



So you want to know more about...

Discipline

Who's In Charge?

At Gretchen's House we use the term *discipline* to describe self-control and emotional regulation. These skills enable kids to be what we call good citizens: responsible for themselves and respectful of others.

Children who feel powerful will be happier and more successful in all aspects of life. It is adults' job to help children understand limits and give them tools for dealing with challenges.

Expecting behavior that is beyond children's capabilities will increase frustration and decrease success. Raising our expectations in sync with children's growing capabilities, on the other hand, will boost their self-esteem as they develop self-control.

Here's how we promote self-control at Gretchen's House:

- Structure our environment to reduce frustrations.
- Ensure that children's physical needs are being met — sleep, exercise, and good nutrition.
- Use a 3-P approach: prepare for challenging situations, predict tough spots and practice good choices.
- Balance group time with solitary activities. Give kids time to observe and reflect.
- Label children's emotions as they express them: frustration, anger, sadness. Suggest appropriate ways to accomplish their goals.
- Compromise. Meet the child halfway. Children often have pretty resourceful *and* reasonable solutions.

- Make *no* mean *no*, not *probably not* or *maybe*. Unclear language encourages kids to persist. If you need time to think about something before responding, just say so.
- Remark on children's progress.
- Differentiate between bad behavior and "bad" kids. Children can't change who they are but they can change what they do!
- Remind children that our affection for them does not diminish when they "fail." If you feel angry, say so. But make sure they know that anger does not equal dislike.
- When children make mistakes, help them plan for the future. Talk about making better choices in similar situations.

Consequences

Two kinds of consequences help children see the connection between their behavior and outcomes. **Natural consequences** are outcomes that serve as a deterrent in and of themselves. For example, a child who repeatedly throws a toy and breaks it will no longer have that toy to play with. No further intervention from adults is needed, other than to point out the connection. Adults can also choose **logical consequences**, which are directly linked to the negative behavior. A three-year-old child who purposely pours her milk on the floor shouldn't be given a refill, and adults should explain why.

The key to helping kids see *causal connections* is to react matter-of-factly. If you become emotional, children won't pay attention to your message, but to your demeanor. Overreacting may actually reinforce negative behaviors. Once children understand causal connections, they can begin to practice self-control. As with so many aspects of child-rearing, consistency is key.

Further reading about discipline

- *Bedtime for Frances*, by Russell Hoban
- *Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline*, by Rebecca Bailey
- *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, by Kevin Henkes
- *Loving Your Child Is Not Enough*, by Nancy Samalian
- *Who's In Control*, by Dr. Lawrence Balter

Ages & Stages: Appropriate Expectations

6 months: Responding to your baby's cries and expressions will teach him that you will listen and respond to his needs. Caregivers should reduce frustrations and minimize waiting time to build trust.

9 months: As infants become more mobile, they may get into more "trouble." Caregivers should *intervene* to remove frustrations, *distract* attention from "no-no's," and *anticipate* difficult situations.

12-18 months: Don't take negative behaviors personally. Reserve the word "NO" for dangerous situations or it will lose its impact. State the behavior you **do** want: "Feet on the floor!" instead of "No climbing!"

18-36 months: Children want to feel "big" and powerful. Let them do as many things for themselves as possible. Cognitively, they should be able to resist

temptation with supervision. **Tantrums** are normal, as is some experimental **aggression**.

3-4 years: Children become more peer-focused than adult-focused, so you may see more negative behaviors as your child becomes less concerned with adult approval. Children become cognitively capable of empathy around 3 years of age. Because children understand "if...then" statements, reasonable and consistent consequences are a great teaching tool.

5 years: Children become very concerned with rules and rigid implementation of them as they pertain to *others'* behavior. Bossiness may become an issue. Children are capable of and interested in solving problems. Five-year-olds are also capable of taking care of their own belongings with reminders. See the **Power Struggles Purple Page** for more tips.

Is it time for a time-out?

"Time out" is more of a *punishment* than a *consequence* and thus has limited value as a teaching tool. Here's how we handle persistent disruptive behavior at Gretchen's House:

- Children whose behavior is escalating need **close supervision** and **limited activity choices** until they begin to check their own impulses.
- Adults **shadow** children who are having difficulties and **coach** them through tough situations **before** they lose control.
- Adults **rehearse** challenging situations before they happen, with individual children and the group. Children need **scripts** for communicating their needs and **cues** to understand when they are crossing the line with kids and teachers.
- When children are completely out of control and hurting people or things, they need **time away** until they calm down. Adults **don't negotiate** with children while they are out of control.
- Losing control is scary for children. They need help to **re-enter the group** comfortably.

Frequently Asked Questions

Isn't "time away" the same thing as a time out?

Time out's main function is to give adults a break when they are out of resources. A frustrated adult has a hard time effectively guiding behavior, so sometimes time out is used as a last resort. **Time away** should happen **before** children completely lose control. It's an opportunity for everyone to regroup.

This all sounds a bit too lenient for me. I want my kids to respect my authority. We want children to be respectful, too. If you spend time at the center, you will see and hear children speaking and behaving respectfully towards each other and adults. Disrespectful behavior is never condoned, but you

are likely to see children who are still *working on* the concept. They learn by doing, and it's our goal to support that process.

I want you to tell me everything my child does wrong at the center so we can work on it at home. Discussing bad choices out of context and hours after the fact is unproductive. We will let you know the kinds of struggles we're having and how we are addressing them so we can all be consistent.

Whatever happened to please and thanks and I'm sorry?! We encourage polite behavior through modeling and rehearsal. We also believe, however, that tone of voice is as important as word choice.