

# Parents must choose the right tools for discipline

Most of the jobs we do, whether gardening, repairing our vehicle or cooking, require tools. There are also a variety of tools that parents can use to guide their children. Choosing the right tool for the child and the situation can make the job of parenting easier.

A good carpenter has a tool box in which to keep all of the tools he or she needs to complete a construction job. The following discipline techniques are just a few of the tools you might want to add to your parenting toolbox.

**Modelling** is teaching by example. This is a parent's most powerful tool. Parents who provide a positive example for their children by being kind and fair, by controlling their tempers, and by behaving in the way they want their children to behave will have fewer problems with their children. Modelling is a

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## PARENTING POINTS

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tool that should be used all the time.

**Change the surrounding or the equipment**, when possible, rather than dealing with some issues over and over. For example, if two children are always kicking each other at the supper table, rearrange the chairs so they can no longer reach each other.

**Give warnings.** Children

have a hard time switching from one activity to another. They need time to adjust. For example, say, "In five minutes it will be time to put the Lego's in the bucket so we can go outside." Or, "When this television show is over, it will be time to get your pyjamas on."

**Offer choices when possible.** Choices help children feel capable and in control. For example, "Do you want to wear your sweatshirt or your red coat when you go outside?" Don't offer an open-ended choice like, "Would you like to go to bed now?" Going to bed is really not a choice, and this sets the stage for a battle. It is better to say, "It is time for bed." Then the child could be given the choice between two pairs of pyjamas or two bedtime stories.

**Keep it simple.** For young children, give only one order at a time. For example, say,

"Put your shoes on the mat." Wait until that is completed before you say, "Put your coat on the hook."

**Use a firm tone for important requests.** Speak as if you mean it. Don't nag. If the child does not respond after the first request, you may need to walk to them and physically help them through the task. For example, "Stacey, please close the door." You may need to walk with her to the door rather than yelling to her over and over again.

**Be specific about what you want the child to do.** For example, say "Pick up all the clothes that are on the floor. Put the dirty ones in the clothes basket and the clean ones in your dresser." This is better than saying, "Clean up your room. It is a mess." It is also easier to enforce because a child might "clean up" the room by shoving the clothes under the bed. The floor is

clear, but is this what you really want?

**Use the "when/then" rule.** For example, "When your spelling homework is finished, then you may watch one-half hour of TV," or "When you are done mowing the lawn, then you may go with your friends to the mall."

**Use the "broken record" technique.** When the rule needs to be enforced, state the rule or expectation. If the child begins to argue or whine, simply restate the rule in the same words using a calm, firm voice until the arguing stops. For example, "It's time for bed." "But Mom, I'm not tired. Can't I just stay up a little longer?" "It's time for bed." "It's not fair; everybody else gets to stay up later than I do." "It's time for bed."

Changing children's behaviour takes time and patience. In fact, when you start using new techniques with children, their behaviour might get worse before it gets better. Remember, they are used to what you have been doing, and when you try something new, that seems inconsistent to them. They won't know how to react. Keep on trying the technique for a while. When children begin to realize you are serious they will begin to respond appropriately.

No technique works for every child every time. Also, you may slip up and go back to your old ways of doing things. When that happens, forgive yourself, apologize to your children and try the new technique again. This is a learning process for everyone.