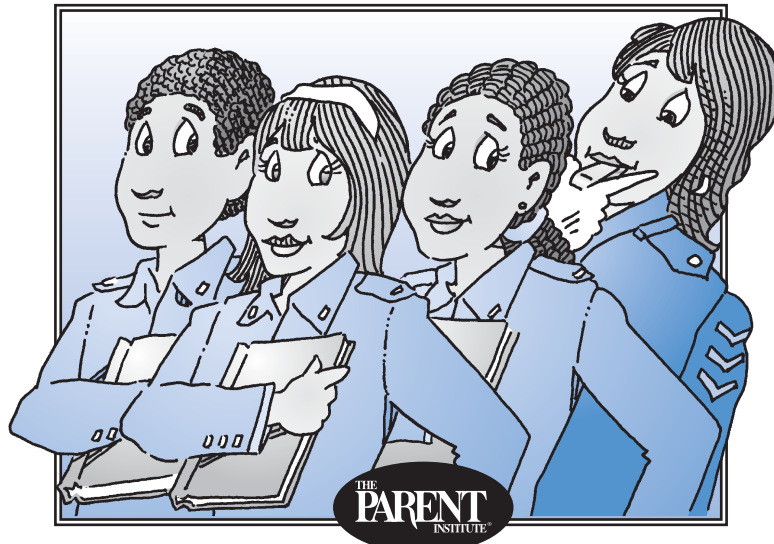


REMEMBER ...
YOU ARE
THE ADULT ...
AND *YOU ARE*
IN CHARGE**E**

Ways Parents Can Help Their Children
Do Better in School



One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

Effective Parents Are The Parents in Charge!

One of the biggest challenges parents face is knowing how to be caring and supportive of children—yet still maintain good discipline. With today's busy lifestyles, parents often have less time to spend with children than they would like. Sometimes it seems easier to just let children do what they want.

But children lack experience and judgment. They *need* behavior boundaries. They *need* someone to look to for strength, protection and guidance.

The key is to remember that *you are the adult and you are in charge*. You have the maturity. You have the experience. Your child doesn't. Only you can establish the limits of acceptable behavior in your household. With loving firmness and authority, you must establish the rules and enforce them.

This booklet will help you consider the kind of discipline to use with your child. It offers practical ideas for taking charge and teaching your child the important lessons only good discipline can teach.

Tip: *Don't expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make changes is gradually. Focus on one or two ideas at a time—and don't forget to celebrate progress!*



**Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.*



Easy, Firm or Tough— Which Is Best?

Experts say most parents use one of three basic parenting styles: "easy," "firm" or "tough."

Firm

Parents with a *firm* parenting style are very much in charge—but willing to listen.

Parents with an *easy* parenting style let children do pretty much as they please.

Easy

TOUGH

Parents with a *tough* parenting style give children very few choices—"Because I said so!"

So which is best?

The research says:

- Children of parents with either "easy" or "tough" parenting styles had the *lowest* grades.
- Children whose parents use a "firm" style—not too easy, but not too tough—were the *best* students. The experts think that encouraging children to question things and to accept responsibility (rather than dominating them or ignoring them) helps children to develop and mature.
- Children whose parents use **changeable parenting styles**—"tough" today and "easy" tomorrow—were the *least successful* of all students.

What's Your Parenting Style?

Your “parenting style” describes how you use your authority with your child. The style you choose can have a positive or negative effect on your child’s school success and behavior.

No parent has the same style all the time, but behavior is often repeated in certain situations. Children take note and learn to respond in a way that meets their needs. Some respond with fearful obedience. Others are accepting. Some just give lip service. Others are rejecting, disrespectful and openly defiant.

To be an effective parent, adopt a style that produces respect, love and acceptance. Experts agree that such a style is one that falls somewhere between being “easy” and “tough.” This ideal style is called “firm.”

Parenting Style Quiz

Use the quiz below to become more aware of your basic style. Check off the statements that are usually true for you.

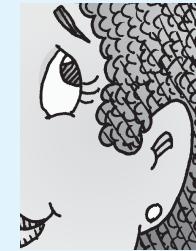
Easy

- I try to help solve any problems my child has and get him what he wants.
- I don't have a lot of rules or routines. I like to leave my child room for self-development.
- I rarely insist that my child do something if he just doesn't want to do it.
- When my child misbehaves, the only stiff penalties I set are for “next time.”
- How well my child does in school is basically up to him.



Firm

- I try to give my child age-appropriate choices, and I let her experience the consequences of the decisions she makes.
- I consider my child's ideas and feelings as we make family rules and decisions. I give the reasons for the rules and decisions that affect my child.
- I am firm, fair and consistent in enforcing family rules.
- I tell my child it's okay to make mistakes, as long as she learns from them.
- I praise my child's best efforts. I offer help and encouragement if my child is struggling.



TOUGH

- I often tell my children, “Do it and don't ask questions. Because I said so is reason enough.”
- In our house, I make most of the rules and my child must obey them—or be punished by whatever means is necessary.
- I expect my child to be obedient.
- I get very angry when my child doesn't do as she's told.
- No matter how well my child does in school or elsewhere, I tell her I want her to do better. She gets punished for any poor grades.

How Did You Do?

Do you have more checks in the “easy” or in the “tough” categories than you would like? If so, you'll find lots of ideas in the rest of this booklet to help you develop the ideal “firm” approach.

Parents Have Discipline Responsibilities

More than 20,000 education leaders were asked what they would like to tell parents to help them improve the discipline of their children at home and at school.

They stressed that parents have the *responsibility* to guide their children's behavior. Here are some of the most important things educators want you to know:

- **Be involved in your child's life.** You can't guide your child if you don't know what's going on in her life. Go to school and meet her teachers. Volunteer. Know how much homework your child has and if she has done it. Be aware of your child's likes and dislikes, disappointments and accomplishments. And even if your child says she doesn't want you around, she really does.

“

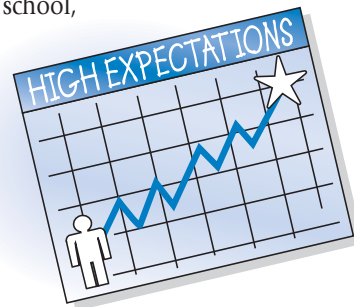
*Forget about 'quality time.'
Parents must keep their noses in their
children's business 24 hours a day!*

—School Principal

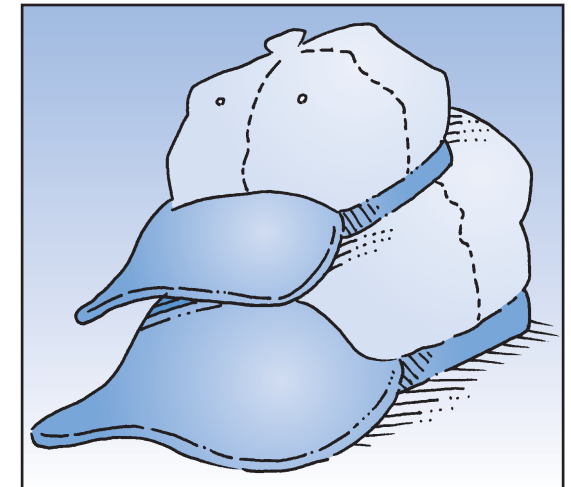
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- **Hold high expectations.** Children usually do exactly what is expected of them. That's why having high expectations is so important. Children are more likely to do well in school, and in life, if parents expect it of them.

So if you say, “You just watch—you're going to fail” or “You'll never amount to anything,” your child will likely do that, too. What your child needs to hear are old-fashioned words like, “Go to school, learn, work hard, behave and be kind to others—I'm counting on you to do your best!”



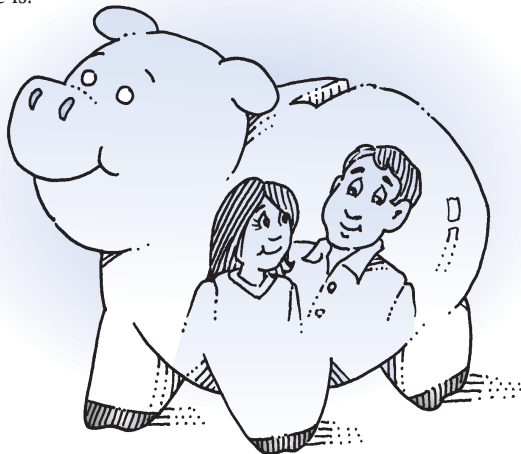
- **Set clear and consistent limits.** No matter how much they try to convince you otherwise, children want and need limits—such as rules for TV, homework, bedtime and being considerate of others. Without limits, they are lost.
- **Enforce limits with consequences.** Natural and logical consequences are great discipline tools for parents. Having to face the consequences of their actions teaches children responsibility. To enforce natural consequences, you need to do nothing at all—the consequence just happens. The natural consequence for not getting enough sleep is feeling tired the next day, for example. For best results with logical consequences, set them up ahead of time. If your son misses dinner, for example, then he knows he has to make his own.
- **To get respect—give it.** Experts say that until children can learn to accept and respect parents' authority at home, they are unlikely to accept authority at school or anywhere else. But you can't just demand respect. The best way to teach your child respect is to be respectful toward him. Only when your child knows how respect feels can he learn how to give it to others.
- **Be your child's parent first.** It's impossible to be your child's pal or an “equal” one day, and expect him to look up to you and obey you the next day. There's a line of authority between children and adults. Once you cross it, your child can get confused about who's in charge and how he should act around you and others in authority. It's your *responsibility* to be the adult. It's your *responsibility* to be in charge. It's your *responsibility* to be the parent.



Boost Your Authority and Be a More Effective Parent

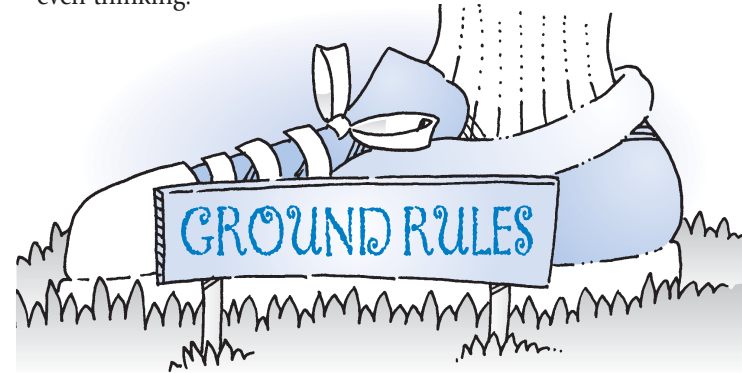
To give children the guidance they want and need, parents must be in control. They must establish and maintain authority over their children. Here are some good ways for you to strengthen your authority:

1. **Be a model of the behaviors you value.** You can't expect your child to be kind, courteous and respectful if you aren't kind, courteous and respectful to your child and others.
2. **Spend time with your child.** Many parents of children ages four to 18 spend *fewer than five minutes a day* in meaningful conversation with their children. That is not enough time to develop the kind of bond you need to influence your child in a positive way.
3. **Keep your promises.** Spending time with your child creates a "bank account" of goodwill that you can draw from when you and your child aren't getting along. The fastest way to "break the bank" is to make promises you don't keep.
4. **Demonstrate your love.** Your child is much more likely to do as you say when she knows that you love her—when she understands that your requests and actions are in her best interests. Don't just assume your child knows you love her. She needs to hear it and see it over and over again—no matter how old she is.

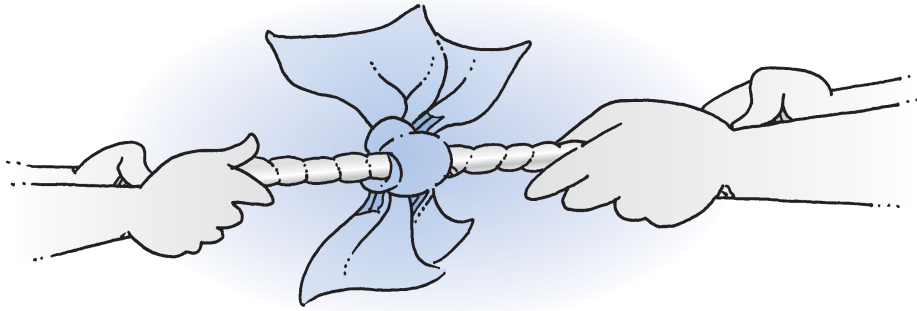


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5. **Use the power of routines.** Constantly telling your child what to do is exhausting—and it invites him to challenge authority. Try setting up routines. Once established, routines provide a behavioral "road map" to follow. Once your child gets into a routine, he will do the right thing, without even thinking.



6. **Stay grounded with ground rules.** Your child can't do what's expected unless he knows what you expect. When you set up clear and reasonable rules, it's easy for him to make decisions—either he obeys the rules or he doesn't. And it's easier for you to administer discipline.
7. **Expect your child to test your rules regularly.** Just because you set up rules and routines doesn't mean your child will blindly follow them. Expect him to test the rules to see what you *really* mean by them. You may say the rule is "No TV until homework is done." But if he can sometimes talk you into letting him watch a show, he learns that the rule really is, "No TV—unless you can talk me into it."
8. **Know the secrets to fighting peer pressure.** Peer pressure can be a real threat to your authority. The older your child gets, the more pressure he will feel from peers to do things that are against your wishes. To fight peer pressure, you can use the same tactics children's peers use to get others to follow along:
 - Show that you *like* your child.
 - Help your child feel like a *member* of an important group.
 - Help him feel *special* because he's part of the family.



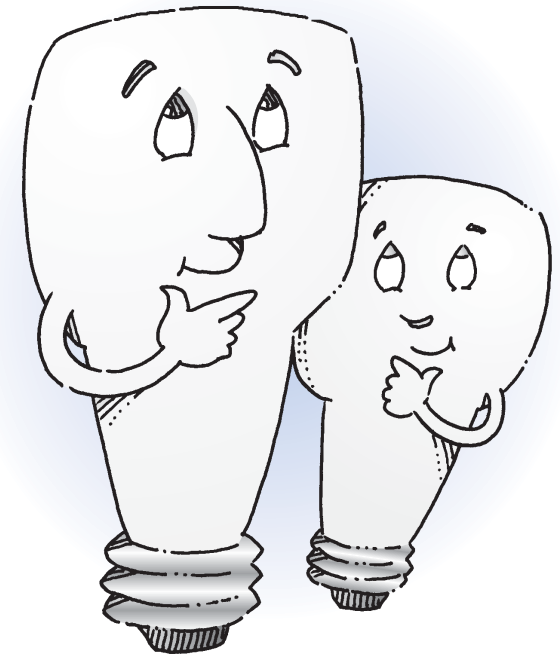
Don't Let Power Struggles Weaken Your Control

Sometimes parents have to deal with the power struggles that are certain to occur as children grow up. The solution to staying in charge in spite of power struggles is to balance your need for control with your child's growing need for independence. These ideas work:

- **Acknowledge your child's need for independence.** Let your child know you understand and appreciate her desire to call her own shots. Tell her you intend to turn over decisions and responsibilities as soon as she shows that she can handle them. Then do it. Remember, as children grow older, they should be given more freedom. That's how they learn.
- **Say "yes" whenever you can.** If your child wants to do something, and it's not harmful or against your rules, try to say "yes." If you have to say "no," explain why. If your child insists that you're being unreasonable, hear her out. See if you can work out a solution that satisfies everyone.
- **Allow your child safe ways to rebel.** If your child feels she has her way in some areas, she won't have to demand it in others. Let your child express her own tastes and preferences (how to wear her hair and what music to listen to) as long as her decisions don't go against the basic values you are trying to instill.

- **Pick your battles.** There are many opportunities for you and your child to disagree. But some things really aren't worth arguing about—like whether your child zips his jacket before he goes outside. Life will be more pleasant for everyone if you decide which issues are worth the battle—and save your energy for them.
- **Be flexible.** When you assign a chore, for example, don't always insist that it be done your way or by a certain time—if it isn't critical. If your child's way is less efficient, you might show him a better way, courteously. But let him do it his way as long as he gets the job done.

- **Get your child to think with you.** If your child starts arguing or turns you off whenever you tell him "no," try another approach. Instead of just saying no, try asking, "Have you really thought about that?" Try to engage your child in weighing the pros and cons of his decision. You'll find that, usually, you won't end up that far apart.
- **Shift the authority to something no one can argue with.** Play "Beat the Clock" using a kitchen timer, for example, when you want your child to get ready for bed faster, or complete homework or another task. Or have your child consult his own "to-do" list to make sure daily tasks get done.



Say 'No' Without Feeling Guilty

It's often hard to tell a child "no." It feels like you're rejecting your child, not just your child's request. But it's a parent's responsibility to say "no" when necessary. And you shouldn't feel guilty about it! Here are some ideas to make the task easier:

- **Realize that your child counts on your saying "no."** It gives her a sense of relief to know what the limits are. Sometimes it lets her off the hook with friends.
- **Delay your answer to give yourself time to think.** Kids like it when they know parents consider their requests. And it's easier to say "no" when you're clear on the reasons why.
- **Ask questions, so you can make an informed decision.** Ask your child why she wants to do this. Does she feel it's safe? Is there something else she should do instead?
- **Get other opinions** if this is a decision you don't want to—or shouldn't—make on your own. Tell your child, "I need to speak to your father" or "I want to talk to your friends' parents before I decide."
- **Make your decision, then make it work!** Sometimes there are no absolute right or wrong answers. But you are the parent and you must decide. Keep in mind that success often depends more upon what happens *after* the decision is made than upon the decision itself. Consider the issues, make your best decision—*then make it work!*



Don't Be Manipulated

Giving in too much to children's desires can lead to spoiled, self-ish kids who think they can get anything they want if they just push hard enough. Parents can firmly stand up to children's whining and pleading if they recognize the tactics kids use to manipulate them—and know what to do about each. Here are six examples, along with suggestions:

1. **Buttering up.** Kids know how to turn on the charm when they want something. "I love you Mommy—and by the way, I spent my allowance. Can I borrow five dollars?" *What to do:* First return the compliment, "I love you, too." Then say, "No."
2. **Promising.** "If you let me play after school, I promise I'll clean my room as soon as I get home." *What to do:* First acknowledge your child's good intentions, "I'm glad you'll clean your room." Then say, "No."
3. **Invoking guilt.** "You're the worst mom in the world!" *What to do:* Acknowledge that he's angry and say, "You're entitled to feel that way." Then say, "No."
4. **Playing on your heart strings.** "If you love me, why won't you let me?" *What to do:* Remind your child you do love him, and that's why you've made the decision you have. Then say, "No."
5. **Applying peer pressure.** "Everybody else is doing it!" *What to do:* Say, "I don't make decisions based on what your friends are doing. I make decisions based on what's best for you."
6. **Throwing tantrums.** Temper tantrums come in two varieties— physical and verbal. *What to do:* First, actively ignore your child. When the tantrum is over, say, "No."





Stay in Charge Even When You're Away

Most experts agree that it is generally not a good idea to leave a child younger than 10 home alone. However, if your older child is home when you're not, these tips will help keep things going your way:

- **Agree on specific rules** for what your child can and can't do on her own—use of TV and phone, having friends over, leaving the house, what to do if brothers and sisters quarrel, handling emergencies, etc.
- **Work out a schedule ahead of time.** Include what your child will do and when: 3:00—snack time; 3:30—play time; 4:15—homework, etc.
- **Make a “to-do” list** and have your child check off things as she completes them.
- **Phone to make sure your child made it home safely,** or have your child call you. Agree to exchange calls if there are any changes in plans.
- **When you come home,** spend time reviewing homework and the other things your child has done. Praise your child for what she's finished.

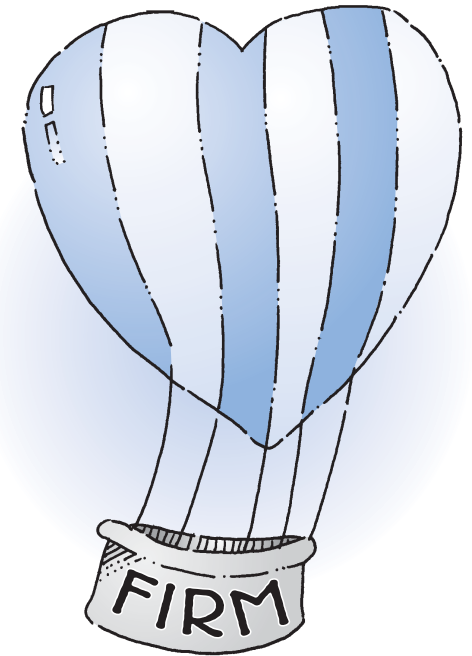
For more specific information on leaving your child home alone, check with the National Child Care Information Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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You Can Be an Effective Parent

Remember:

- Use a ‘firm’ discipline style—not too easy, but not too tough.
- You are the adult and you are in charge!



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