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Positive Parenting

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Some children frequently misbehave. Well, that's the way it can seem. Actually, children's misbehaviours are carried out for a reason. Children act to meet needs. While the child, however, may have a reason for their behaviour, in a social setting the behaviour may well be unacceptable or inappropriate. Misbehaviour can include attention-seeking, gaining power, revenge, avoidance, anger, frustration, sensory processing difficulties, and feelings of inadequacy. To address misbehaviour 'appropriately' requires what we could call 'positive parenting'.

Positive parenting recognizes that all behaviours meet needs and teaches children there is another way to approach needs. It recognises that behaviour doesn't occur in a vacuum and advocates that there are no "bad" kids, only kids searching for a way to fit in. Positive parenting therefore requires parents to provide positive, loving environments that are conducive to learning

A key concept in positive parenting and responding appropriately to misbehaviour is **discipline**. Discipline is often mistakenly considered the same as punishment but there are highly important differences between the two. Discipline is about providing training that develops self-control, character, and efficiency. It is about instructing or educating the child; it involves love, guidance, nurture, and support and it focuses on self-control and sustained learning. Discipline views behavioural occurrences as opportunities to teach and support. Punishment, on the other hand, is defined as imposing external controls by force on children to change their behavior. **Punishment tells children what not to do rather than what to do.** Positive discipline, by contrast, tells the child what to do, explains how to do it, and, most important and effective, the child learns what to do by watching what the parent does.

Effective discipline therefore teaches children problem-solving skills, appropriate interactions, and self-discipline. It promotes growth and enhances the self concept by encouraging children to take responsibility. But how can parents actively, practically, and effectively engage in positive discipline?

There are a number of important steps to positive discipline. Parents should learn to ignore minor, irritating behaviours. The phrase "pick your battles" is relevant here. If a parent gets angry and upset at every small misdemeanor, not only are they exerting a large amount of emotional effort which leads to stress, the child will come to view this reaction as "normal" and it will not have the same effect on them as it would if used occasionally and for more serious occurrences.

Related to this is learning to pay more attention to good behaviour and less attention to bad behaviour – remember, it needs an audience to occur! Praise and reward positive behaviour. "Catch" your child behaving well and praise them and reward them when they are not expecting it. Furthermore, be specific with praise. Tell them exactly what it is that you liked about their behaviour and why.

Work with the child to set basic rules and decide together what consequences will result from breaking the rules. If a child has a say in the rules they are expected to adhere to,

they are much more likely to consider them fair and subsequently respect and obey them. It is important that the rules are acceptable to the parent, but give the child choices and be flexible. Then use these rules and consequences consistently and calmly.

Remember children will often push to find out where limits are. Positive discipline is not forcing or coaxing them to do what we want but helping them to learn self discipline, partly from consequences of their own actions. Let them experience your disapproval but not your rejection. Disapproval should lead to healthy guilt, not unhealthy shame.