



## Discipline vs. Punishment

Authoritarian parenting uses punishment or the threat of punishment, which creates children who are outer-directed. These children look outside of themselves for how to think, feel, and behave. There are two kinds of punishment—psychological and physical.

Psychological punishment can be verbal or non-verbal threats that instill fear, or damage a child's self-image; physical punishment can be slapping, spanking, or pulling hair, causing a child physical pain with the intent of associating the child's undesirable behavior with that pain. Fear is the natural result.

As a method for controlling others, punishment is a powerful tool. When children are afraid, parents have incredible power over them. How does fear of their parents affect children? They will be on edge, anxious, and out of balance. Clearly, children do not function at their best when they are in fear. For that reason, punishment works against a child's ability to develop into a thinking, loving, and confident person.

The use of punishment also creates resistance, rebellion, and lying or begrudging compliance. As a method for controlling children, it works, at best, on a short-term basis, and is likely to work mostly when the punisher is present.

The moment the punisher leaves, the temptation to continue the inappropriate behavior can be overwhelming, as misbehavior becomes an assertion of their desire to be self-determined. By using parenting methods that help your children become inner-directed, you can reduce this problem dramatically.

### **Discipline vs. Punishment**

#### **Discipline**

To teach by showing how to assume responsibility.

#### **Punishment**

To control by causing psychological or physical pain.

Discipline is teaching in a way that the child feels understood and respected. Discipline can only be effective when a child is receptive to hearing what the parent is teaching. At those times, discipline strengthens the bond between parent and child. It helps a child assume inner control over his or her life. It promotes confidence and self-esteem. Discipline is *not* punishment.

Punishment is the use of either physical or psychological pain to force a child to obey. The punisher thinks, "I know better than you do, therefore, you must obey me." The punisher assumes control over the child's behavior. The child learns to not trust his or her own inner processes and to be controlled by a power outside of him or herself, thus operating on the beliefs, "I am okay if you like me. I am not okay if you don't like me."

Depending on the degree and frequency, punishment leads to resentment, revenge, and passive/aggressive behavior. In addition, punishment also contributes to a lack of creativity and prevents the development of tools to solve problems independently.

Punishment does not contribute to producing a psychologically healthy child. Discipline, on the other hand, will promote a well-adjusted child. Parents must decide what outcome they want for their children and use those methods that best support that outcome.

It very much matters how you package your gifts of insight, skill and knowledge.

If the packaging is critical and punishing, your children will not want to receive your gift.

If you package your wisdom in loving ways, your children will be eager to learn from you.

**AJM/BJA 25-Feb-08**