

Linda: Antonia, I've asked you twice to tidy up these toys and clothes. Please do it right now!

Antonia: Agh, mom, why must I do it now? I'll do it later, I promise.

Linda: [shouts] Just do it now, Antonia, for heaven's sake!

[Antonia throws down the toy she is holding. Linda smacks her.]

Linda: Antonia, you are not allowed to throw things. Now just tidy up this mess and don't be cheeky! [Antonia wails.]

Linda: Oh, for goodness' sake, Antonia, now what! What are you crying for?

Antonia: Because you hit me and shouted at me!

Linda: Yes, I did shout at you. Do you know why? Because I had asked you twice already and you hadn't tidied up. And I smacked you because you threw your toy, and that is dangerous!

Antonia: But I just want to finish playing!

Linda: Antonia, why can't you just say, 'OK, mom, you're right – I should tidy up my things!' Must you always answer back? I've a good mind not to let you go to the party on Saturday!

[Antonia mutters angrily and puts the toys and clothes away in a huff.]

Other incidents of misbehaviour can happen. Your child might be unable to sit still at a play or might refuse to help lay the table. She might have a temper tantrum when you won't buy sweets or say unkind words to a friend or sibling.

When you reprimand your child, she might show no remorse, or she might cry and feel that she is no good.

You might struggle to find correct ways of disciplining your child when, for instance, she leaves her blazer at school repeatedly, or takes hours to do her homework. This is not strictly misbehaving, but it is unacceptable behaviour.

Your primary school child might roll her eyes when you ask her to tidy her room, or might repeatedly disobey your house rules. Your high school child might speak rudely to you or your friends, or ignore your curfew, or smoke behind your back.



1. Why does she misbehave?
2. Why do I have to say everything three times?
3. Why can my child not see the mess she makes?
4. Why doesn't she take responsibility?
5. Is it OK to shout at my child? What else could I do?
6. Is it OK to smack her?
7. How can I discipline her?
8. Are my expectations too high?

## Discussion



1. Children's misbehaviour at all ages often arises from discomfort. A young child can be frustrated by not being able to express herself or have power. Sometimes she is blinded by immediate needs, like finishing her Lego figure, or rescuing her 'stolen' pen from her brother. An older child is sensitive to perceived injustice and will play up if she feels unfairly treated. A teenage boy who has not been taught how to express his feelings might seem angry and wild when in fact he is sad, confused, hungry or sleep-deprived. (See pamphlet on 'Moodiness'.) A diet with too much sugar or MSG can cause a child to be over-active and uncontrolled. Conditions such as ADD, ADHD or diabetes can be at the root of a child's perceived misbehaviour. It is apparent that we as parents need to look lovingly at the child before we attack her behaviour. Sometimes we need to look inward, also: have we modelled good behaviour for our child, and been loving and consistent in our discipline?
2. In this age of visual over-stimulation (TV, Playstation, flashy adverts), children are forgetting listening skills. We can strengthen these by training our child to listen. Speak so that she hears: look into her eyes, ask her to repeat what you have asked, and check that she does it. If she does not do it first time, try to get her to recall what was asked instead of just telling her again.
3. Some children seem better at tidying up than others, just as some are better at greeting people than others. Usually it is because their parents set a good example – or not! It helps to establish a routine, which includes tidying up and checking.
4. Teaching responsibility is a life-long process. Children are young and don't wish to be burdened with too much responsibility. Reminding a child to bring her blazer is a tedious repetition, but it is an important lesson. It is probably more effective to say to her: 'Do you have all your things?', thus training her to check for herself. Again, some children are better at checking than others. Responsibility in tidying up or doing homework also requires children to learn how to defer gratification, to wait to

have fun. This is an important life skill: encourage them to tidy up now and play immediately afterwards.

5. Most of us shout at our children from time to time, and mostly regret it. There are more effective, less dangerous, ways of disciplining which won't leave us feeling guilty. Shouting can make a child fearful or resentful, and can imply that aggression is an acceptable reaction. It is better not to shout at our children, and it is absolutely not OK when it is insulting or degrading. Sometimes we want to show our child that we are irritated or upset by a certain type of behaviour, but it is better to show a young child this by a sad face or a frown, or to talk to an older child. Shouting usually happens when we haven't taken the time to reflect. This can also lead to making threats we cannot carry through, which is ineffective. We also need to choose our words: criticise the behaviour, not the child. A deep breath, a moment's reflection, a second's walk in their shoes, a reminder to ourselves that we are the adult – these can all help with our discipline methods.
6. In some situations a smack is effective. If a wilful toddler is determined to open the oven door, a smack will emphasise 'No!' There is no humiliation. Smacks should fade out as a child reaches primary school. Remember that you can't smack a child if you are not his/her guardian. A smack and especially a beating can be humiliating, or a power-play by the adult, and this suggests that violence is a suitable reaction to displeasure. A beating is often delayed, so there is not the effectiveness of immediate consequences, and there is also no attempt to make the punishment fit the crime. A fitting punishment or consequence, preferably discussed or negotiated beforehand, serves to reinforce the lesson by linking the consequence to the misbehaviour: 'You upset granny by shouting at the dinner table, so please offer to carry her basket when she leaves.'

*Express your sense of humour*  
– from *Ten attitudes of*  
*Marcellin Champagnat*,  
founder of Marist schools

Remember also that children, especially younger ones, need to be allowed to 'save face'. Try to find a win-win solution.

7. You could say that good discipline begins in the CRaDL:

Calm  
Respect  
and  
Dignity;  
Love  
especially

The generation gap has always made discipline difficult. It can be even harder when a grandparent is the primary guardian, or when the family culture changes from one generation to the next (if a family has moved from a rural to a suburban setting, from a traditional African culture to a westernised culture, or to a different country, etc). In all situations, but especially these, it is important to listen to your child as well as talk. If you talk (and listen) about life situations, about consequences, morality and the reasons for certain ways of behaving, your child should develop a sense of the underlying values that drive you, and will be equipped to make decisions about her actions. Luke Lamprecht of the Teddy Bear Clinic suggests the following ideas.

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It is easier to talk when the pressure is off – a child's mood spikes at the time of misbehaviour, and then she is often depressed in the aftermath. Once her mood levels out again, it is time to review the misbehaviour. Choose your battles, and ignore some smaller issues. If something is a concern to you, you might not want to clamp down on it straight away, but might just want to keep your eye on it. Does it continue? Is it serious? Also remember to look out for good behaviour, and praise it!

8. It is good to have high expectations of our children, but we need to remind ourselves again and again that school children are in the process of learning. They learn academically, but they are also learning social norms and behaviour. They will make mistakes, but we as their primary educators need to show them the behaviour we expect. They will experiment. They do not necessarily know the right way to behave in many situations, and when they make the wrong choice, they have to be taught alternative, acceptable behaviour.

*Bringing up young people is both a civic and a religious activity*  
– from *Ten attitudes of Marcellin Champagnat*, founder of Marist schools

# PARENTING with



Discipline



SACRED HEART COLLEGE  
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*An initiative of the Sacred Heart parent body*

### Useful contact information

Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre	011 484 1734
Childline	08 000 55555
Famsa: Parktown	011 833 2057
Soweto	011 933 1301
Teddy Bear Clinic	011 491 5103
Lifeline	011 728 1347
DARE (formerly Drugwise)	011 788 0717

### Further reading

<http://www.family.samhsa.gov/get/involvement.aspx>  
*Parenting with Panache* by Dereck Jackson, Wordsmiths, Johannesburg: 2001

### Other titles

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