



## What is the Purpose of Discipline?, by Dr. Brad Schwall

Parents may fear being consistently firm and setting limits because they are afraid they may start a battle or lose a battle, they may be tired, they may have tried to be firm and failed, their child's behaviors may present some unique challenges, they may have had negative discipline modeled for them by their own parents, or they may need more effective communication skills and discipline strategies. The goal of discipline is to teach children the skills they need to make good choices. Focus your discipline on teaching your child and your child will benefit.

### Discipline as Punishment

- Goal: fear of the punishment
- Only focuses on what not to do
- Reactive
- After incidents, focuses only on the punishment
- Focuses on what the child did wrong
- Ignores causes of undesirable behavior
- Inconsistent

### Discipline as Instruction

- Goal: self-discipline
- Focuses on what to do
- Proactive
- After incidents, guides the child to make positive choices in the future
- Focuses on what the child can do differently in the future
- Assesses motivation and teaches skills
- Consistent

The ultimate goal of discipline is to teach self-discipline. How do children learn to make good choices on their own? Children need to hear "no" for an answer. They must be treated with respect and fairness. Arbitrary limits do not teach. Intentional limits that help children learn values and standards help shape the character of children.

If discipline is based only on fear of a consequence that must be enforced by an adult, the child may only be motivated to make a desirable choice when an adult is present. If the child does not have skills for self-control and problem-solving, the child will not develop the desirable behaviors necessary to avoid the punishment.

Children learn how to make constructive choices when we teach skills and build values. Fearing a negative consequence may motivate a child temporarily, but setting limits, teaching good decision-making skills, allowing children to face consequences, and helping children reflect on what they can do differently in the future teach them self-discipline that can last a lifetime.