

# Sowing Seeds of Love

Winning Ways to Talk with Your Child



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Many parents struggle to discipline their children consistently because they recall feelings of being judged and overpowered by their own parents. They desperately want to break the cycle of negative and degrading parenting, but they don't know where to start.

## The Circle of Security

Imagine your child in a circle. When he is deliberately disobedient, openly defiant or breaks a rule that he is familiar with, he runs into the outer perimeter and he automatically experiences an unpleasant consequence. That is healthy discipline.

Healthy discipline may upset a child for a short period of time, but it is good and beneficial as it creates a sense of order and security in the long run. It also protects other family members from general chaos and emotional instability in the household.

## So what's the problem?

During the first years of life, children make decisions that shape their lives. They decide whether they are intrinsically 'good' or 'bad', whether they have potential or not and how they think and feel about their parents, other people and life in general.

How parents act towards their children during these important years have a huge influence on them. As cliché as it may sound: a parent's words can either be poisoned arrows or seeds of love.

When a child gets signals from his parents 98% of the time that convince him that he is a good, reliable and adorable human being, he finds it easy to bounce back emotionally after being disciplined by them for a misdemeanor.

Think about the circle again.

Parents need to be strict and stand their ground when a child runs into the outer boundary.

On the other hand, while the child is innocently moving around within the circle, going about his business of being a child, the parent's role is to build him up and lovingly train him.

The problem is that many parents hurt their children's feelings by being harsh to them while they are inside the circle. Here are a few tips:

## 1. Be clear about what you expect.

Before you enter a challenging situation, describe what your child can expect and how he can please you. By doing this you make it easier for him to stay within the boundaries.

For example, "We're going to visit Aunt Susie now. Now you can show Mommy how you give her a hug when you say hello and how you say please and thank you. I can't wait to see the hug and the good manners!"

Then remember to praise the good behaviour afterwards.

## 2. Assume the best.

If you're not sure that your child knows any better, assume that he isn't deliberately defiant when he does something unacceptable. When he pulls the cat's tail for the first time, explain that no one may hurt the cat. Demonstrate how to pet the cat, showing it affection and let your child follow your example.

Depending on your child's age, you may have to demonstrate the acceptable behaviour a number of times. If he then hurts the cat, after you've laid down the boundary, he needs to be disciplined. Keep the discipline impersonal, reminding yourself that you are not out to hurt your child in any way, but rather to bring about unpleasant consequences so that he can learn from it.

## 3. Send "I-messages"

Deliberately start your sentences with "I" instead of "you".

Instead of saying: "You've made a mess!" you can say: "I need help in picking up the toys".

Instead of saying: "You better shut up" you can say: "I can't concentrate on what I'm doing with all that screaming".

Instead of "You're such a slob!" you can say: "I really get upset when I see your clothes all over the floor".

As you do this you are merely stating facts about your own feelings and needs, instead of judging and attacking your child. You teach your child that you have feelings too and get your point across without creating feelings of helplessness, anger and resentment in him.

Be sure to also often share your feelings about your child's good behaviour. For example: "It makes me happy when you ... (fill in)."

## 4. Say what to do, instead of what not to do.

Instead of:

Don't run.

Don't touch that.

Don't slam the door.

Say:

You need to walk.

Look. But, please don't touch.

Close the door quietly.

**"IF YOU DON'T LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES, THERE'S NO SENSE MAKING THEM" (HERBERT PROCHNOW).**