

Love and Discipline

By Judith S. Bloch



Finding a way to reconcile our love for our children with reasonable expectations for their

good behavior can be a difficult task, especially for those of us who take care of challenging children. Behavior-management dilemmas have a way of making all adults, parents and teachers feel less adequate and confident. While we know that we can control a child's behavior with punishment, we also know that adult power tactics don't lead the child to develop necessary inner controls. Some children are easygoing, cheerful and compliant. Others are defiant or oppositional. They act this way in class, at home and even in public places. They often provoke angry and punitive reactions.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THESE PATTERNS?

When the child's behavior is unacceptable, it may be part of a developmental disability, linked to limited understanding, problems with attentiveness, impulsivity or hyperactivity. With specific techniques geared to the child's personality and age, parents can present their ideas and household rules in positive ways that are more likely to gain their child's cooperation. Some misbehavior can be ignored, especially if it isn't dangerous. But, when certain problems occur frequently, it's a good idea to make a plan or have a rule that could prevent misbehavior. Parents who are patient and loving (sometimes funny), but also consistent and firm so their children know they mean what they say, will have more success. Be consistent. If you said, "No candy," hold the line. If you said it, "Do it," idle threats will interfere with your effectiveness. Don't inadvertently teach children to nag or whine to get you to change your mind.

Here are some guidelines to follow:

- Make sure your child understands what you want.
- Catch the child "being good." Comment on behavior in a specific way, as in: "That's great! You picked up your toys."
- Encourage your child to respond with words, to tell you what she thinks and feels, not to throw or hit. You can say, "Use your words."

Punishments work for the moment but don't lead the child to learn self control. Punishments teach a child *what not* to do, but not *what* to do. Our goal is to help children learn to behave appropriately and control themselves, even when we aren't with them.

