

Firm, Fair & Consistent®

Medford Township Public Schools
Elementary School Counselors

Guiding Students for School Success

Take control, plan a calm approach

Do you ever start off being angry with your child, but end up angry with yourself? This can happen when you feel out of control. You want to discipline your child, but in the heat of the moment, you aren't sure how. So you end up making mistakes.

This is common:

- **In the morning.** Maybe your child is tired, distracted or out of sorts. Once you pinpoint the problem, find a solution. Try an earlier bedtime or wakeup time, for example. Or create a helpful routine.
- **In the evening.** A long day takes its toll on families. It's tough to be at your best when you're tired. Relaxing habits help, such as listening to favorite music on the drive home or unwinding with a quiet family activity. Give your child time to wrap up activities before bed. And make bedtime appealing by reading together!
- **In disagreements.** Make sure your expectations are reasonable. Remember that too many rules can make it hard for your child to obey. Be firm about limits—but not overly demanding. And don't forget to follow through with reasonable consequences.

Plan ahead. Decide how to handle problems calmly. Set a good example by being in control of your actions. And take pride in your success!

Source: Leslie Lampert, "How to Stop Yelling," *Parents*, July 2000 (Meredith Corporation, 1-888-616-7679, www.parents.com).



It's never too early for good etiquette

Your youngster may not be ready to dine with the queen. Still, he's old enough to show proper table manners. That is, he's perfectly able to chat politely, put his napkin in his lap and wait for everyone to sit before he starts eating. But when he forgets? Offer a friendly reminder—"What should we do before we start eating?"—and give him a chance to correct his own behavior.



Source: Kimberly L. Keith, "Manners 101," *About.com*, <http://childparenting.about.com/od/strategiesforparents/a/manners5to7.htm>.

Your child says, "I can't stand reading. The words are too hard." Don't dismiss her with: "Don't be silly. The words are easy." They are *not* easy for *her*.

A better approach is to say, "You sound frustrated. I know you're having a hard time reading. Tell me more about what's difficult for you." Then work on finding a solution together.



Flowers aren't the only way to say, 'I love you!'

Who needs chocolate hearts? To show your child you love him this Valentine's Day:

- **Carve out some special time.** Spend a few hours doing something fun together.
- **Use positive, loving words.** Avoid being sarcastic with your child.
- **Be kind.** If you're upset about something he's done, criticize his actions, not him.
- **Set a good example.** Let him hear you saying *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me*.



Source: "14 Ways to Show Love for Your Child This Valentine's Day," American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/febvaltips.htm.

Even tantrums need ground rules

Your child may "see red" when she's angry, but she shouldn't be allowed to express that anger however she wants. Before her next meltdown, let her know that it's *not* okay to:

- **Hit or push.**
- **Scream or slam doors.**
- **Call names.**

True, she may slip up, but continue to calmly and consistently enforce these ground rules. It will transfer into good school behavior, too.



Source: "Taming Tempers," *KidsHealth*, www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/temper.html.

Know when to seek help

When is normal behavior *not* normal? Sometimes, it's tough to tell. After all, kids go through all kinds of behaviors (and misbehaviors). Still, there are signs that a child may need professional help for her behavioral issues. Here are a few:

- *A major drop in grades*—especially if she's a good student.
- *Excessive anger* or acting out.
- *Depression.*
- *Withdrawal from friends.*

If you notice any of these symptoms in your child, talk to her pediatrician.



Source: "Facts for Families: Where to Find Help for Your Child," American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/where_to_find_help_for_your_child.

Questions & Answers

Q: My new stepson treats me like his wicked stepmother! How can I discipline him fairly when I can't even get him to respect me?

A: It's great that you're aware of how important fairness is when it comes to discipline. As you've learned, though, discipline issues can be extra sticky in stepfamilies. Unfortunately, there's no quick fix to being cast as the "wicked stepmother." Here are some ways to smooth the rough spots:

- *Ask your spouse to step in.* Because you're the stepparent, you shouldn't be the primary rule enforcer. Whenever possible, have your spouse take the lead. But try to agree where school routines are involved.
- *Always take the high road.* No matter how angry you feel, never let your stepson hear you criticize his mother. (This is true even if Mom is contributing to her son's misbehavior.) If you need to vent, do it when your stepson is far away.
- *Be a good role model.* Show your stepson that you're a smart, confident person who can handle whatever he throws your way. Don't lose your cool when he acts up. (In fact, stay especially calm if he's only doing it to provoke you.) Let him see you as the mature adult you are—and that he needs you to be.
- *Be patient.* Research shows that it takes up to seven years for stepfamilies to hit their stride, so hang in there. And remember: As hard as it is for you to be a stepmother, it's likely tougher for him to be a stepson.



Source: "Stepfamily Discipline Issues," Family Education Network, <http://life.familyeducation.com/parenting/stepfamilies/45329.html>.

Why 'bad' parents usually aren't

What does a "bad parent" look like? Is it the dad whose kindergartner melts down at the park? The mom whose third grader stomps when he's upset? Actually, neither of these parents is necessarily "bad." More likely, what they are is normal. Every parent has strengths and weaknesses; all kids have good and bad days. So don't be too quick to pass judgment on fellow parents.

Source: "The Myth of the Bad Parent," National Mental Health Information Center, <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/Ca-0035/default.asp>.

Teach the importance of being honest

Lying is never okay, but when could it signal a larger problem? Ask yourself whether your child:



- *Tells lies repeatedly.*
- *Isn't bothered by lying.*
- *Lies to hide serious misbehavior.*

If this sounds familiar, it's vital for you to:

- *Be a good role model.* Don't tell fibs yourself.
- *Talk about the importance of honesty.*

If your child continues to lie, ask his school counselor or pediatrician about where to go for help.

Source: "Children and Lying," American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, www.aacap.org/page/ww?section=Facts%20for%20Families&name=Children%20And%20Lying.

Firm, Fair & Consistent®

Guiding Students for School Success

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Managing Editor: Pat Hodgdon.

Editor: Erika Beasley.

Writers: Susan O'Brien, Holly Smith.

Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2008, The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525

www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1545-7737