

Discipline After Surviving Cancer

Disciplining a child with cancer is often a difficult task for parents. Though children continue to need a structured environment and routine, it is often challenging to provide this while in the hospital or having frequent clinic visits. Parents often find themselves wanting to provide only positive stimuli to their children during this difficult time and find it hard to punish them for breaking rules. Caregivers often feel guilty the child has to suffer and go through so much during treatment and desire to balance this out by allowing the child to set the limits.

Changes in discipline during therapy can often cause struggles after treatment is complete. Children do best when they have a structured environment in which they feel safe. It fosters healthy growth and development. It is important to resume discipline after completion of therapy, if it has fallen away during treatment. The following discipline pointers may be of assistance in providing guidelines for establishing effective discipline. You may discuss further discipline questions with your pediatrician, if needed.

DISCIPLINE GUIDE

Learning how to effectively discipline your child is an important skill that all parents need to learn. Discipline is not the same as punishment. Instead, discipline has to do more with teaching, and involves teaching your child right from wrong, how to respect the rights of others, which behaviors are acceptable and which are not, with a goal of helping to develop a child who feels secure and loved, is self-confident, self-disciplined and knows how to control his impulses, and who does not get overly frustrated with the normal stresses of everyday life.

If you are having difficulty disciplining your child, it is important to remember that you may not be doing anything wrong. All children are different and have different temperaments and developmental levels and a style of discipline that may work with other children may not work with yours.

You should understand that how you behave when disciplining your child will help to determine how your child is going to behave or misbehave in the future. If you give in after your child repeatedly argues, becomes violent or has a temper tantrum, then he will learn to repeat this behavior because he knows you may eventually give in (even if it is only once in a while that you do give in). If you are firm and consistent then he will learn that it doesn't

pay to fight doing what he is eventually going to have to do anyway. Some children, however, will feel like they won if they put off doing something that they didn't want to do for even a few minutes.

Be consistent in your methods of discipline and how you punish your child. This applies to all caregivers. It is normal for children to test their limits, and if you are inconsistent in what these limits are, then you will be encouraging more misbehavior.

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE TIPS

The following are some general tips to help you effectively discipline your kids:

Be consistent in your methods of discipline and how you punish your child. This applies to all caregivers. Your child should learn to understand that there are predictable consequences for his actions.

Think ahead. Be prepared for what you are going to do and say to help your child understand the consequences of his actions. Don't just wing it, or do or say the first thing that pops into your head. You are more likely to react negatively if you haven't thought out your plan for discipline beforehand.

Set up a daily routine for your younger children and try and stick to it each day. This should include mealtimes, snacks, bath and bedtime.

Provide a safe environment that encourages exploration, but protects your child. For example, you can prevent your toddler from getting in trouble for opening drawers and cabinets if you have safety locks preventing them from opening.

Set limits that are appropriate for your child's age and developmental level. Some survivors may have different physical or emotional struggles than a child who has not been treated for cancer. Make sure your limits are realistic for the child, but be watchful for the child who tries to take advantage of the caregiver. Remember that you are in charge and that you will have to say 'no' to your child sometimes. You should expect your child to cry when he does not get his way. This is a normal way of dealing with frustration in younger children and should be ignored. You should also ignore temper tantrums.

Do not offer choices in situations where your child has to cooperate with your rules. For example, instead of saying 'do you want to take a bath?' you should instead say 'it is time for your bath.'

Don't give in to your child when he is whining, crying or having a temper tantrum. If you do, it will only teach him that this kind of behavior is an appropriate way to get what he wants.

Learn to ignore minor, harmless or unimportant misbehaviors, such as fidgeting.

Make punishments and rewards immediate. Avoid waiting more than a few minutes to provide the consequences of a behavior.

Avoid repeating commands. You should give a command and if not followed, then you can repeat it once with a warning of what the consequences for noncompliance will be. If not followed, then apply the consequences. Do not continue to repeat the command.

Don't argue with your child about the punishment. Ignore any protests. You can talk about it later.

Plan ahead. If you always have difficulty in certain situations, such as shopping or having visitors, go over a plan of action beforehand that includes what your expectations are and what the consequences of misbehavior will be.

Be flexible, especially with older children and adolescents. Listen and get your child's input on some rules and punishment.

Use 'I' messages, instead of 'you' messages. For example, say 'I am upset that you didn't clean up your room,' instead of 'You made me upset for not cleaning up.' 'You' statements can seem more accusatory and can lead to arguing.

After disciplining your child, briefly explain the rule and what your expectations are when he misbehaves and explain what the proper behavior would have been.