

THE DREADED PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE

Too much and you have a rebel, too little and you have an unmanageable child, finding that sweet spot is part of the parents journey. This is the part of parenting most did not tell you about, the part where we have to navigate by bouncing off the railing.

Discipline is where we, by aspiring to 'do things different then our parents did', fall into the trap that created our parents behavior-only the other end of the same trap. This is where parents' different styles are highlighted and the cultural roles of mom and dad are often exaggerated. There are few places where you will feel as conflicted as you will with discipline.

There are many books written on the issue, they are all right some of the time. It is my hope to do at least as well in writing this.

The two concepts that I have found most useful are:

1. *To create safety by providing limits.*
2. *To build self esteem by gradually increasing responsibility and accountability while decreasing structure as your child grows up.*

Put simply, you gradually change your style from dictatorship to democracy over the course of many years, knowing that only part of your child's training will happen at home anyways.

My hope is that you will have a perfectly behaved self-confident citizen of the universe and that all these resources are not needed, but you should know that I also still believe in Santa Claus.

The books I have found useful at different times are:

1. ***How to talk so that kids will listen, and listen so that kids will talk.*** It is a classic. Great to deal with kids in the pre-over the top stage and often alleviates the need for the 1,2,3...
2. ***Playful parenting***--helpful for understanding why kids behave the way they do (a natural outcome of retreating into the tower of powerlessness and the tower of isolation) and playful ways to get them to come out. I think this could have been written as an essay or mini-booklet, but then that is more my style. It is a quick read and appropriate to skim.
3. ***Positive Discipline***--another approach to discipline that is useful if your kids are behaving in a reasonable way or are in a state where they respond to reason and natural consequences. They have many different books for specific ages and methods for specific issues.

Not all kids respond to reason or to play or to talk all the time and so I think that having these books and the concepts in them along with the 1,2,3 Magic is a great combo.

4. **1,2,3 Magic** is useful mainly for when your child or you have either lost self-control or are on the brink of losing self respect. Especially effective for starting behaviors you want them to do, or stopping behaviors you want them to stop, like being a bit of a tyrant and trying to boss and control everything--it helps to break that cycle without breaking the child. The DVD's are also very helpful (1,2,3 Magic and more 1,2,3 Magic).

5. **Simplicity Parenting**, Kim John Payne. A great book to help parents in this age to avoid the trap of surrounding your child with too much choice, too much stuff and getting them involved in too many things. It is written with the humor of introspection in mind.

I think of these resources as ways of preserving a touch of sanity in an insane situation. Think about what you are trying to do here, you are trying to do the impossible, help an appropriately self absorbed 2-18 year old function in the context of group. Hello! Get the problem here? If not, start reading again from the top of this article.

Here is what I would like to suggest as some ideas to consider:

1. What specific behaviors do you need from your child for their and your safety and sanity? What behaviors need to start and what behaviors need to stop. How urgent is it? Is it realistic given the age and nature of your child to expect this or something close to it right now?
2. What structure (ie method of discipline) does your child need to increase the likelihood of these behaviors? How do you help them when they have gone over the top, even if it is for a good reason (they are tired, hungry, too much change recently, etc.)?
3. What structures help support your child as they meet your or others needs in the context of group (family, shopping, restaurants)? Are those needs realistic given your child (age, personality, etc.)? If not then it might be good to keep these activities short, do your best, and have an exit plan.
4. If you chose a method really do it. Doing something partially does not really test the method.
5. Have a back up plan when all else is failing: someone to call, someone to take over, or get very good at the 1,2,3 Magic.