



## Positive Discipline for Children with Disability

Disciplining children is one of the most difficult responsibilities of parenting. Positive discipline teaches morality and promotes healthy development, establishing the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Parents of children with disability may hesitate to discipline them the same as siblings without disability, however, there are a few universal strategies that can be adapted for all children:

- Use praise as a foundation and focus for positive discipline.
- Use quality family time as an incentive for appropriate behavior.
- Model good listening and communication skills:
  - Misbehavior is often caused by the inability to communicate needs properly.
  - Use empathic statements to help children feel understood and encourage further communication, such as, *I see you're angry. It must be frustrating because you want to play outside now, but it's time to go to church.*
- Establish negative consequences for repeated or extreme inappropriate behaviors:
  - Clarify rules and set boundaries before children have the opportunity to misbehave.
  - Deliver consequences calmly and immediately when misbehavior occurs.
  - The duration and severity of punishment should relate to the degree of the inappropriate behavior.
- Use "timeout" to modify behavior:
  - Duration should be adapted to a child's developmental age, with a maximum of one minute per year.
  - Explain to children only one time, in a way they understand, through voice, sign, and/or communication device, the reason for their punishment.
  - Do not look at or talk to children once timeout begins.
  - Make sure location is safe and quiet; monitor inconspicuously from a distance.
  - At the conclusion of timeout, immediately resume praising good behavior.
- When behavior is a symptom of disability, special circumstances may apply:
  - Separate the behavior from the child when disciplining.
  - Never limit the use of assistive devices, such as mobility or communication aids as a form of punishment.
  - Avoid the use of negative labels or psychological terms when discussing children's behavior.

Parents should expect some degree of misbehavior from all children, as a normal part of development. When these behaviors threaten a child's safety or their ability to interact with others in acceptable ways, there must be consequences. To deny these consequences to children with disability may delay their development into responsible adults.

Resource:

*Positive Discipline for Special Needs Children*, by Kara Ayers, [www.disaboon.com](http://www.disaboon.com)

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