Correcting Losing Behavior

Positive Ways to Correct Losing Behavior

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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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In this lesson, we will look at the difference between "correction" and "punishment." Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing what you think is the difference between "correction" and "punishment." Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet **and then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any scripture **Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.**

I. Introduction

What do many parents do when their children misbehave? They simply punish them, without a goal of correcting the behavior. Does punishment, however harsh, work? Sometimes, yes. If not, then why do so many parents continue this ineffective method of disciplining their children? When all is said and done, much of the time it is because that is what they learned from their parents? Styles of parenting (whether good or bad) are usually passed from generation to generation.

B.F. Skinner says that punishment is a consequence that decreases the probability a behavior will occur. In other words, by treating a child in an extremely negative and hurtful manner, he or she will conform to the behaviour you desire. J. Burchard and P.T. Harig add that "...only when the frequency of the behavior decreases subsequent to the imposition of a given consequence, can that consequence be called a punishment." In other words, punishment can only be considered punishment if it causes the child to do what you want him to do. If the child continues in his misbehavior, the punishment has become positive reinforcement. Talk about things backfiring! Instead of getting your child to change his negative behavior, you could be encouraging him or her to continue doing it. This happens most often when the focus of the parent is retaliation, rather than concern for the child and *correction* of his behavior. A simple example illustrates this problem: a pilot is off course and landing his jet on the wrong runway. The air-traffic control operator yells, *"Do not land on that runway, don't you know what you are doing"?* The pilot yells back in anger but corrects his mistake (changes his behavior as demanded); he has been verbally 'punished" by the control-tower operator. A better way for the control-tower operator to correct the pilot would be to aggresively alert him to his error, but immediately direct him to the correct runway.

Correction, as opposed to punishment, focuses on the reason behind the behavior and not just on the child's physical body. It tries to change the child's negative behavior into a positive behavior, and also to change his attitude in a positive way. If the child's attitude can been changed, the behavior can change permanently. Correction *can* include

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temporary physical pain, if it works to (1) prevent emotional damage, (2) includes the correct behavior. Because correction includes a change in attitude, it takes a longer time and more intense effort by the parents. This is one reason parents (if they know the difference between correction and punishment) tend to see punishment as an easy quick fix method instead of the longer and more difficult correction paradigm. This change requires an attitude and behavorial change in the parent, which will bring about a change in the child.

The correction method is not something new. It has been around a long time. The Bible says much about parent/child relations and stresses the correction method as the way to discipline children (1 Samuel 3:12-13; Proverbs 22:6, 23:13, 29:15, 17, Ephesians 6:1-4).

II. Goal of Disciplining a Child

The goal of discipline is to develop a sense of self-control and self-discipline in the child. If a child grows up with a sense of self-control/discipline, he will neither allow others to control him or be irresponsible. Important as the *control* or *discipline* that a parent exercises over the child is, it is only temporary. However, the *training* the parent gives can influence the child's behavior for a lifetime.

When a person is born, the parents' control is total. If the family is healthy, the parents will allow the child to exercise more control and independence over his life. As the child grows, he gains control over his life while that of the parents decreases. By the time the child is in his late teens or early twenties, he should be exercising control over his life. Then the amount of control or influence his parents exercise will depend on his relationship with them.

Discipline is the tool parents use to help the child learn the self-control needed to live a mature, independent life. The type of discipline the parents exercise plays a big part in what kind of adult the child will become. If the discipline is biblically based and positive, the child will grow into the mature, independent adult God intended for us to be. If the discipline is harsh and demeaning, the child will grow up emotionally and psychologically handicapped.

The following chart shows the difference between punishment and correction.

	Punishment Only	Correction (Redirection)
Purpose	to inflict penalty for an offense	to train for correction and maturity
Focus	past misdeeds	future correct actions
Attitude	hostility and frustration on the part of the parent	love and concern on the part of the parent
Resulting Emotion	fear and guilt	security

(Reprinted from *How to Discipline and Build Self-Esteem In Your Child)*

III. Methods of Punishment

There are two basic types of punishment. One is to cause pain. The second is the creation of a penalty. The idea behind both is to make life so unpleasant for the child that he will stop the negative behavior.

A. Pain Punishments

This includes spanking or striking with either the hand or some object (a belt, switch, or paddle). It works best with younger children, but even then, is not very effective. There is a place for spanking when correcting a child. It should be done with great care and only for extremely major offenses. Roger Allen and Ron Rose see it as best reserved "...for open defiance and rebellious behavior in children roughly 2-10 years of age." Even then, it should be a tool of last resort. After the third or fourth grade, they see it as totally ineffective.

If it works, spanking may reduce some misbehavior. The problem is that it does not teach the child what type of behavior is required.

If physical punishment is excessive or cruel, it can lead to problems in the parent/child relationship. These can include resentment against the parents, backlash (reinforcement of misbehavior), child abuse, defeatism (child believes that he can never do anything right).

B. Penalty Punishments

This includes such punishments as restrictions, fines, and groundings. These types of punishment can be as hard on the parents as on the child. They can lead to constant bickerings and arguments while the child tries to push his parents into lifting the

penalty. Often, the parents will give up and allow the child to have his way to avoid a constant fight.

These types of punishments work best on pre-teens and teenagers. The reason for this is the effects of a spanking will last only a few minutes while the effects of a restriction decreases the child's growing independence. The younger the child, the less effective these types of punishments are. Younger children do not have the knowledge or reasoning ability to understand what is supposed to be happening. When use is excessive or cruel, it can lead to the same problems in the parent/child relationship as the pain type punishments can.

IV. Positive Ways to Correct Losing Behavior

A. Use Preventive Discipline.

The best way to create "winning behavior" in a child is to have him or her grow up in a winning environment. It is easier to teach a child from the day he is born how to be a winner, than it is to get him to break the bad habits of being a loser.

Christ is the foundation for winning behavior. It is only in Christ that man can be what God intended. It is in Christ that we have the knowledge and strength to know and strive to gain the abundant life He promised.

A winning environment is not one that emphasizes the material, monetary, "get all you can get" view of life. It is one which provides the positive, Christ-centered life. It is the one in which all family members are seeking the same goal, to be Christ like.

Part of a winning environment is that it is achievement oriented. The achievement it seeks is not a worldly achievement of ego and wealth. It is an achievement allowing the child to develop into a mature, complete adult, someone independent and responsible for his actions while still loving and helping others in their search for a positive winning environment.

Parents are the most important human element in creating a winning environment. They are the child's earliest and strongest role models. A child's whole concept of what it means to be a man or woman comes from his parents. If you want your child to be a winner, you have to be a winner.

Life is not always winning. There will be times in which we lose. The difference between the winner and loser is how he handles his losses. The loser sees them as

overwhelming. They paralyze him. He becomes so weighted down with them that he ignores his wins. Losing becomes his way of life.

The winner knows that losses happen. He accepts them for what they are, temporary set backs in a long series of wins. He sees them in one of two ways. One, a loss can be a warning that something might have been wrong with what he was doing. Two, bad things happen in the fallen, sinful world in which we live. We can do everything right, but because we live in a fallen sinful world bad, things happen. A winner understands and accepts these reasons for losing. He learns from them, picks himself up and goes on with trying to live a winning life.

Parents' influence and control over their children decreases as the child grows older. As this happens, parents need to find other winning adults to serve as role models or mentors and sometimes even peers for their children. This does not mean that the parents pick their children's friends, but try to guide them into situations where they will meet other winning children. If you remember from the 1982 survey in Lesson 1 of this unit, teens' peers are the second most important influence in their lives.

A winning environment is full of praise. Let your child know that you appreciate and approve of his winning behavior. Keep the praise truthful and within limits of his accomplishments. Do not understate or exaggerate them. A word of praise from a loving parent is worth more to a child than all the material things an indifferent parent can buy.

B. Focus On Their Needs.

We all have needs (physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual). A winning environment will try to meet those needs.

One of the big problems in modern America is the blurring of the line between needs and wants. Needs are those things that are essential for living. They are shelter, not necessarily a $250,000 house; genuine love shown by spending time together, not the buying of expensive presents; teaching the child the ways of the Lord, not sending him to church once a week.

Children, especially younger ones, do not have the capability to know the difference between a need and a want. When parents treat a child's wants as if they are his needs, the child becomes confused and does not recognize the difference. Good parents help their children know the difference between wants and needs. They will meet their children's needs while helping them understand that wants do not *have* to be fulfilled.

Also, as you meet your child's needs, do not compromise your values or standards. You are modeling your values and standards to your children. If you fail to meet their needs or meet them in an angry, half hearted fashion, your child will learn that he and his needs are unimportant. When meeting your children's needs, model love, care, and concern.

C. Ignore It.

Ignoring a child's behavior is tricky. It can either lead to additional bad behavior, or it can cause the bad behavior to stop. How the child interprets his parents' ignoring him determines how the child will act.

If the child thinks that his parents do not love him, his behavior will continue to grow worse. He is thinking, “If they think they can ignore me, I will show them exactly how mean I can be.” A child will do whatever is needed (good or bad) to gain his parents' attention, be it postive or negative. To a disturbed child, *negative* attention is better than *no* attention.

On the other hand, if the child knows that his parents love him, he will stop his negative behavior if the parents do not reinforce it (ignore him). People continue do those things which are reinforced by someone important in their life.

Be selective in what negative behavior you ignore. Do not ignore behavior that is dangerous or harmful to your children or to others. You might ignore that behavior that you dislike or irritates you.

Do not nag. Nagging is often in the ear of the listener. Often, parents nag their children without realizing it. As far as they are concerned, they are trying to help the child. In reality, they have long left loving guidance behind, and now are nagging. Nagging only irritates and promotes additional misbehavior.

Remember, you were a child once. Would you, as a child, have considered your behavior nagging? If you would have, then probably your children will consider it nagging. If you as a child would have considered it loving guidance, probably your children will also.

D. Redirect Their Behavior.

Usually, children do not misbehave just to be mean. They are trying to learn how to live. They do not understand right or wrong unless it is pointed out to them. It is the parents' job to teach them the moral and ethical values that go with their actions.

Instead of just telling a child what not to do, tell, show, explain to him what you want him to do. Yes, this takes a lot of time!

One good technique is to provide the child with a different activity. One that will make the child behave as the parents want him to do. Then use positive reinforcement to get the child to perform the new behavior. As he learns the new positive behavior, he will stop the old negative behavior.

E. Withhold Privileges.

There are two types of family privileges. One type, is an unearned privilege. These are privileges that just go with being part of the family. These include the right to the same basic comforts and treatment given to everyone else in the family. If these basic privileges are withheld, the child learns that he is different, usually negative, from the rest of the family. If he is given special privileges, he will believe that he is better than the rest of the family. As a result, he will expect them to cater to his every demand. Either way, the child is learning negative behavior.

The second type of privilege is an earned personal privilege. These are privileges that might or might not be wanted by other family members. They have meaning only to that specific child. It is these types of privileges that you can withhold as a way of changing your child's behavior. The objective of withholding privileges should not be punishment, but changing attitudes and behavior. That is, you are trying to teach him or her self-discipline.

One technique of withholding privileges is the “as soon as” concept. You tell the child that he can do a certain activity as soon as he does what you want him to do. The length of time it takes for a child to develop the new positive behavior is determined by his relationship with his parents. The better the relationship, the sooner the change will happen. The worst the relationship, the longer it will take, if ever.

A second technique is the “time out” concept. The parent declares a time out. The child is expected to stop whatever he is doing and do some other prescheduled activity.

V. Conclusion

Discipline is the tool that parents use to teach their children self-control. Parents have two methods to enforce discipline. One is punishment. The other is correction. Correction is the method taught in the Bible; please read Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:5.

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**