



## **TIME-OUT, GROUNDING, CONSEQUENCES NOT WORKING? TRY ANOTHER APPROACH!**

By Judy Arnall

When you look at your child now and imagine the teenage years ahead, does the image fill your heart with dread or joy and anticipation? Do you see your relationship as a warm, loving, close one that has open communication, shared feelings, consideration, trust, and fun together? Do you see your teen coming to you first when they have a problem? Or do you see behaviour such as lying, sneakiness, snide remarks, attitude, and non-existent communication?

Parenting is relationship building. How you parent today will either build or break the bonds you have with your children in the future. Some aspects of parenting can disconnect the relationship. One of those aspects is disciplining using punishment.

Can a parent discipline without using punishment? Of course! It takes time, a little bit of skill and a lot of patience. But any worthwhile

relationship takes time. Just think how much time you are investing in meting out punishments.

Why give up punishments? Children who are not punished have more control over their fate. They learn problem solving skills and healthy conflict resolution. They have healthy self-esteem. They develop the inner voice of conscience and have more empathy for other's needs and values because their needs have been met.

Why do parents keep using punishments? In times of stress, we parent the way we were parented. Sometimes we know of no other way.

Punishments work on some children in the short term. Children who have an easygoing temperament are easily compliant with even the threat of punishment. It's the same with younger children. As children get older, punishments get harder to enforce because children become more capable of escape and revenge. Long term damage is the lack of a child's inner conscience and an increased reliance on other's approval. Some children may withdraw. Often, the children who respond the best to punishment are the ones who need it the least. Then there are older children and spirited children.

Punishments only serve to make them more rebellious, angry, humiliated, resentful and revengeful. Those are the children that are sent to time-out and instead of thinking of their wrongdoing, they are planning ways to get even with you. A minor discipline problem can turn into a major power struggle. For both types of temperament, the greatest danger of using punishment is that the feelings and needs of the child driving the behaviour are not addressed by the parent.

Punishments can bring about temporary and superficially good behaviour based on threats and fear. However, it's a known fact that children do not open up and express their feelings to parents they fear. Communication shuts down just as you want it revved up for the teen years. As educator John Holt once said, "When we make a child afraid, we stop learning dead in its tracks."

How a child feels is how he behaves. Jane Nelson, author of Positive Discipline, said that "Where did we get the idea that in order for children to behave better, we need to make them feel worse?" Think of your child as a boiling pot of water on a gas stove. His feelings are the flame driving the water to boil. The water boiling over the pot is his behaviour. Turn up the heat and the behaviour will increase. Slap a lid on the pot. The lid is punishment. The lid will stop the behaviour of water boiling over the sides for a little while, but without

the flames (feelings) being attended too, soon the boiling water will pop the lid off and overflow again. Using the lid is a temporary stop-gap measure. Turning down the heat and addressing the feelings/needs will permanently stop the overflow. The lid is punishment. Turning down the heat is discipline. Good discipline allows parents to find the unmet need or unacknowledged feelings and help the child find acceptable ways to meet it. This eventually helps the child learn to identify their own needs and how to address them in appropriate ways. This is developing inner conscience, not outer control.

So if you are using time-outs, grounding, unrelated consequences, spanking, yelling, and removal of privileges, and it's not gaining the permanent compliance you want, perhaps its time for another approach.

How does a parent know if their discipline is teaching or punishment? Ask yourself three questions: Is it respectful and would I want it done to me? Is it effective long term? Does it help my child develop valuable life skills for good character? For example, let's look at time-out. When you send a child to time-out, do you choose the time limit? The place? Do you choose the tools/or lack of tools to help him calm down? Do you decide if he goes alone or with someone? If yes, the time-out is a punishment. When you send a child to time-out, does he choose when to come out when he's calm? Does he choose the place that is most calming to him? Does he choose the tools to help him calm down and think such as music, a stuffy, a cozy, comforting place on his bed? Does he decide if he wants to go alone and not be bothered by anyone, (as preferred by introverted children) or does he want you to come with him so he can talk it out (as preferred by extroverted children). If yes, this type of time-out is a valuable discipline tool that is respectful, lifelong, and a valuable skill to have as an adult. As adults, we call it renewal time or a break, or even time out for parents. It's not punishment. It's a tool for building relationships, not disconnecting them. **We are raising an entire generation of children adverse to taking a time-out because they have only experienced it as a punishment in childhood.**

So if you are using time-outs, grounding, unrelated consequences, spanking, yelling, and removal of privileges, and it's not gaining the permanent compliance you want, perhaps its time for another approach.

Parent with the end in mind. Remember your long-term goals instead of immediate results. The long-term goals of developing life skills such as respect, problem solving, effective communication, empathy and self-control rather than outside control can be attained faster when punishment is out of the mix. You can set limits, provide guidance and correct misbehavior all without the use of punishment.

If you would like to know more about many other non-punitive discipline tools that enhance the parent-child relationship, look into the multitude of parenting courses that are available in communities and colleges. Parent Effectiveness Training is one of the oldest, evidenced based, proven course among many others. Look forward to those teen years!

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