

Ten "To Do's" for Conscious Discipline

1. **Tell children what to do**

Principle: What you focus on, you get more of.

Application: Instead of saying, "No pushing, you know better than to push your brother, pushing is not nice," say, "When you want your brother to move say, 'Move please.' Tell him now." Focus on what you want your children to do!

2. **Give children useable information, especially when you are upset.**

Principle: When you are upset you are always focused on what you don't want.

Application: Instead of saying, "Why isn't this homework done? Do you want to fail? How many times do we have to go over this?" you could say, "You can start with your math homework or reading. Which is best for you?"

3. **Help children to be successful instead of attempting to make or get them to behave.**

Principle: The only person you can make change is yourself.

Application: How often have we attempted to make a smoker quit smoking or growing child eat her peas? There is a better way. Instead of asking yourself, "How am I going to get my child to stay in bed," ask yourself, "How am I going to help my child be more likely to choose to stay in her bed?" The first question will give you manipulative, coercive answers. The second question will give you creative, cooperative solutions.

4. **Use your children as resources to solve their own problems.**

Principle: Two heads are better than one.

Application: Instead of you trying to figure out what needs to be done, ask your children for input. You could say, "What would help you finish your homework by 8:00 p.m.?" Help children solve their problems themselves.

5. **Put your children on your "to do list" and spend time enjoying them.**

Principle: The motivation to behave comes from being in relationship with one another.

Application: When a child says, "I don't care," she is really saying, "I don't feel cared for." Cooperation comes from connection. If your child chronically refuses to listen or tells you they don't care, then you must start by rebuilding your relationship and rekindling family rituals.

6. **Encourage your children during wonderful times and tough times. Do not attempt to get children to feel bad in order to behave better.**

Principle: Encouragement empowers.

Application: Be your children's cheerleader. Constantly tell them, "You did it," "Way to go," "Look at you," or "Good for you." When your children are struggling you might say, "I believe in you, you can do this."

7. Take back your power. You are in charge.

Principle: Whoever you believe to be in charge of your feelings, you have placed in charge of you.

Application: Instead of saying, "Don't make me have to pull this car over," say, "I'm going to pull this car over until the seatbelts are fastened and everyone is safe." Instead of saying, "You drive me nuts," say, "I'm going to take a few deep breaths and calm myself down. Then I will talk to you." When children refuse to do what you ask state, "I'm going to show you what I want you to do." Then help them be successful.

8. Become the person you want your children to be.

Principle: We must discipline ourselves first and our children second.

Application: Instead of screaming, "You better get control of yourself right now," take a deep breath and calm yourself down. Be a S.T.A.R. (Smile, Take a deep breath, And Relax). Become what you want your child to be. If you want calmness, demonstrate how to be calm.

9. Do not save your children from the consequences of their actions.

Principle: Psychological pain is a signal to make changes in your life.

Application: Help your child handle disappointing choices. Offer empathy instead of lectures after poor choices. Instead of saying, "I told you not to take that picture to school. It's your own fault it got torn in half. That is what you get for not listening to me," say, "How disappointing for you. I know how important that picture was to you." Empathy allows children to take responsibility for their actions, while lecturing allows them to blame you for their distress.

10. Teach children how to handle their conflicts instead of punishing them for not knowing how.

Principle: Conflict is an opportunity to teach.

Application: When one child comes to you tattling on the other, use these moments to teach life skills. When one sibling says, "He pushed me," you say, "Did you like it?" The child will likely say, "No!" At this point you can say, "Go tell your brother, 'I don't like it when you push me.'" Use these intrusive episodes as a way to teach assertiveness skills to your children.

Become conscious of the intent behind each of your interactions. Your intent is more powerful than any words. Most importantly, have fun! There is no right or wrong way - it is a journey.

-Dr. Becky Bailey
Conscious Discipline