

Sue Cepin's Philosophy of Training Children

We are transformed into great parents by the Holy Spirit as we embrace the gospel.

Galatians 5:16-26 (NIV)

¹⁶So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

¹⁷For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Therefore, the first priority in training their children is not the children themselves, it's the parent's relationship with Jesus. As we care the most about Jesus (as the Spirit does), the fruit of the Spirit in all its varieties will gradually grow in us (Gal. 5:22-23; 25), and the "acts of the sinful nature" will die away (Gal. 5:19-21; 24).

The Gospel is:

a) what Jesus has done for us, not what we are doing for Him

b) our identity found in Christ

Where do I find my value?

If it's in my children's response to me or in their mood, I give them the power to manipulate me. I will also manipulate them.

If it's in how other people view my children, I tend to be overly severe or shaming toward them in specific situations but inconsistent in other areas.

If it's in something else entirely, I am angry with being inconvenienced by my children and will ignore them frequently, as they get in the way of my goals.

If I find my value in my identity in Christ, I am free to engage my children with care and also require difficult things of them as I seek to love them well.

My children may not like me and may temporarily make life more difficult, but eventually the result will be good in both of us – we are growing up together!

c) our ability to live out the values of the kingdom of God.

The Mechanics: Raising Kids with Kingdom Values

- Objective: The high priority concept is Honor Your Father and Mother.
This means that they do what you ask
They respond to your requests by saying “yes” instead of “no”
They make requests of you, not demands
- If this is consistently pursued, other disciplinary issues will often resolve themselves. -

1) Assess

Long-term

How are you getting your value from your children?

Are you overly concerned with how they regard you?

Are you overly concerned with how other people regard them?

What long-term habits do you want your children to develop?

[Long-term thinking for young children may include a matter of weeks, expanding to a matter of months or even years for older children.]

What rebellious behaviors do you see in your children?

Is there peace in your home?

Be objective! You're the coach!

Short-term

Disciplinary issues will inevitably arise that have not been established in your long-term rules. In this case, it is necessary to come up with a disciplinary sequence on the fly. Indicators that it's time for short-term intervention include:

- you feel angry with your children
- you feel helpless to stop their bad behavior
- you are yelling at your children
- you are shaming your children or becoming verbally manipulative
- your children are behaving badly in new ways
- your children are about to hurt themselves or someone else
- your children are about to experience a new situation
- your children are showing patterns of bad behavior at a particular time

Assessment: What is the behavior that is unacceptable? What is a good consequence for this behavior? [If you are in a public space, you may want to modify what you would normally do. Just make sure you are willing to follow it through when the time comes. Then establish the rule & complete the process.]

Be objective! You're the trainer!

2) Establish

Decide on a few rules that address the specifics of your assessment.

Choose consequences which will support these rules. Consequences should vary in severity to match the rule. I use harsher consequences for high priority rules: if the child's safety would be endangered by breaking the rule or if the rule is related to a direct rebellious response to authority. I use milder consequences for lower priority rules and may gradually escalate the consequence if the child doesn't seem to be learning the rule over time.

Get your children's full attention, get down to eye level with them and tell them the rules.

Tell them what the consequences will be if the rules are broken.

Speak firmly to your children, but not in anger. Be objective.

3) Complete

The next time your child breaks the rule, get down to eye level with him. **Remind** him of what rule he's broken and what the consequence you will give him the next time he does it. Tell him that this is his **final warning**.

The next time your child breaks the rule, get down to eye level with him. Have him look you in the eye. Hold him firmly by the shoulder if necessary. **Remind** him of what rule he's broken and **immediately follow through** by giving the consequence you promised.

After the consequence is complete, tell your child, "I would like you to apologize to me for _____" (or have him apologize to whichever person he's wronged). Have him **apologize** for the specific thing he did wrong. Then tell him you **forgive** him, give him a hug, and tell him you love him. **Move on** and don't bring up this incident again. Don't ask for an apology before the consequence is given, as this creates confusion.

Don't do long-term assessments when it's time to complete. If you've established a rule, follow through when it is broken just like you said you would. You can re-evaluate later.

Younger children may need to go through this entire "Establish - Complete" process for each rule every day. As children grow older, the sequence may happen over a longer period of time. Disciplinary issues for older children tend to be more sporadic and subtle. Give a "final warning" and then give the consequence the next time you see the behavior even if it's been several days or weeks, depending on the specific issue.

As rules become established and accepted, you can add new rules to address new issues. If you are inconsistent or children fall out of the habit of an old rule, start over! Every day is a new opportunity.

Don't offer explanations to your children during the Establish or Complete phases. Be brief and clear with your instructions and reminders. If you believe your children need an explanation for a

rule, wait until some *later* time when discipline is not underway and talk to them about the rule, only as long as their attention span can handle. Explanations during the disciplinary process will tend to escalate into a lecture or tirade or will offer the child an opportunity to sidetrack and avoid the consequence. This undermines the disciplinary process. If they ask “why?” during this process, either tell them that the appropriate response is “yes, mom” or tell them that you’ll explain later.

Scale of consequences

- Practice:** A very mild consequence that is the most frequently necessary is PRACTICE. Children are learning a huge array of new, complex behaviors and interactions. They may need to practice these in specific ways a number of times before they learn. I use *practice* for a lot of mundane items that are long-term in nature. If I see a behavior in my children that I don’t like but which doesn’t seem to merit a consequence at the time, I will refrain from lecturing, yelling, or complaining about it. Instead, I tell them what they did and ask them to try again, and don’t move on until they have practiced the correct way. This is the case especially for how they use their words or their bodies (saying please and thank you, saying, “Yes, mom” when I ask them to do or not do something, speaking respectfully to me, putting an item away instead of dropping it on the floor, closing the door behind them, etc.) This way they gain *practice* at doing something the appropriate way instead of just hearing about how something should be done. Repeated practice over a long period of time becomes a habit!
- Hand Flick:** I find physical consequences particular effective with younger children. In our home, we’ve seen children begin obviously rebellious behaviors as early as they become mobile (this is usually when rules become important for safety), around 9 months of age. Early training may be effectively accomplished through a flick on the back of the hand. The benefit of this consequence is that it is immediately experienced – young children have a shorter span of attention in which they can recognize a behavior and its consequence.
- Time-Outs:** Other consequences that may be effective are time-outs. If a time-out is given, the child should be required to sit in a specific location for a specific amount of time (one minute per year of age). When the time-out is over, they should stay in that place until you come over (which should be immediately). They are to apologize and be released before they move on. Jo relies heavily on time-outs and has a good explanation of how they can be used well in her book [Ask Supernanny: What Every Parent Wants to Know](#).
- Loss of Privilege:** Sometimes a consequence can be very natural to the behavior. The child may lose a privilege or favorite item for a *specific* period of time. It’s important to keep this period of time reasonable.
- Spanking:** I have found spanking effective with my children, especially in their early years (between 2 and 5ish). Spankings with toddlers should happen with immediacy. Spankings of children three and over should happen in private (away from other

children or grown-ups watching) and should be part of a clear disciplinary sequence: the rule should have been clearly established and the warning of the specific consequence already given. Spankings should be hard enough that the child cries, or they lose their effectiveness. However, one to three swats is all that is necessary. Spankings should be deliberately given with no hint of shaming, abusiveness, or loss of control on your part; otherwise they become harmful.

Shoulder Pinch: This can be especially effective in public places where subtlety is necessary and your disciplinary options are limited. Take your child firmly by the shoulder and speak to him firmly as you communicate a warning. This can help convey your intention to follow through.

Rewards

Verbal Praise: If my children have chosen to obey for a span of time after being given a rule or a warning, I tell them what they've done and how much I appreciate it.

Privilege: Privilege grows with responsibility. Children who are developing good habits over time and gaining more responsibilities around the house should also gain new privileges. This could be a natural process.

This could also be part of an Establish – Complete structure to develop a new skill set (like chores): privileges work well when success is tracked over time as the children are working toward a goal.

Privileges are less effective when used during a Short-term disciplinary process, since they can easily become bribery, which is a tool of manipulation.

Chores

Children learn many important lessons through their participation in chores:

- Skills for running a household when they are adults
- The value of serving others
- How to participate in a family where each member is valued and needed
- An awareness of their personal responsibility
- Gratitude for work other people do for them
- A sense of having an impact

Children should start doing simple chores when they are young. Chores should grow in complexity and mastery along with the child.

It's a lot of work to teach children to do chores, but this is a Long-term training goal which will bear fruit in the future!