



Tender Hearts Child Therapy Center

Parent Newsletter

February 2012

The “Secret Weapon” of Effective Discipline

What is the number one most important point to remember when disciplining your child? Frustrated parents are often searching for a “secret weapon” or some new parenting strategy that will work like magic and turn a defiant, unruly child into a well-mannered little angel overnight.

Guess what? There is no “secret weapon” or new revolutionary parenting program that works like magic to erase your child’s behavior problems instantly. But there is one very important point to remember if you want any discipline strategy to work.

The most important key to successful parenting is CONSISTENCY. Sorry, no new secret trick or technique here, just basic, old-fashioned hard work and consistency on your part as a parent. By being consistent, it sends a clear message to your child that you mean business and that you are serious about following through with what you say you are going to do no matter how long it takes or how hard it is.

A parent who is not consistent will have far more power struggles and defiance issues to deal with in the long run. When you don’t follow through with discipline and clear expectations, it sends a message to your child that he or she can continue doing whatever it is that they do to get in trouble and nothing bad will happen (at least part of the time). It tells the child that it is okay to break the rules and, every once in a while at least, he just might get by with it!

Imagine that you have to be at work at 8:00am every morning. One morning you wake up 30 minutes late and don’t get there until 8:20am. You run through the front door and your boss greets you but says nothing about you being late. Same thing happens next Monday morning. This time you aren’t as concerned because last week the boss didn’t seem to care. This time you walk in at 8:15am, five minutes earlier than last week. The boss is waiting at the door with a scowl on his face. As you walk in, he immediately yells at you in front of everyone and explains that you are being written up for being late. Confused? Last week he smiled when you were 20 minutes late but this week you were written up for being only 15 minutes late!

This is the same message we send to our children by not being consistent with our rules and expectations. And children are less able to make sense of these “mixed messages” than we are as adults. In addition to being confusing, this type of parenting (supervision in the above example) also leads to us trying to break the rules more often in the future. Why not? The first time you were able to come 20 minutes late and nothing happened. Maybe next week the boss will be in a good mood and you can get by with it again. Inconsistency leads to confusion for the child and a desire to break the rules just one more time to see if mom or dad will let it “slide” again. This then leads to frazzled, frustrated parents who don’t understand why their child is not the well-mannered angel they want him to be!