

Parent Education Corner
Discipline and Communication
By Caroline Mouldale

“Adults have not understood children or adolescents as they are, as consequences, in continual conflict with them. The adult must find a different point of departure. The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child as he is.”
-Montessori

Discipline does not mean punishing your child. The art of discipline is creating a respectful environment for the child to develop refined grace and courtesy skills. If you are consistent wherever you go with children and you create an environment where children know what to expect at all times then discipline and order will start to seem natural. With a consistent atmosphere children will know what to expect and will know the consequences for their actions.

Try the following steps to encourage discipline and communication:

1. **Set the guidelines with your children:** Write down what rules you expect your children to follow. Go over the expectations with your children. Make sure they understand why this is expected of them and the consequences that will occur if they do not follow the rules. To help the children own the rules, let them come up with a few on their own to add to the list. You will be surprised with what they come up with and how much better they will then follow the rules. Once you have the rules written down, follow through!! No compromising, negotiating, or saying “oh, just this time”. Children are in their sensitive period for order, so if you compromise or negotiate then the battle has already been lost.
2. **Tone of voice and role modeling:** Imagine a person twice your size standing over you with a raised voice. Children feel powerless and scared when an adult stands over them. When communicating or disciplining a child, try getting down on their level and speaking in a calm voice. It is not always easy to do, but if we remind ourselves, our children will respond much better. This is not to say that sometimes a firm voice is needed. Role model how you want your child to act. Children are sponges and repeat everything we do or say and how we carry things out. Researchers, educational experts, and teachers observe how children behave in certain situations and we can tell you, “role modeling matters”.

Parent tip: Team up with your spouse. A reminder word such as “tone” can be used if one parent is getting too heated and not responding well to the child.

3. **Communication:**
 - a. Make sure you have time in your schedule everyday to communicate with your children. I always tell parents, a good time to do this is at the dinner table. Everyone in the family, including the parents, can take turns sharing their most exciting or upsetting things that happened during the day. It is just as important to share your day with your child as it is for them to be able to share. They truly enjoy the two-way conversation. When communicating with your child also make sure to ask questions. Communication is also important when a child wants to share something. If a child runs up to you and wants to show you a picture, take a moment to enjoy it with them. Rather than saying good job, ask them about the picture and tell them, “You must be so proud of your picture” or “Tell me about

your picture". We must encourage children to be proud of their own work and own what they do; otherwise, they become trained to do things to please adults.

- b. Communicating with a child crying or having a tantrum:** Children cry and throw tantrums for a reason. Most of the time they are either trying to communicate with us, because they are having trouble finding their words; or they are testing us, looking for discipline. The trick is how to handle them. When a tantrum happens, first try the previous tactic of getting on the child's level and asking them in a calm voice to use their words and tell you how you can help them or what is wrong. If the child is too upset, tell the child you will give them a few minutes to calm down and to take some deep breaths. You may want to demonstrate by putting your hand on your belly and taking a deep breath. Most of the time we know what is wrong with our child, but it is important not to dictate how to handle the situation before the child is able to talk through the situation. You can assist your child in resolving the issue, but in the end the child will handle the situation better in the future by working through it using their words.
- 4. The Master Plan:** If you follow the plan and are consistent, you will find that "time outs" or "breaks" will become few and far between. The first thing to remember is not to abuse time outs. In addition, you should make sure they are in a set place. Before putting a child in time out, give them a warning and remind them of their behavior. The only time a child should go immediately into a break is for hurting someone. Make sure you follow through when a time out is needed. Another way you can give a time out is by simply telling the child they need to go take a break and think about how they are acting or what they did. Make sure that when you put your child in time out or in a break, you explain clearly why they are there and what they need to think about while they are there. Let them sit for 1 minute per year of age. Ignore any behavior or talking while the child is in a break. Do not be tempted to talk to them. If it helps you, set a timer so you know when you can go back to the child and it will be a helpful reminder to yourself not to talk during the timer. Before letting them get back up, make sure you talk to them to see if they understand the situation and will try better next time. If a child is defiant and not listening to you after the break, this means they are not ready for communication and need to sit longer. Time outs should be done in a boring area, like a step, and should educate the child. Bedrooms are not good to use, because they will just play and eventually start thinking of their room as an unhappy place. Bedrooms should remain a safe haven. Make sure any caretakers are familiar with your discipline techniques, so there will be consistency. Remember, always follow through! Even if it means missing a party, leaving a store without buying anything, or even turning the car around and going home. Respect the child, remember to communicate, and remember to create a clear and consistent discipline plan.

"Discipline, the first result of an order establishing itself within, is the principle phenomenon to be looked for as the 'external sign' of an internal process that has been initiated" (Montessori).

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at Cmoulsdale@thehms.org.