

**Finding a Discipline Approach that Works for You**  
**South Austin API November 2008**

Questions to Ask Yourself When Disciplining (Redirecting Children's Behavior)

1. Am I angry, do I want to "hurt back," do I feel powerless?
2. Do I want my child to do what I'm asking in order to a) be a better person, or b) get him to obey me?
3. Do I want to control my child, or would I rather teach him to control himself?
4. Am I using fear or love to motivate my child?
5. What do I want my child to learn right now?
6. How can I teach what I want my child to learn without being coercive?

Is Your Discipline Approach Working for You? (Redirecting Children's Behavior)

- *What happens to your child after being disciplined? Is s/he angry? Is s/he trying to get back at you in an underhanded way? Is s/he fully cooperating or withdrawn and sullen?*
- *What happens to her/his self-esteem? Lowered or enhanced?*
- *Does s/he feel empowered to repair her/his mistake?*
- *Does s/he become more externally motivated or internally motivated?*
- *What happens to your relationship? Is communication better? Because of your discipline, will s/he be more or less likely to tell you about her/his mistakes in the future? Will s/he be too afraid? Did you win the battle (get the child to do what you wanted) and lose the war (dampen your delicate relationship)?*
- *Does the interaction encourage your child to discuss her/his wants and feelings? Or does s/he become hesitant to express her/his feelings or opinions?*
- *Does the interaction improve her/his ability to solve conflicts in a way that allows both of you to win?*
- *Does s/he learn about her/his behavior in a way that provides increased choices? Or does s/he learn that s/he has no choice at all?*

## Resources for Finding Your Discipline Style

### 1. Read Related Books (AustinAttachedMoms has a parenting book club)

Samples from API's and LLL's book lists:

- The Natural Child – Jan Hunt
- Playful Parenting – Cohen
- The Discipline Book – Sears
- How to Talk so Kids Will Listen – Faber & Mazlish
- Redirecting Children's Behavior - Kvols
- Raising Your Spirited Child - Kurcinka
- Kids are Worth it! Giving the Gift of Inner Discipline - Coloroso
- Becoming the Parent You Want to Be – Davis & Keyser
- Natural Family Living – O'Mara
- Unconditional Parenting – Kohn
- The Five Love Languages of Children - Chapman

### 2. Attend Parenting Workshops/Classes

Some available in Austin:

- Redirecting Children's Behavior workshop
- How to Talk so Kids Will Listen workshop
- For Kids' Sake parenting classes (check web site)
- Connections' parenting classes (check web site)

### 3. Learn More About Your Child

- a. Temperament (Raising Your Spirited Child): sensitivity, intensity, perceptiveness, energy, persistence, adaptability, regularity, moods
- b. Personality: extroverted, introverted, etc.
- c. Developmental level: different approaches may be appropriate at different ages/developmental stages
- d. Preferred "love language" (Five Love Languages of Children): Physical affection? Verbal? Quality time? Doing things for? etc

### 4. Examine Yourself

- a. Your temperament (Raising Your Spirited Child)
- b. What discipline approach did your parents use and how did that affect you/your relationships?
- c. What type of relationship would you like to have with your child?
- d. What are your triggers?
- e. How do you express your feelings and cope with frustrations?
- f. What is causing discipline conflicts: child (temperament, developmental level, tired/hungry, etc) or you (need to feel in control, unnecessary or unreasonable demand, disrespectful delivery, punitive approach, etc)?

### 5. Talk to Others

- Watch other families in action and note what works/doesn't
- Ask other respected parents how they handle situations
- Join online discussions groups/forums (AustinAttachedMoms, AttachedParentsWithOlderKids, etc)

## Discipline Beyond Yelling, Spanking: What TO DO

- Jan Hunt (Natural Child author) offers “Parenting Cards” with brief affirmations, inspiration and encouragement for parents ([www.naturalchild.org/parenting\\_cards](http://www.naturalchild.org/parenting_cards))
- **Provide a safe and positive environment.** Baby proof, move breakable items, provide low/open shelves with safe/fun items, provide routines for children who prefer them; adjust schedule/activities to child’s rhythm/attention span when possible
- **Apply the Golden Rule:** Put Yourself in Child’s place. How would you want to be treated? Would you speak to your mate like this? “A person’s a person, no matter how small”
- **Distract and Redirect!**
- **Focus on what the child CAN do vs. what not to do**
  - Focus on positive, use Yes as much as possible
  - Offer child ways to help you in your work or daily routine
  - Offer choices
  - Show the child how to make amends
- **Give advanced notice:** 10-minute warning at park, “list game” for errands/store
- **Communicate respectfully.**
  - Go to your child (vs. talking across the room), get down to child’s level, engage them with eye contact, speak calmly and positively. Reconnect
  - Give child time to agree, don’t be in a hurry; give a graceful way out without ultimatums or “I told you so”
- **Accept/reflect feelings.** Show empathy; Validate child’s feelings: child should never be rejected for any particular kinds of feelings; give name for feelings
- **Model appropriate behavior:** show, not tell
  - Demonstrate coping skills: identify and express feelings, walk away to cool off, share and be courteous, model problem-solving skills
- **Prevent unwanted behavior (tantrums) by**
  - Meeting child’s needs when first expressed
  - Learning children’s triggers and anticipating them
- **Pick your battles:** is someone’s safety at stake? Stop and think: is this really important?
- **Give a reason:** explain why we do or don’t do things
- **Stay on your child’s side: try to find a win-win solution** whenever possible
- **Use humor!**
  - Great tool for diffusing tense situations, for reconnecting
  - Keep perspective: will you look back at this moment later and laugh? If so, then why not start laughing now?
  - **Make it a game:** who can get there first?
  - **Make it a song:** say No in a funny voice, crossing-street song, hand-washing song, etc
- **Encourage autonomy:** Let children make choices; Show respect for a child’s struggle; Encourage children to use sources outside the home (librarian, store clerk, friend, teacher); Allow children to experience natural consequences of their actions; Engage in problem solving; Let children own their own body - refrain from fussing over a bent collar, lint, tucking in clothes, etc.
- **Problem solve WITH your kids.** Ask vs. tell. Even in play.
- **Don’t talk about your child in front of him/her,** no matter how young!
  - Let a child answer for him/herself. When a store clerk asks you a question about the child, redirect question to child.
- **Quality Family Time.** *Quality time is the best gift we can give our children.*
  - Have regular family outings, meals together, “game night,” etc.
  - Hold regular family meetings to discuss family issues (guidelines in Redirecting Children’s Behavior and steps for conflict resolution).
- If employing Time Out: Offer as **Opportunity to Cool Off** vs. Punishment

## Parenting Mindset: Discipline

- **The purpose of discipline is not punishment.** Children need not suffer to learn.
  - Children are punished when:
    - Their behavior is controlled through fear
    - Their feelings are not respected
    - They behave to avoid a penalty or get a bribe
    - The adult tells the child only what NOT to do
  - Children who are punished
    - Feel humiliated
    - Hide their mistakes
    - Tend to be angry and aggressive
    - Fail to develop control of themselves – NAEYC
- **Choose closeness** with your child over power struggles. Put the Relationship first. Being right isn't what matters.
- **Same Side:** Anything that keeps us on the same side as our child is more respectful and consequently will be more successful than anything that sets up a hierarchy and puts a cold distance between us, such as parent-set standards and extrinsic rewards for specific behaviors. - Hunt
- **Respect:** The husband starts to argue with a visiting friend. The wife says, "It's not nice to argue with your friend! I won't have this! Go sit in the bedroom for half an hour!" Will the husband become less argumentative? Will the embarrassment of the situation set him straight? Will he feel like apologizing to his friend? - Hunt
- **Trust** your child. Attribute to children the best possible motive consistent with the facts.
- **Be Reflective.** Why does a particular behavior bother you? Is your child's or another child's safety at stake? Try to figure out what drives your parenting style and why certain things irk you.
- **Reconsider your Requests.** Perhaps when your child doesn't do what you want, the problem isn't with the child but with the demand. Is it really necessary? Reasonable? Rethink the value and necessity of your requests.
- **Keep your eye on the long-term.** Do you want to encourage an older child/adult who has self-esteem? intellectual curiosity? leadership skills? *When parents focus on the broader objectives rather than getting their kids to obey at this instant, they tend to use better parenting skills.*

## **Language of Respectful Discipline**

(How to Talk so Kids Will Listen, The Natural Child, Discipline Book, Natural Family Living, Unconditional Parenting)

- Would you be willing to...
- I'm not comfortable with that option because...
- What could we do to help Joe feel better?
- Ask vs. tell. Ask more, talk less.
- Say Yes as much as possible, limit No to the big stuff.
- Alternatives to NO:
  - Give information: when child asks to go to friend's house, "we're having dinner in 5 minutes."
  - Accept feelings: "I can see that if it were up to you, we'd stay for a long, long time." "It's hard to leave a place you enjoy so much."
  - Describe problem: "I'd like to drive you there, but the problem is that the electrician is coming in a half hour."
  - Substitute a Yes: "Yes, right after lunch." vs. "No, we haven't eaten yet."
  - Give yourself time to think: "let me think." "let's talk about it."
- "I want" requests:
  - Fantasy: I wish I had one to give you
  - Empathy: I'd like to have one of those too.
  - Yes, wouldn't that be neat if we could...
  - That would be fun, wouldn't it.
  - I hear how much you want that.
  - Let's write it down on your list.
- Respect the struggle: "sometimes it helps if you..." vs. "that's easy/hard" which are judgment statements that can backfire
- To alleviate a child's "no" streak, ask "yes" questions: Are you feeling sad that happened? Is this frustrating you?
- Engage in problem solving: I see that upset you. What can we do to help you feel better?
- Describe vs. advise: inform. I see... the tub is almost full. The milk spilled.
- Describe behavior rather than character.
- Identify feelings. Give them a name.
- Use "I" statements to describe the issue. "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_ because I \_\_\_\_\_. What I want is \_\_\_\_\_. What I love about you is \_\_\_\_\_."  
Example: I feel frustrated when you take my pens and don't return them because I can't find them. What I want is to have my pens handy when I need them. What I love about you is your interest in writing and your creativity.