

Father Times

Fathers and Child Guidance

Issue 6

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

Taking Time for Guidance

"No, I don't want to!" shouts your four-year-old daughter. How do you respond? "You're mean!" says your young son. What do you say? Responding to children's challenging behaviors can be frustrating for any parent, especially fathers. Using patience, keeping your temper, and providing firm but loving guidance are all critical when fathers need to discipline their children.

In thinking about this topic, over time we have moved from talking about "punishment" to using the idea of "discipline." Now, it's becoming even more common to talk about "guidance." It's clear that young children sometimes need a parent to stop them, correct them, and teach them how to behave in appropriate ways. The question is how fathers can most effectively give guidance or discipline to their child that is firm but still positive and loving. Let's take some time to think about it. The word "discipline" actually means "to teach." Guidance begins with not just telling children what to do, but teaching them what to do in a positive and caring way.

Once Upon A Time . . .

Something Else Instead

Corey slumped into the old wicker rocker on the front porch of his farmhouse.

This was his favorite time of day. The sun was just beginning to climb in the sky, his coffee was steaming and he was alone. In about 30 minutes his wife and all three of his rambunctious kids would be piling down the stairs and fighting like scrappy cats. He could take the squawking and fussing, but his wife could not, and lately that seemed to be their only discussion. Who was right? Should they let the three-year-old whine, the five-year-old punch, and the seven-year-old tattle? Corey tended to remember his own father walking away at such times, or, after holding in his anger for so long, he would unload on anyone within earshot. Corey didn't know what to do, but fighting with his wife wasn't helping any of them.

Corey tipped his head back and from his old chair surveyed his land and the work that lay ahead of him that day. His eyes came to rest on the old, empty corn crib. He remembered when he was about four years old. His father had scolded him harshly for going in there, climbing on the corn and sliding down. He must have gotten in a half dozen good slides before his father caught him. Corey remembered thinking he had found a very fun thing to do. His father made a big deal out of his knocking the corn down and making a mess. Corey had never understood why that mattered until now.

As a father himself now, Corey realized that his dad was afraid for his safety.

His dad really loved him and didn't want any harm to come to him. He had not been able to see the little boy in the yard and was probably worried. The corn could have buried a boy his size pretty easily.



He also remembered his grandfather coming up behind his dad and asking gently, "What would you like the boy to do instead?"

"What?" his father had asked sharply.

Grandpa calmly repeated the question, "What would you like the boy to do instead? He wants to slide. He has to build up his muscles. That isn't a good place for him to play. What can he climb on and slide down instead of the corn?"

His father was quiet for a minute and then said, "Well, I suppose we could put up a real slide and maybe some swings. There's nothing else here I want these kids climbing on anyway." Then he said, "In the meanwhile, don't go in there, Corey. It's no place to play."

Corey thought his memory might be the perfect place to start. He would try showing his children what to do instead of the whining, the hitting and the tattling. There must be reasons behind it, he thought. Maybe spending time just watching them would give him the information he needed to help each child do "something else instead" of their negative behavior.

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What Children Need

Fathers and Discipline

Guidance of children begins with understanding their needs and motivations. Young children need to explore the world around them and express themselves. As they do, often they get into things or act in ways that can be frustrating for parents. It is important to understand that children are not trying to do things that are inappropriate. They often simply are not developed enough to understand the impacts of their choices and behavior. For example, how does a three-year-old know that getting an extra cookie from the cupboard will "ruin his dinner?" He doesn't know. He just knows that he's hungry and a cookie looks good to eat. Here are some ideas about what children need from fathers when it comes to discipline.

• Babies –

Infants need time to get to know both parents. Be involved in care routines as well as playing with your child. No discipline is needed for babies, just lots of love, time and adjustment for all family members. Consistent care and patience with babies is the key.



- **Babies** – Trade off so both parents get enough sleep to handle the crying, feeding and laundry tasks. Babies cry to alert parents to a need, not to irritate or interrupt you. Check to see if the baby is hungry, sleepy, lonely, gassy, cold, sick or just tired. Colicky babies pose a special need for patience as parents often feel hopeless to help.

Call your health care provider for suggestions. Also, remember to never, never shake a baby. Shaking a baby can easily cause brain damage, injuries, and even death to an infant. It is much better to get a trusted caregiver to relieve you if you are out of patience or tired than to take it out on a child.

- **Toddlers** – Toddlers are learning to separate from their parents and to think independently. They have strong emotions. This means it is your job to provide a place that is toddler-proof, interesting and safe. Young children must learn autonomy and making choices to function in the world, and so it is natural for them to challenge parents. Parents should not take this personally. Instead, make situations available where the toddler can have some power or control and provide opportunities to make choices. For example, offer two choices of shoes for the toddler to wear and let him or her choose a pair.

- **Preschoolers and Kindergartners** – Preschool and kindergarten children from 3-6 years of age are working on power and identity. Many times you will hear "You aren't the boss of me" or "I am going to hurt you." Your response is what they are watching for so they can learn to handle emotions and conflict. Be prepared. This is not an overly cooperative age. Keep your frustration in check and help children by modeling appropriate responses to situations.
- **Preschoolers and Kindergartners** – Children at this age are beginning to understand consequences. Parents can use guidance techniques beyond redirection, such as reasoning, role-playing alternatives to misguided behavior or "time out" and other techniques to help children learn consequences. If a "time out" is used as a consequence, a good rule of thumb is one minute per year of a child's age. Fathers should always avoid harshness and learn to be firm but positive with children.

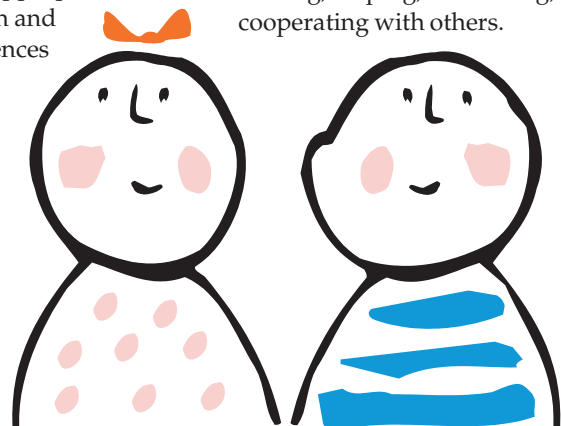
Fathering Facts

On Fathers and Child Guidance

How fathers behave in giving guidance and discipline has an important influence on young children. Young children need love, understanding, and clear guidance. What does the research say about fathers and child guidance? Here are some key findings:

- Children who have social challenges learn to handle situations better when fathers provide support and gentle guidance rather than taking over a situation or punishing the child for social misbehavior.
- Fathers who do not set appropriate limits with their children and do not enforce consequences are more likely to have children who are aggressive on the playground and more often engage in destructive behavior.

- Children who witness fathers using force or coercion to get what they want in family relationships are more likely to believe that they will get what they want with peers by acting aggressively and avoiding negotiation.
- When fathers use disciplinary tactics such as explaining causes and effects, setting clear limits, using logical consequences, negotiating, and getting ideas from the child, their children tend to have better communication skills, greater self-control, and engage in more positive behaviors like sharing, helping, comforting, and cooperating with others.



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Activities for Fathers and Children

This section provides a variety of activities that you can do with your children. Have fun!

- ❑ Take your baby on a walk in your neighborhood. The exercise and fresh air will make you both feel better. Remember to talk about where you are going, and point out interesting sites — a dog, a ball field, the cement mixer.

- ❑ Make a squishy bag for baby. Use a sturdy plastic freezer bag with a zip top. Put two or three colorful plastic toys in the bag, partially fill it with water, remove most of the air and zip it shut. Encourage the baby to poke and pat the bag to splash the toys around. Do not leave the baby's side while he plays with this toy!

- ❑ Toddlers love to help. Be sure to incorporate your child into your work whenever possible. Toddlers who are beyond mouthing everything can wash their hands and tear the lettuce into a plastic colander for tonight's dinner. Simply rinse it when they are finished with their tearing. Sitting in the high chair for this project gets the child at a level where he or she can see you doing your cooking work.

- ❑ Blow bubbles together. Talk about the shape, colors and sizes you make. Baby shampoo and water make tearless bubbles. Dish soap, water and glycerin (made several hours before use) make the strongest bubbles, especially on cool and humid days.

- ❑ Turn on some tunes and dance with your kids. It's creative, and it's exercise!

- ❑ Preschoolers are hard to catch, so good luck making a pretend "preschooler sandwich." Start with a slice of pretend bread (a bed pillow); next, add the filling (the child); now add pretend invisible lettuce, pickles, and silly stuffings from head to toe. This feels a lot like a good back rub for the child, as you add the pretend fillings and slather on the mayo. Now add the other slice of bread and pretend to chomp away. Do not play this game if your child is a biter! Kindergartners like this kind of pretend and will probably insist that you take a turn as well — enjoy.

- ❑ How about some science? Fill drinking glasses with varying levels of water. Tap on the rim or middle with a spoon. What kind of sounds do they make? Can you make a scale by arranging the glasses? Can you tap out a tune? Play the spoons while you are at it.

- ❑ Put a blanket out in the yard tonight if the weather is warm enough. Sit or lay on it to look up at the sky. Talk about the stars, the lights from the city, airplanes and planets. Use a paper towel tube for a telescope or two empty toilet paper rolls for binoculars.

Solving Problems with Children

Work with your partner and the child to solve specific problems together. Problem solving feels like a formal process at first but soon becomes part of everyday life. Even very young children can use parts of this problem solving model when taught how to do it.

Problem Solving

- 1 Have the child talk about his feelings and needs.
- 2 Talk about your feelings and needs.
- 3 Together, come up with a list of possible solutions.
- 4 Write down all of the ideas without commenting on them; just write.
- 5 Cross out all of the solutions that you and your child don't like.
- 6 Decide which one you will try.
- 7 Write out the plan (and any consequences) you agree on, together.

Tips for Dads on Child Guidance

Fathers are often looking for tips on how to get things done the right way when it comes to discipline and guidance. Here are a few ideas to put in your tool box of techniques to use with children.

Teach by doing. You model behaviors every day in every way. Your children may not always hear you but they are always watching you. Be the person you want them to be.

Young children need a few simple rules and consequences to go with them. Say, for example, "You can ride your trike on the sidewalk from this chalk line all the way over to this chalk line. If you go beyond that, I can't see you." Then give a clear consequence: "I will put the trike away for a while if you go beyond the lines." Be reasonable. If the child takes a wide swing on the corner to turn his trike, well that's the way practice driving can be. If she willfully shoots past the line to see what happens next, the trike gets parked until later in the day. Make sure the consequences are appropriate. For example, the trike may get parked for the afternoon, not for a year — consequences have to be reasonable.

Follow through on the consequences if they break the rules. So often parents level threats and never follow through. If you have consequences planned into the rule, it is easier to follow through. If you don't plan to follow through, don't bother having a rule. At the same time, be sensitive to the situation and to the needs of your child at a particular time.

Change the surroundings. If your toddler is throwing food from the tray, wash him up and send him off to play. Hungry children eat. Children who are not hungry throw food.

Offer simple choices. "Do you want to brush your teeth first or wash your face?" Don't offer choices if there aren't any. Offering choices gives children some opportunity for control over their environment and helps them learn responsibility.

Let children help with making up the rules. If children are old enough, engage them in discussing rules and guidelines for behavior. As they discuss what is appropriate and how to behave, they are more likely to follow such guidelines if they know the rules and have helped to make them up.

Tell the child what "to do instead." Say "pat the kitten gently like this" instead of "don't touch the kitten!"

Share concerns firmly, without hurting. Use clear, firm messages for unacceptable behavior without physical punishment, shame, ridicule, or name calling. Give a reason why the behavior is not acceptable, such as it might be hurtful to others or unsafe for the child.

Call attention to those behaviors you appreciate. They will show up more often.

Show children how their actions affect others. Everyone feels better when they have an opportunity to work through the problem and then make amends for their mistakes.

Teach children how to express their strong emotions. "I am so mad. I was still playing with that, Nathan — give it back!" Children need to learn how to express emotions and negotiate, rather than simply lashing out. For example, encourage the child to say, "You can use it when I am done" rather than hitting or pushing. Teach them to use their words and express themselves.

Spend time with each child each day. Parents often say, "He's just doing that to get attention." Positive attention ahead of time can mean less whining, hurting, tattling and other negative attention-getting behaviors. "Father time" is an investment in the future.

Story Time

Just Like Daddy by Frank Asch
(Aladdin Paperbacks, 1984)

*What Mommies Do Best,
What Daddies Do Best* by Laura Joffe
Numeroff (Simon & Schuster, 1998)

*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible,
No Good, Very Bad Day* by
Judith Viorst & Ray Cruz

Fathering Resources

*Helping Children Learn Self Control:
A Guide to Discipline* by the National
Association for the Education of Young
Children, 2001. Washington, D.C.:
National Association for the Education
of Young Children.

*How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and
Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber
and Elaine Mazlish, 1980. New York, NY:
Avon Books.

Positive Discipline A-Z by Jane Nelsen,
Lynn Lott and H. Stephen Glenn, 1999.
Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing.

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Hart, C.H., Olsen, S.F., Robinson, C.C., & Mandlco, B.L. (1996). The development of social and communicative competence in childhood: Review and a model of personal, familial, and extrafamilial processes. *Communication Yearbook*, 20, 305-373.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2001). *Helping Children Learn Self Control: A Guide to Discipline*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

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