

Building Strong Families

Discipline Situations to Talk About

Cut out the boxed items and give one to each participant. The information below the boxes gives helpful discipline methods and short- and long-term solutions for the presenter to share during the activity.

Susan (age 18 months) is turning the buttons on the TV off and on. She loves to play with the remote control.

Change the child's focus.

Remove tempting things and change situations.

Short-Term Solution: Change the child's focus. Get her interested in an activity that gives some type of repeating action, such as dropping small toys into an empty grocery sack, rolling toy cars down a slope, or rolling a ball across the floor.

Long-Term Solution: Store the remote control where Susan can't reach it. Tell her that playing with the TV may break it. (Perhaps you can show her a broken doll or toy as an example of "broken.") Keep repeating this message each time she touches the TV.

Adam (age 1 year) gets around everywhere and has become very good at opening cabinet doors. Today he has found the cleaners under the sink.

Change the child's focus.

Remove tempting things and change situations.

Short-Term Solution: Change the child's focus and immediately store the cleaning supplies in a place that he cannot reach (such as the cupboard above the kitchen counter).

Long-Term Solution: Empty out some bottom kitchen cabinets or drawers and store plastic containers, old towels, and old utensils in them so that he has something safe to play with when you are in the kitchen. Change the items every so often so that he stays interested in the drawers.

Dad was cooking dinner while Mom worked late. Suddenly Logan (age 4) screamed. Dad threw down the potato peeler and ran to see what the problem was. Larry (age 7), Logan's brother, had pinned Logan in a wrestling position and was twisting his ear.

Remove the child from the activity.

Give the child a "time out."

Short-Term Solution: Take Larry off Logan. Comfort Logan and make sure that he is not hurt. Take Larry away from the situation and put him in a "time out." Don't let him have toys or talk to others. After several minutes, talk with Larry and explain that hurting another child is not acceptable behavior. Then ask him WHY he was doing what he was doing so that he has a chance to justify his behavior. Talk with Larry about non-physical ways to interact with Logan.

Long-Term Solution: Be consistent and firm as you handle this behavior. Handle every situation the same way, using the same clear message.

While Mother was getting ready for work, Amanda (age 5) jumped up from her breakfast and asked Mom to come help her in the bathroom. When Mom encouraged her to manage alone, Amanda began to pull on Mom's leg. She whined, "But I can't do it by myself."

Encourage the child.

Short-Term Solution: Remind Amanda that she has managed on her own in the bathroom for a while. Encourage her to start her bathroom tasks, and reassure her that you will check to see how she is doing in a few minutes.

Long-Term Solution: Use this event as a chance to tell Amanda how much you appreciate her handling her own needs in the morning when everyone is getting ready for work and school. Tell her that in a family, everyone works together to keep the family strong. Remind her that taking care of her needs in the morning is one way she can help the family work together.

Mary (age 8) is not hungry at supper or dinnertime. She plays with her food and eats only a little.

Use natural or logical consequences.

A.C.T.

Short-Term Solution: Ask Mary why she is not eating her food. Ask her what she ate during the day, at school, and before dinnertime. Make sure that she has had enough to eat. Ask her if she would like to prepare something for herself to eat, like a sandwich. Decide for yourself how much you want to encourage her to eat if she really is not hungry. Remind her that dinnertime is a nice time for everyone in the family to eat together and catch up on each other's days. Tell her that you hope she will stay with all of you at the table to talk, even if she isn't going to eat.

Long-Term Solution: Watch your child's eating habits by casually talking to her and asking questions. Make sure that she is healthy and eating enough of the right foods. You can also encourage her to help fix dinner and choose menus for the family. (Sometimes by having children help fix meals, you can get them to eat healthy foods.)

Daryl (age 4) cries when Mom leaves him at day care. He plays but only by himself, and he looks sad. He can't seem to focus well enough to finish puzzles and other tasks. He won't zip up his jacket, and he tries to leave the group. The teacher shouts to Daryl to stay with the group. She thinks he is just trying to get attention.

Encourage the child.

Short-Term Solution: Make an appointment with the teacher to find out why Daryl is acting this way. Ask if there are problems with other children or teachers. If possible, arrive at the center earlier the next few mornings and spend time playing with Daryl. Staying will help you find out what he likes and dislikes at school. Let him know you are concerned and want to help him have a better time at school. At the end of the day, ask Daryl questions about the activities he enjoys.

Long-Term Solution: Remember this event for the future when Daryl starts at a new school or in a new classroom. Some children take longer than others to warm up and adjust to new teachers and playmates. You may want to repeat the process of going in a little early to play and learn about your Daryl's likes and dislikes. Don't forget that he

may be bothered by something outside the school environment. Keep asking questions until you understand.

Whitney (age 9) was ready to go shopping when Dad told her they were going to the mall. She grabbed her jar of pennies. At each store, she asked for things too expensive to buy. She finally found an item for less than a dollar, so she counted out the pennies and paid for it. But after she had spent her money, she kept whining for other things she said she needed.

Dad said, “We’ll leave if you keep asking for things.” She begged to stay, so they did. Soon she asked for another item and insisted she have it.

Use natural or logical consequences.

A.C.T.

Short-Term Solution: Leave the mall immediately. Explain to Whitney that you warned her that if she whined again, she would have to leave the mall. It is very important to follow through with the original warning so that in the future your child knows that you are serious about the consequences.

Long-Term Solution: Taking your child on an open-ended shopping trip may set the child up to whine and want everything. Before you go shopping, make a list of what you are going to look for, and work together to mark off the items when you find them and buy them. Make the shopping trip like a scavenger hunt or a game that has a definite beginning and ending. Decide on “rules” such as the amount of money that can be spent to “play the game.” This work and planning will help the child understand the limits of money and shopping and will also help the child to keep self-control during the shopping trip.

Jorge's (age 10) teacher asked his parents what might be affecting Jorge's work at school. She said, "He doesn't finish assignments. And no matter how much I help him, he gets further behind."

A.C.T.**Agree and shake hands on it!**

Short-Term Solution: Meet with the teacher; ask for copies of unfinished assignments; ask her specific questions about how the day is structured and what subjects are taught during which time of day. Get as much information as you can before you talk with Jorge. You may find that assignments are too difficult for his skills or that lessons are being taught during his "down time." After you collect information, talk calmly with your child. Tell him you want to support him, and ask him how he feels about the problem. Together with Jorge, plan ways to work on the problem. This may involve hiring a special tutor for Jorge or setting aside time at night to work on unfinished assignments together. Ask him what choices he thinks are the best.

Long-Term Solution: Stay in touch with your child's school experiences and progress by talking with him and his teachers. Explain that you want him to succeed, and that together you can make this happen. Ask how he feels about school and the work that is required. When you can agree on a plan for helping him finish his work each week, write it down on paper. Then sign the paper and shake hands on it!

James (age 17) is very upset. He comes to the dinner table angry at the world. When you ask him a question like “How was your day?” or “What is wrong?”, he yells, “Nothing!”

Allow some give-and-take.

A.C.T.

Short-Term Solution: Let James know that angry feelings are okay. Ask if something specific happened and if he wants to talk about it. Tell him you would like to listen, and avoid telling him what to do. Accept the angry feelings and the fact that he or she may not want to talk with you about it. You might ask him to agree not to yell at you in such an angry way when you ask him questions.

Long-Term Solution: At a time when your child isn't feeling angry, you might be able to talk about the different causes of angry feelings and different ways to cope. Let your child know that all human beings feel angry sometimes. Talk about the physical signs of anger. Tell him how important it is to stay in touch with the whys and hows of angry feelings so that they don't interfere with life. Discuss some limits that he needs to put on his actions even when he is feeling very angry.

Charlie (age 8) has trouble going to sleep at night. He worries about things. He really wants to be in bed with his parents.

Allow some give-and-take.

Short-Term Solution: Talk with Charlie about what is on his mind. Ask about his worries and listen to his answer. After letting him talk, explain that he needs to sleep in his own bed so that you can get a good night's sleep in your own bed. Go with him as he goes back to his bed.

Long-Term Solution: The next day, talk further about the problem with him. Together, you can brainstorm different activities to help him fall asleep worry-free. For example, he may find that taking a bath right before bed doesn't help but reading a book for 15 minutes right before bed does help. Going through the process of solving problems and evaluating the solutions will help him in many different situations.

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