honest
- Being behavior focused, understanding and conveying that the behavior is negative or maladaptive and not the child

- **Positive Disciplinary Strategies**

Examples of positive, acceptable disciplinary strategies include the following:

- **Clarification** – Some form of clarification should be used with every correction of behavior. For instance, if a child hits another child, be certain to clarify (in a manner that is in keeping with that child’s developmental age) that hitting is harmful, review rules that were broken or expectations that were not met, what actions they can do instead of hitting, and the consequences for the behavior, if any, such as an apology to the hurt child and offering the other child a hug or an ice pack to help them feel better. Dependent upon the child’s age, this can include an inquiry into what led to the behavior, feelings of the child, etc. The key is to talk about why the child’s *behavior* was a concern.
- **Role-playing** – Role-playing can be used to demonstrate, for instance, what the child can do instead. If it is determined, for instance, that the child hit because she was angry that the other child wouldn’t share, you can role-play or model for the child other options, such as seeking help from an adult.
- **Collaborative problem solving** – You can collaborate with the child in exploring ideas of what can be done instead and/or what the consequence may be for the behavior – and consequence does not mean punishment, but instead how the child can make restitution or amends, and reconciliation when their actions have hurt others. When a child comes up with their own solutions, they are usually more genuine and heartfelt – and the child is more likely to feel control over the situation, and their future behavior.
- **Praising and reinforcing positive behaviors** – This is a proactive, preventative approach that should always be used. By focusing more on positive, acceptable behaviors rather than only negative, the child is more inclined to continue those behaviors.
- **Time-in** – The traditional time out is when a child is told to go somewhere, such as their room or a certain chair, alone for a determined number of minutes, and often parents withhold attention and ignore any cries or requests from the child during timeout. This tactic can make any child feel abandoned, rejected, frightened and confused, and these feelings may be amplified and even re-traumatizing for your child given their traumatic histories. Research shows that timeouts don’t necessarily improve behavior and do little to help children learn to regulate their emotions or learn moral values like right from wrong. This is in part because timeouts are in keeping with love withdrawal, and studies on love withdrawal as a punishment technique demonstrate that kids subjected to it tend to exhibit more misbehavior, worse emotional health, and less developed morality. Prominent psychologist, Dan Siegel, says that the relational pain of isolation in timeout is deeply wounding to young children and that when repeated over and over, the experience of timeout can “actually change the physical structure of the brain.” Children need to feel connected to us to feel safe, especially children with traumatic histories, and transgression in behavior is often because they don’t feel safe. The goal when a child is upset, then, is to restore safety first before any attempts can be made to teach appropriate behavior. The positive parenting tool time-in should be used *instead of* timeout, and this involves parents kindly inviting the upset child to sit *with* them or close nearby, empathizing with the child’s feelings, and reassuring their safety. Often just quiet connection is all that is needed until the storm has passed. Once calmness has been restored, you can begin to engage other positive parenting strategies, such as clarifying why the behavior is concerning, collaborating to identifying other solutions, and role-playing what those solutions would look like.
- **Earning privileges** – Grounding, removing privileges, punishing with extra chores – while these approaches are meant to “teach a lesson,” they are punitive and ineffective. Research shows that kids get preoccupied with the unfairness of the punishment, instead of feeling remorse for what they did wrong. Earning privileges is to be understood as a proactive, preventative method of positive reinforcement. For instance, praise can be given to a child who cleans up after playing and “earn” a privilege, such as choosing what game or activity the family will play together at night or help select and prepare dinner. You should incorporate your child’s voice when determining earned privileges for positive behavior. This could simply be asking them what they feel is an appropriate reward for a given behavior and coming to mutually agreed upon reward.
- **Using positive modeling of behaviors** – Modeling desired behavior is also a proactive, preventative strategy. You should model desired behavior in your own actions and interactions. Children are more likely to follow/imitate behavior than do what they’re told, especially if the modeled behavior is counter to how they’re being told to behave.

- **Reparations** (great for older children and youth) - This isn't a consequence (punishment) that you impose. This is when you ask your child if there's something they can do to repair or make the situation better now. For instance, if your child verbally insults other family members, they'll need to do some repair work on those relationships. If your child breaks something, they'll need to help pay for a replacement. Remember, however, that if you think up the reparation and force your child to comply, they'll likely reject it. Instead, let this be an empowering opportunity for them to learn that we all make mistakes -- and we can always take action to make things better. Instead of taking something away (like a privilege) or adding something negative to their life (like a punishment), reframe this and help your child understand this as *adding* something positive to their life (e.g. a positive interaction with family members to heal what went wrong between them).

By following these positive parenting strategies, you can help build your child's capacity for emotional connection and the development of positive relationships, including peer to peer. Further, your child will be more inclined to learn and use appropriate conflict resolution skills if consistently used and modeled in the home. When conflicts *do* arise, use the above positive parenting strategies to help resolve the conflict and correct any transgressions in behavior. Whenever possible, include your child's voice when establishing expectations and consequences for transgressions in behavior or rewards for positive behavior, as in the collaborative problem solving and earned privileges sections described above.

### **Responding to Aggressive or Assaultive Behavior**

Some children require behavioral interventions beyond those generally appropriate for the child's age and developmental level. These children are behaviorally reactive in ways that may pose a continuing serious threat to themselves or others. In general, these children require higher levels of care than Extraordinary Families is equipped to provide or otherwise care under agencies with resource parents specifically trained to respond to such behaviors. In the event your child, however, exhibits significant aggressive or assaultive behavior, you must:

- Use the least restrictive methods that adequately protect the child or other persons. Potentially dangerous situations may often be defused if you are alert, intervene early to change the environment if appropriate, and use active listening and de-escalation techniques. If restraint is used to prevent serious injury to the child or others, it must be reported to Extraordinary Families immediately.
- Contact your FFA/Adoption social worker for assistance and guidance. Your social worker may also refer you to the agency's Family Support Specialist for additional support.
- Communicate and work with the child's treatment team to develop an appropriate behavioral intervention plan to address the child's behavior, which may include referrals to additional supportive services.

- **Non-Minor Dependents**

If you are a parent of a non-minor dependent (NMD), collaborate with them to develop, implement, and maintain written expectations, alternatives, reparations (as opposed to consequences) and rewards for behavior. This may be done using a Shared Living Agreement, which aids in the creation and maintenance of successful placements and supports the young adult's continued transition to independent adulthood. Such agreements should be renegotiated and updated as needed and appropriate.

**NOTE:** All examples of unacceptable forms of discipline described previously apply to non-minor dependents. Acceptable forms of discipline may include using reparations, clarification, role-playing (or helping the young adult empathize with the feelings of the person or people impacted by their transgression in behavior or violation of expectations), collaborative problem solving, praising and reinforcing positive behavior, earning privileges, and positive modeling of behavior.

- **Significant Behavioral Concerns**

In the event of significant behavioral concerns, running away, suspected drug use, physical harm to others, property damage, theft, self-injury, and any behaviors that results in being stopped or apprehended by the police, **you must immediately notify the agency in person or by phone** – email is not acceptable. Staff is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to take these reports. Within one business day of receiving such reports, staff must complete a special incident report (SIR) for the county placing agency and Community Care Licensing. Work with your FFA/Adoption social worker and the treatment team to develop disciplinary actions and strategies to address the concerning behavior.

Your FFA/Adoption social worker may join you in conversations with your child/NMD to clarify why the behavior is a concern, review rules that were broken or expectations that were not met, what actions they can do instead, and the consequences/reparations for the behavior. This can include an inquiry into what led to the behavior, feelings of the child, etc. As indicated previously, the key is to talk about *why behavior* was a concern and not identifying the *child/NMD* as bad or wrong. These joint conversations can also include collaborative problem solving.

- **Always remember:**

Children, youth, *and* young adults learn best with love; when offered honesty and treated with kindness, respect and compassion, they thrive.

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As an approved resource parent(s) I/we will adhere to the disciplinary guidelines set forth above. I/We will *not* use negative discipline in caring for children, youth or non-minor dependents. This includes refraining from using any form of physical discipline. I understand that such discipline is a direct violation of personal rights, is reportable as child abuse and could lead to the removal of the child(ren) placed in my care and the withdrawal of my certification/approval and home study approval. All discipline will be accomplished with the goal of achieving positive behavioral change and will always be fair and fitting for the behavior.

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Signature of EF Representative Date

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Name/Title of EF Representative

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Signature of Resource Parent Date

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Name of Resource Parent

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Signature of Resource Parent Date

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Name of Resource Parent

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Signature of Child/NMD Date

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Name of Child/NMD