



Assertive Discipline

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Parents are often confused about how to teach children to behave well in a variety of situations. [Assertive discipline](#) is a useful tool in teaching your children appropriate behavior. Assertive parents state expectations directly, and provide consistent consequences for misbehavior. They don't allow their children to take advantage of them, nor do they put children down with hostile statements or give overly severe punishments.

Critical phrases such as "you never do anything right" teach children that they are inadequate and might as well give up on trying to do things the right way. Telling children to "shut up" or giving them the silent treatment results in feelings of insecurity and poor self-worth. In contrast, assertive messages let children know that the problem is the behavior (not the children themselves) and reassure them that they can indeed learn to behave appropriately.

Assertive parents clearly state what the rules are and what the consequences are for breaking those rules – and then follow through. For example, if children are fighting at the dinner table, the assertive parent would say, "You aren't allowed to fight at the dinner table. If you do it again, you will finish your meal alone in your room. If the behavior continues, the child is sent to their room with no further discussion. A note of caution here: parents need to be careful when choosing a punishment. In this case, if the child enjoys being in his or her room alone, then the intended punishment is actually a reward and will encourage the child to continue misbehaving in the future. In that case, the punishment needs to be changed to something the child finds unpleasant (but not harmful, of course).

Children learn best from [logical consequences](#) which require them to experience the results of a poor choice, lose the privilege that was abused, or to make up for the misbehavior in some way. For example, the logical consequence for leaving laundry undone is not having any clean clothes when needed. The logical consequence for not doing homework might be making up the missing assignment instead of doing a more fun activity. Choose the consequence that best fits the situation and your child.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.