

#3

Discipline-based parenting teaches and helps internalize values that can be applied by their kids in other life situations. Punishment-based parenting teaches only that, "I'd better not get caught next time!"

### **Discipline-based parenting**

Discipline-based parents are always on the look out for ways they can turn a problem that requires discipline into an opportunity for teaching values and principles.

When discipline is necessary, these parents identify the values and principles that have been compromised and then use their approach to discipline to teach their kids values. So their goals reach well beyond simply extracting some desired behavior change. What they really want to accomplish is to introduce values that are important to them to their kids. They spend the time that is required to go beyond merely achieving behavior change to teaching values.

These parents know that they have a small window of time to instill the values that are important to them, and refuse to waste time on just administering the swift "arm of the law" when their kids misbehave.

They want their kids to think about far more than just, "If I know what's good for me, I'd better try harder next time not to get caught." They know that when their kids do understand that there is more to the importance of behaving appropriately than just not getting caught, that they will have provided them with an internal moral compass that will guide their behavior toward others for the rest of their lives.

### **Punishment-based parenting**

Punishment-based parents teach the self-centered attitude of, "What can I get away with, and how bad will it hurt if I get caught?"

They are concerned primarily with an immediate behavior change in their kids. As a result it is unlikely that they will introduce and expose them to any values that will generalize to other situations. The primary concern of these parents is that the unacceptable behavior must stop now, and that it better not happen again. As a result, the only real motivating factor in the minds of their kids is, "I'd better not get caught next time, cuz if I do, it will hurt." Their only focus is to make sure that

next time they'd better try a little harder to avoid detection in order to prevent any consequences that might be painful and costly to them selves.

These parents express anger (or hurt, disappointment, embarrassment, etc.) over what their kids have done or not done, said or not said, and then they administer some form of punishment (vs. discipline, since little is taught other than the wisdom of not getting caught next time) to what ever it is that has happened. Unfortunately, what usually determines the consequences to be applied are the parent's emotions, rather than what is reasonable and appropriate to the "crime".

Their response to any challenges to their authority is superficial and teaches very little about the value of right and wrong. And missing too, are their efforts to teach the importance of the rights of others. Instead, what is taught by them and learned by their kids is an attitude of self-protection and self-preservation. The results are obviously self-centered, superficial, and create little if any concern for others.

### **What's a parent to do?**

Imagine for a moment that you have just discovered that your oldest has been sneaking money out of your wallet to support a sweet tooth addiction (a childhood behavior out of my own past, I must confess). At this point, you must decide whether you are going to use a discipline-based parenting response, or if you will use a punishment-based parenting response.

If you decide to use the recommended discipline-based parenting approach, you will help teach them your values, and thereby decrease the chances of the problem happening again-either with you, or in their relationship with others. You will also have to accept that this approach is probably going to take you much more time to accomplish your goal of exposing them to the values that are important to you.

On the other hand, if you decide to take the punishment-based parenting approach, all you will need to do is to simply punish, maybe yell a little, and perhaps for good measure, close off with a threat or two. But if you choose this route, the only affect you will likely have is to teach them the importance of not getting caught next time. it is likely, however, that your efforts to simply get them to change their behavior or attitude will take you far less time.

In dealing with this unfortunate event, the discipline-based parent will take the time to express to their kids why what they did was wrong and unacceptable. They will also tell them that they have higher expectations for them as a person and will go on to communicate what those expectations are.

They will also certainly communicate clearly what the consequences will be for taking money that is not theirs. As important as it is to determine and administer those consequences, it is just a part of what makes up discipline-based parenting.

Consider the following example of a discipline-based-parenting approach:

"I know you have been taking money out of my wallet over the past few weeks. I want to hear from you about why you have felt it was necessary to do such a dishonest thing. Because I love you and am concerned about you, I am determined to do what it takes as your parent to help you change this pattern. What I expect from you is honesty and fairness toward others, and when you take what is not yours, you are being neither honest, nor fair.

In spite of the fact that I am hurt and even angry at you for doing such a selfish thing, I still love you. But I also want you to know that what you did will not be tolerated, and that there will definitely be some consequences for your poor choice to steal from me.

I want you to take some time to think about what you did, and then I want to talk with you again. I have some ideas as to what I believe are appropriate consequences for what you have done, but I also want you to give some thought to what you think might be an appropriate consequence for this. I also want you to think about what might be an appropriate consequence if this were to ever happen again. Until you are ready to talk further with me about what has happened, consider yourself grounded. How much time do you need, and when would be a good time for us to talk again?"

Compare the above discipline-based parenting approach with the following punishment-based parenting:

"I caught you stealing from me and I'm going to make sure that it doesn't happen again. Go to your room and consider yourself grounded. Do not talk on the phone, do not come out except to go to school, and I don't want to hear a peep out of you until I tell you that you can talk. Life as you have previously known it, is over. I can't believe that you would do such a thing, after all I've sacrificed for you."

### **So what's the bottom line?**

There is a distinct difference between what using discipline and using punishment looks like in our efforts to shape, design and to influence our kids. Even more importantly, there is a crucial difference in the results that come about when we use discipline-based-parenting efforts, instead of punishment-based parenting ones. While discipline teaches principles and values that will serve our kids well

throughout the rest of their lives, punishment rarely teaches anything other than the importance of not getting caught next time.

Misbehavior, testing, and even some degree of rebellion are inevitable events during the development and growth of most kids. It's natural, it's normal, and we should expect it. (For more on this, refer to question #21 in Part I of this book.) How we respond to their attempts to find out where they belong, what is expected, and what it will cost them when they step outside our boundaries, is crucial to their developing a true and healthy sense of values, morals, and principles.

If we are going to raise great kids who have honorable values, then we parents must be willing to exert the extra effort it takes to teach and instruct. Merely bringing about our desired changes in their immediate behaviors and attitudes is simply not enough.

### **Discussion Questions**

Based on what you have learned about the differences, do you think your parents were more likely to practice discipline-based or punishment-based parenting?

Did their responses help you learn values that you eventually internalized as your own, or did you simply learn not to get caught the next time?

Do your kids seem to be learning values from your discipline of them, or are they just learning not to get caught next time?

If you are teaching them important values that they seem to be internalizing, what efforts of yours seem to be working well?

If your kids seem to just be learning ways to not get caught next time, what changes need to be made in your efforts to use discipline rather than punishment?