

# Be a More Positive Parent

**Forget yelling and nagging. Focus on positive discipline to bring out the best in your kids and create a more harmonious household.**

By [Gail Reichlin](#) | June , 2007

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Alice, mother of three spirited boys under the age of 7, had made a recent promise to herself to change her discipline technique. "No more yelling, nagging, bribing, or threatening." But on Friday morning, feeling frazzled and with her kids running late for school, she reverted back to "automatic parenting pilot." She reeled off a rapid-fire list of demands: "Hurry up, you'll miss the bus!" she called out. "Eat your breakfast! Keep your hands off your brother!"

Alice is not alone. As we try to manage our kid battles, we sometimes snap and fall into old habits. But you can be assured that no matter how challenging the situation is in your home, you can begin using a strategy called positive discipline that will help you get the cooperation you're after without losing your temper or your sanity.

## A Better Way

Positive discipline, based on love and limits, is common sense. It's often the simple, sensible choices we tend to overlook as options, especially when we're in the heat of a kid battle. Unlike punishment, positive discipline works to maintain the dignity of both child and parent by helping the child want to cooperate because he knows it's the right thing to do, not because he feels he has to comply "or else." It has three main objectives:

- To put a stop to misbehavior (such as whining, lying, hitting, tantrums).
- To encourage good behaviors (i.e., cleaning up, healthy eating, using manners).
- To strengthen the relationship between parent and child.

The starting place for positive discipline is with you. It involves modeling good behavior — the kind you'd like from your child. As you have already discovered, children will do as you do, not necessarily as you say. To review the kind of behavior you expect, schedule private discussions and family meetings to revisit a situation without blame, shame, fear, or guilt. When the child has input into solving the problem, he is more inclined to want to cooperate as planned when a similar situation arises. The process helps him feel important. But keep in mind that you have full veto power. Over time, a well-disciplined child learns to control his impulses, take responsibility, solve problems, and empathize with others.

In truth, changing your ways and your children's isn't easy, and it can be especially difficult to hold it together on crazy mornings like Alice had. But even if you find that what comes out of your mouth is not what you had practiced, don't worry. Your child will give you another chance - sooner than you think - to say it better.

## 8 Great Ways to Get Your Kids to Cooperate

1. **Acknowledge strong feelings.** A child who feels understood sees you as on his side rather than on his back and is more likely to cooperate. Say, "I noticed how angry you get when you're having fun and have to leave your friend's house. Let's practice a happy goodbye for tomorrow. How would that look and sound?"
2. **Talk less.** Say what needs to be done in a single word if you can. "Coat." "Breakfast." "Teeth." Children hate long explanations, which often turn into a screaming tirade of reasons it must be done. You're also modeling self-control.
3. **Tell your child what he can do,** rather than what he cannot do. For example, "We pet the cat" works better than, "Don't pull the cat's tail like you did last week." This serves as a reminder of an acceptable action rather than of what your child did wrong.
4. **Give limited choices.** Say to your child, "You can get in your car seat all by yourself or Mommy will help you do it. Do you need my help? It's your choice." Most toddlers will say, "Self, self . . . I do it." The more you do this, the more you'll get "self" cooperation.
5. **Lighten up.** Make inanimate objects do the talking for you. If you want your child to put on his shoes, for instance, make the shoes say, "Please put your feet in my tummy." Toddlers will usually happily comply, at least once.
6. **Rewind!** This announcement means that your child will "take back" her words and actions and start anew with good behavior. Silly babble and walking backwards indicate the bad behavior has been "erased." In order for this to be effective, it must be introduced, demonstrated, and talked about repeatedly, outside the heat of the moment.
7. **Take a break.** To calm a frustrated child, stop and breathe together. Say, "Looks like you need a break; let's breathe together." Sitting across from each other, holding hands, inhale slowly and deeply three times. Say, "I'm feeling relaxed now."

8. **Take a silly break.** A sense of humor is very positive and often works well to stop misbehavior. When things are out of control, consider declaring, "We need to get silly!" Dance, sing the "silly song," tell a joke, talk in a silly voice or a foreign language. The children will join right in - or at least stop misbehaving long enough to watch the show!

## About the Author

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Gail Reichlin is a former preschool teacher and the author of *The Pocket Parent*.

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