

4 DISCIPLINE MISTAKES PUSHOVER PARENTS MAKE

By Jacqueline Burt Cote from Parents Magazine

“Some parents believe there shouldn’t ever be conflicts with their children,” says Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D., author of the 1-2-3 Magic series of discipline books. However, the reality is that kids need the structure that setting limits provides—and some, like mine, aren’t getting it at home. Discipline helps them learn self-control and appropriate behavior. In fact, researchers have shown that children of lenient parents are more likely to act aggressively at school and are at greater risk for underage drinking.

Mistake 1 – You don’t follow through on consequences

Why It Happens: If you have a tendency to backtrack, you probably don’t think about what enforcing a punishment will feel like, says Parents advisor Jenn Mann, Psy.D., author of *The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Kids*. Only later do you realize that carrying it out will be as big a bummer for you as it is for your kid.

How To Fix It: Before you announce a consequence, leave the room and take a couple of deep breaths. This will give you a little time to calm down and come up with a more manageable solution. If you forget to take this pause and later need to modify the plan, let your child know that the change works better for you, not him. You might say, “We’re going to the birthday party because I promised Emma’s mom I would help out. Instead, you’ll lose 30 minutes of your screen time tomorrow.”

Mistake 2 – You ask for cooperation rather than insist on it

Why It Happens: You want your child to like you and are afraid you might come off as a meanie. I speak from experience. My M.O. is to present my children with queries instead of expectations: “Hey, would you mind taking out the garbage before dinner?” or “You should get your homework started soon, okay?” As a result, they don’t take me seriously and then don’t understand why I get upset when they fail to empty the trash or finish their school assignments on time.

How To Fix It: Embrace the idea that just because you enforce the rules doesn’t make you a dictator; it makes you an effective parent. It’s critical to use the right language as well. Instead of saying “okay?” at the end of a sentence or asking kids to do something, make a more definitive statement (“I need you to help me bring the laundry basket downstairs”). This becomes a directive for your child to follow rather than an option that she can refuse. “It’s also important to try to avoid spontaneous requests,” says Dr. Phelan. He encourages having routines, such as laundry day on Saturday and homework starting at 4 p.m. This way, your child doesn’t feel put out by an unexpected demand and also feels respected.

Mistake 3 – You let your child bend the rules

Why It Happens: You’ll do whatever it takes to keep the peace, even if it means letting your children call the shots. Rachel Burt Loventhal, of Atlanta, says that whenever she lets her 3-year old son, Theo, watch “one more show,” he starts to bargain. “I’ll say, ‘Okay, that’s it,’ and then he’ll say, ‘Wait, I have an idea. What if I watch only half of another show?’ ” She usually gives in

to his attempts to negotiate a deal. “I rationalize that since he asked me nicely, I should let him have what he wants.”

How To Fix It: Keep your directions simple and clear, and don’t leave room for debate. While it’s fine to give kids control in certain situations (such as having them choose between two snack options), you shouldn’t be drawn into a negotiation. In Loventhal’s case, the effective response to her son’s comeback would be to simply repeat the rule—“One show, that’s it”—and then turn off the TV.

Mistake 4 – You try to keep your child happy at all costs

Why It Happens: When your child is hungry or tired, you’re more likely to give in. After all, even if the situation isn’t your fault, no one wants her kid to be miserable. “But sometimes we put our kid in positions we shouldn’t, like running errands with her when she needs a nap or a snack,” says Dr. Mann. This sets her up to fail—and then makes us feel guilty.

How To Fix It: Validate your child’s feelings rather than trying to appease her. You might say, “I know that you’re disappointed about the cookie.” Then remind yourself that when you set boundaries and stick to them, you’ll also help build the skills your child needs to deal with whatever challenges life throws at her.