Effective Discipline Methods

Factors to consider

Trying to figure out effective methods of discipline can be a challenge for a foster or adoptive parent. So many factors are involved, including the child's background, their behaviors, their personality, and the situation to name a few. No discipline method is a "one size fits all" so parents are left using trial and error to determine which method is the most effective at redirecting their child's behavior. This can be a very aggravating and trying process, so developing a few strategies to rely on in certain situations can be very helpful.

You may want to consider the following factors when it comes to discipling your child:

- **Their ages** - Yes, your child has multiple ages. There is his/her chronological age, which is how old your child is according to their birth certificate. And then there is his/her emotional/developmental age: This is the age that he/she is functioning at. Your child may be 10 years old chronologically, but may be functioning at a 6 year old's level.
- **Their past** - Your child's behaviors stem from their past. This includes their home life living with their biological parents, their experience in foster care, and any diagnoses they may have. Their early experiences shape how they think, feel, and react to certain situations. Understanding where your child is coming from will help you determine why they are behaving the way they are, and what the most effective method of discipline will be as a result.

Effective methods of discipline

The following methods are some of the more effective types of discipline. Remember, not all of these methods will work for your particular child or even in certain situations, so try them out and determine which method(s) will work best:

Social Modeling - Children learn best by watching. They imitate the behaviors they see. This in part explains why children have developed certain behaviors and reactions to situations. Make a conscious effort to model positive behavior in front of your children.

Encouragement - Encouraging positive behaviors is a great way to help your child learn what is appropriate behavior and what is not. By showing your child encouragement you are setting reasonable expectations for your child, showing acceptance of their mistakes, and celebrating in their success. When encouraging a child, focus on praising them in the following ways:

- Internal evaluation - In other words, how do they feel about what they just did?
- Contributions and achievements - For example, let them know how they were able to help

you.

- Effort and improvement - Recognize the effort they put in, and acknowledge how far they have come.

Attention - Give children's positive behaviors attention and ignore negative behaviors. When a child wants your attention, he/she will exhibit behaviors that will get your attention. If you ignore their negative behaviors, they will stop doing them because they won't get your attention anymore. Follow these guidelines when ignoring a child's negative behaviors:

- Do not acknowledge the child in anyway
- Be consistent in not responding to their negative behaviors
- Acknowledge the child again when the negative behaviors stop

Reward Chart - Having a sticker chart hanging on your fridge can be a great motivator. A sticker chart can help promote good behaviors. Be careful to not overuse it, however. Have a limited amount of behaviors that get rewards, and establish an ending point for the rewards (i.e., when will you stop rewarding your child's behaviors so they can learn how to do them without a reward).

Consequences - Establish consequences for a child's actions. For example, if they take a toy away from their brother or sister, that toy gets taken away from them. Sometimes consequences happen on their own, so all you need to do is enforce them. For example, if a child breaks all their crayons in half, they don't get new ones.

Time-Outs - Time-outs are a great way to help a child calm down and collect their thoughts.

Rules - Establishing and enforcing a set of house rules provides children with stability and consistency. Rules can be used to prevent and/or respond to problems that arise.

Change the environment - Making modifications to your child's environment can help them succeed.

Using "I" - Using the word "I" to modify a child's behaviors lets them know how you feel, and gives them the opportunity to make the change themselves. For example, saying "When you don't get in the car on time it makes me upset because it makes me late for work". This lets the child know how you feel as a consequence of their behaviors (upset), and tells them how to make the change (make it in the car at the scheduled time).

Additional information

For more information on effective methods of discipline, including examples of how to use the above techniques and how to handle lying, please see the Child Welfare Information Gateway's page Discipline Techniques.

You may also want to check out Focus on the Family's article Healthy Discipline for Adopted Children.

Resource

You may want to check out the following resource for working with children with extreme behaviors:

The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Chronically Inflexible Children by Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.

> Dr. Greene is Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School and the originator of the Collaborative Problem Solving approach to the treatment and study of children with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. With The Explosive Child he offers an indispensable helping hand to parents who may feel overwhelmed by having to deal with children whose reactions to everyday stimuli may be far more extreme than normal.