

Helping Children Make Good Choices

Ready!

- This unit could take from 15 to 60 minutes depending on how much information you cover and the amount of discussion you draw out. For tips on encouraging good discussions, see “Drawing the Best Out of Your Students” at www.arfamilies.org/family_life/educators.
- The objective of the unit is to help childcare givers set limits for children in ways that encourage cooperation.
- This unit is intended for parents, child care workers, and other early childhood professionals working with children who are at least 2 years of age.
- Read or review the units “Setting Limits” and “Giving Children Choices” at www.arfamilies.org click on “Family Life” then “Living/Loving in Families” then scroll down “Guide,” where both articles are listed.
- Read through the teaching suggestions which follow and customize them to your personality, objective, and the group you will be teaching. You may trim certain questions in order to fit your time slot. You may choose to make your own abbreviated outline to teach from or to highlight key points in this teaching guide.
- With some groups it may be useful to hand out copies of the web unit for them to study at home.

Grab!

- Take a copy of the worksheet for each participant.
- If you plan to evaluate the session, take a copy of the evaluation form for each participant.
- If you want to share them with participants, take a copy of the web units for each person. Alternately, you might invite participants to read the units online before coming to class.

Go!

Children learn from experience. For example, a baby may learn that biting mother while nursing makes for unpleasantness. A toddler may learn that walking in stocking feet on a slippery floor may lead to painful falls. What does a child learn when a parent tells a child to put away toys? Explain better. I think you want to know what a child learns from the result of their response to instruction.

[Allow several people to share. Show interest and support for every answer. The group should quickly come to the conclusion that what the child learns depends on what happens after the child does or doesn't put the toys away.]

If the child does NOT put away the toys and nothing happens, what does the child learn?

You don't have to listen to mom or dad. They make rules but don't enforce them.

If the child does NOT put away the toys and gets spanked or yelled at what does the child learn?

[In the course of the discussion, it will probably come out that the child learns at least two lessons: Mom and dad are serious about the rules but they aren't very nice. If parents do not get both points, prompt them: "Is there anything else the child learns?" or "What does the child learn about his or her parents?"]

Are those the lessons we want our children to learn?

We want them to learn to obey but not to resent parents.

There are many things we can do to help children learn to obey rules while still feeling loved and appreciated by parents. Let's see how many ideas we can come up with. What things might we do to help children learn both lessons?

[Encourage discussion. Ideas will probably include things like: Ask in nice ways. Ask them to do things that they can do. Help them get started.]

Let's consider an example. Imagine that you have a school-age child who is playing with toys. A neighbor child comes and asks your child to come out and play. You have a rule that the toys must be put away before going out to play. Let's talk about what the child would learn if you acted in each of the following ways:

[You will want to mention that they can begin to fill out their worksheet as you discuss these situations.]

You tell the child to go out and play but must clean up the toys later. What would the child learn?

[The child would learn that the rules are not enforced. The child might learn to manipulate the parents – promise to take care of the toys later but never do it.]

What would the child learn if you stand at the door and threaten "You may not go outside until the toys are cleaned up!"?

[The child will probably learn that you are serious about the rule but might also learn to resist your power by pouting or throwing tantrums.]

What would the child learn if you supported the rule AND supported the child by saying something like: "It will be fun to go out and play. I'll help you put your toys away so you can go."?

[There are many possibilities. If the parent puts all the toys away while the child does nothing, the child will learn to let the parent do the work. If the parent just helps the child, the child may learn that rules are to be respected and that parents help you get good things in your life.]

You can probably see that there is not one magic answer. Even the best idea must be done in a way that works with the child. You are the experts on your children so, if you combine your knowledge of your children with these two rules, you will probably be successful with your children. The two rules are:

- 1. If you have made a rule that is important, be sure to enforce it.**
- 2. Help the child obey in a way that encourages cooperation.**

Let's see if we can apply these rules to a different situation. Imagine that you call your child to come to dinner but the child keeps playing in the yard. What could you do that honors the rule and respects the child?

[Encourage many answers. You may get answers like: Go to the child and tell him that he must come now. Go to the child and ask if she wants to come in or wants to be carried in. Give the child a five minute warning so that he can be more ready to come in. Invite the child to come in and help by dishing up the main course or some other activity the child would like. There are many things that might work. Acknowledge all good ideas. If some parents suggest that a certain idea won't work, ask the parent, "Maybe that wouldn't work for your child. What would work?" This is a place where parents learn to think in a new way about how to work with their children. Take what time is needed. Remind the parents of the two rules. If time allows, you can help the parents apply the ideas by asking the following question:]

Can you think of some situations where your child does not cooperate with time important rules you have made?

[Invite class members to describe situations where the rules are not reasonable, are not enforced or are not enforced effectively. Select one or two of the situations and invite class members to suggest what could be done differently to help children learn to honor rules while respecting themselves.]

This is a very important part and very difficult part of parenting. Sometimes we teach children to dishonor rules or disrespect themselves by the way we act. Next time you have trouble getting your child to follow a rule, consider the two rules and see if you can find a positive way to get the child to obey.

[If you will have future sessions with these parents, you could follow up with this question, discussing what they have tried, what has worked, and what else could be tried.]

If we get our children to honor rules while respecting themselves, how will that help them in their lives?

[They will learn to be both honorable and confident people.]

You might keep you worksheet on the wall of your home to remind you of the ideas we have talked about today. Good luck in raising good children.

[For further study, participants can also be given copies of the web unit.]

Original work by H. Wallace Goddard

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A school-age child is playing with toys. A neighbor child comes and asks your child to come out and play. You have a rule that the toys must be put away before going out to play.

1. What would the child learn if you tell the child to go out and play but to clean up the toys later?
2. What would the child learn if you stand at the door and threaten, “You may not go outside until the toys are cleaned up!”?
3. What would the child learn if you supported the rule AND supported the child by saying something like: “It will be fun to go out and play. I’ll help you put your toys away so you can go.”?

Use your knowledge of your children together with these two rules:

1. If you have made a rule that is important, be sure to enforce it.
2. Help the child obey in a way that encourages cooperation.

Imagine that you call your child to come to dinner but the child keeps playing in the yard. What could you do that honors the rule and respects the child?

Can you think of some situations where your child does not cooperate with the important rules you have made? What could you do to honor the rule and respect the child?

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Please answer the following questions in order to help us know whether this session was helpful to you.

1. This workshop gave me specific ideas that will be helpful to me.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

2. I think this session will help me be a better family member.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

3. I am glad I attended this workshop.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

Comments or suggestions: