

## Class 5 Handout


# Overcoming Two of Parenting's Greatest Challenges

Raising children can be one of the most challenging jobs in life; it certainly is one of the most important. Renowned British pediatrician/ psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott once told a group of parents: “You are engaged in founding the mental health of the next generation.” Although, as parents, we recognize the importance and seriousness of our task, many of us still wonder just how much effect we are going to have on how our child will turn out.

Most of us are understandably concerned about the harmful influence of violence on TV, the allure of video games and the Internet and negative social pressure exerted by our children’s peer group. But the truth is that, as parents, we really do have a significant impact on our children from their earliest years well into their adolescence, although admittedly less so as the years go by. This is a huge challenge and tremendous responsibility for all of us who are striving to raise emotionally healthy children. Two major challenges are:

## 1. Being a Positive Role Model for Our Children

If you are the primary care giver, you are by far the most important person in your infant’s or young child’s life. Babies often begin to imitate their mother or primary caregiver parent during their first weeks of life. It’s just human nature for them to emulate their parents’ behaviors; both the positive and the negative. It doesn’t take long to realize that our actions have a far greater impact on our children than our words, and this is again both a challenge and a responsibility.



As parents, we need to be the kind of people that we want our children to grow up to become. This includes fulfilling ourselves through our own relationships, friendships, work and activities that matter to us. When we actively pursue our own interests and our own lives, we are serving as positive role models for our kids.

## 2. Disciplining and Socializing Our Children


The word “discipline” is often misunderstood; many people think the word refers to punishment. The true meaning of the word comes originally from the word “disciple,” a guide, a teacher, one who educates and prepares someone, a student, a younger person, for life. The main goal of discipline is to help the child develop into a decent, likable adult, capable of survival in a social milieu, rather than one who is submissive to, or rebellious against, the socialization process.

Most parents have an image in their minds of the kind of person they want their child to become as an adult. We have ideas about the traits we admire and the values we wish to instill in our children. With these goals in mind, we could learn ways of encouraging and guiding our children in this direction. We can explore ways to support the expression of our children’s natural qualities and personal style of being in the world by taking a sensitive and empathic interest in whatever lights them up and makes them excited. We can encourage our child’s development as a human being separate from ourselves.

Starting with these basic attitudes and principles, there also are a number of guidelines for effective ways to discipline and socialize our children:

**Avoid making unnecessary rules and restrictions for your child.** It’s remarkable how few rules or restrictions are really necessary to accomplish our goal of effectively socializing our children. However, the rules that we decide are necessary need to be consistently upheld.

**Reward rather than punish your child.** Smiling at our children, showing our pleasure in their company, verbal encouragement and physical affection are the kind of rewards we need to offer our children. Parents who continually nag, complain or lecture their children are largely



ineffective. What is best is a combination of verbal approval, tangible rewards, affection, genuine acknowledgment for a child's effort (not false praise of the production) and if necessary, appropriate negative consequence for misbehavior.

**Never beat or physically abuse a child.** There are countless reasons we should never hit a child. Often when parents take these dramatic measures, they're overwhelmed with emotion themselves. In fact, we need to calm down in ourselves in order to effectively teach our child anything. When we know how to handle our own feelings, including our angry feelings, we can effectively stop our children's annoying behaviors without ever being physical with them.

**Avoid making judgmental statements about your child that make him or her feel like a "bad" person.** Just as physical punishment damages children, our harsh, judgmental, shaming attitudes can destroy their sense of self and self-compassion. It's important to make the distinction between "unacceptable behavior" and a global definition of our child as "bad." We should avoid hurtful, generalized terms like "You're being a bad boy" or "What's wrong with you? You're always acting up!"

**Don't teach your children that they are selfish or bad for expressing their wants and desires.** While it's important to lead by example and show our child the value and rewards of practicing generosity and having empathy for others, teaching children to be selfless, in the sense of being self-denying or unnecessarily deferring their own wants in favor of another person, can be damaging and later may interfere with their pursuing their own goals in life.

One important thing to remember is that discipline should never come from a place of relieving our own anger or frustration at our kids. The best overall approach is to practice discipline with strength, not cruelty; with understanding, not condemnation; and from an underlying motive of helping the child become not only the kind of person who likes him/herself, but also the kind of person whom other people like, respect and enjoy being with. This type of discipline allows the gradual unfolding of the child's unique personality, his vitality and his enthusiasm for life.



*Originally published on PsychologyToday -*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/compassion-matters/201509/overcoming-two-parentings-greatest-challenges>