

Baby Step #5

Do Discipline That Works

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You've got this!



Hi! My name is Paul

“Hi! My name is Paul. I have six daughters.” Most of the time when people hear this they either think I’m Catholic or, the other extreme, a playboy who sowed his seed with total indiscretion. Neither is true. I am madly in love with the lovely and talented Mrs. Peterson, and together we have brought into this world six amazing ladies!

My experience with parenting goes like this... MOST of the time I like being “dad.” MOST of the time I love coming home. MOST of the time I enjoy those decades old jokes (you know, they’re the same ones you told your parents and now your kids are telling you and you have to act like you’ve never heard it AND that it is funny). MOST of the time I like hearing about their day. MOST of the time I like going out in public with all of these ladies. But there are days... you’ve had them too! Those days when you would prefer to act like those screaming kids belong to someone else so that you can make snide remarks and shoot condescending looks at those irresponsible and awful parents. Or better yet, those days when you can binge on Netflix and Doritos and act like you’re single with no responsibility. There are days when you simply cannot endure one more child initiated drama, and you swear to God that if you hear your nickname (DAD! MOM!) again you will simply change your name and move to another country. (Come on, you know you’ve felt this way too.)

Seriously, I love being a parent, but there are days when I just want to run away! There are days when I just want to quietly slip in the front door and right upstairs into my Mandom (aka Man Cave) ... a land where there is no tattling, arguing, or drama; a land where my rulings are unquestioned and my belongings left untouched. Do you know what I’m talking about? Some days we feel too tired, inadequate, distracted or frustrated to do what parenting requires of us! Welcome to parenting in the “First Half.”

I have learned some things that will help you enjoy the first half of parenting, which I define as starting at birth and ending around 10 years of age. This article will help you get started with the most important lesson about parenting young children! Enjoy, and always remember this, **“You’ve got this!”**

Me with the lovely and ever talented Mrs. Peterson!



Our six ladies!





Defining Discipline

I was reading a book about personal development the other day and saw this quote by Bob Hawke, “The things which are most important don’t always scream the loudest.” I immediately thought to myself, “This guy’s not a parent, because every parent knows that kids can be the loudest noise in the room!” Yes, I know what he’s talking about, and I agree with him. I also know that the most important responsibility in our life, our kids, can make themselves obvious when they want to, often at the most inopportune times!

As a parent you need to know this right now... your children will say and do things that will bring tears to your eyes, and not because it is cute. They will say and do things that absolutely mortify you. That’s par for the parenting course. We understand and accept that. *What we cannot accept is the possibility of raising children who become adults who continue to act like children!* Somewhere along the line, we have to teach our children; we have to insert discipline and correct those morally and socially unacceptable behaviors. If we do not discipline our children, we will gift the people of the world with adults for whom they are deeply ungrateful. You know the kind of adults I am talking about... ungrateful, selfish, belligerent, lazy, sneaky, violent, undisciplined, and unproductive.

If you have been a parent for any time at all, you have wrestled with the matter of how to discipline your kids. We all have a sense that discipline is important, but there is a lot of confusion about what it is and how to go about it. In this chapter, I want to give you six ideas that should be a part of any conversation about discipline.



It is not okay to raise children who become adults who continue to act like children!

Before we get there, though, let us talk about what discipline is.

I googled “parental discipline” and was surprised to see The American Humane Association show up on the first page of results. I learned that the American Humane Association is not exclusively concerned with puppies. It turns out that since 1877 they have been dedicated to the welfare of animals *and* children! I was also surprised to see that the AHA has some insightful things to say about parental discipline. On their website, they ask the question, “What is discipline?” Then they answer:

As part of their natural development, children sometimes challenge or test parental and adult expectations and authority. Sometimes, children simply choose to misbehave in order to gain something (e.g., attention, an object, power, peer approval). This is a significant part of the growth process of children, yet it should not be without consequence. Discipline is how children learn right from wrong, acceptable from unacceptable. Parental or adult discipline of children should be designed to help children engage better with others and to modify or control their behavior. *Providing appropriate discipline to children is one of the most essential responsibilities of a parent. In addition, providing consistent and positive discipline helps children grow into responsible adults.* (Italics are mine).

Those last two lines are essential to what I want to teach you about discipline! Providing appropriate discipline to children is one of the most essential responsibilities of a parent. In addition, providing consistent and positive discipline helps children grow into responsible adults.



If you are a parent, one of the most fundamental responsibilities you have is to discipline your children. Please read that again! Now look at this proverb from Solomon, father, king, sage, and author: **“Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them” (Proverbs 13:24).** If you are having a hard time disciplining your child, the issue might be that you have not understood the connection between love and discipline.

By the way, the “rod of discipline” to which Solomon refers does not necessarily mean and is certainly not limited to spanking. He does however say this about physical discipline: “A youngster’s heart is filled with foolishness, but physical discipline will drive it far away” (Proverbs 22:15). Often the most difficult part of parenting is to discipline our children!

Whether it is spanking, grounding, restricting privileges, etc. it hurts our heart to inflict pain of any kind on our children. The truth though is that if we love them we will do it, because we know this... **if we do not discipline them today someone who loves them far less will discipline them tomorrow!** It is you today or an employer tomorrow. It is you today or a judge tomorrow. You get the point... you must love them enough to discipline them today so that when they are an adult they will know how to care for themselves and successfully interact with others.



Now before we go any further, I want to take a minute and consider a key principle that we teach, **the better you are, the better they are**. In our first e-book (Baby Step #1 – Take Care of Yourself), I encouraged you to think about how you were caring for yourself. With that in mind, please read this next sentence slowly: **a parent who has not cared for himself/herself cannot discipline wisely, effectively, and with love.**

If you are tired and stressed you will overreact or underreact. You will beat or ignore, and neither is appropriate. Remember this, the best gift you can give to your child is a rested, healthy, thoughtful, spiritually alert you! Anything else and discipline runs the risk of turning into abuse or neglect.

Earlier we read how the AHA says, “Providing appropriate discipline to children is one of the most essential responsibilities of a parent. And providing consistent and positive discipline helps children grow into responsible adults.” As I read that, it sounded familiar. One of the most productive spiritual disciplines I engage in is reading the Bible, and, in particular, reading the book of Proverbs. A few years ago, I read Proverbs and wrote down every verse that talked about parenting. One verse in particular stuck out to me, **“Discipline your children while there is hope. Otherwise, you will ruin their lives” (Proverbs 19:18)**. The AHA says that discipline is one of the most essential responsibilities of a parent and that doing it well helps children grow into responsible adults. Solomon (the author of the just mentioned proverb) intensifies this a bit. He makes it sound like ***there is a window of time that if missed will destroy your child’s future***. That is what he means when he writes, “Discipline your child *while there is hope...*” The AHA says discipline your children so they will turn into responsible adults, and Solomon says if you do not discipline them, you will destroy their future! Are you feeling the weight of responsibility yet?



Now I am an optimistic guy, but I have seen a fair amount of people who are pretty much “hopeless” unless and until there is a drastic intervention. I don’t want your kids to need the “drastic” to be their only hope!

Solomon has wisdom for us! He is essentially saying to parents, **Discipline effectively NOW so that there is no need for a drastic intervention LATER.** Do not hope for something drastic in the future to change your children’s behavior! Do something about it now “while there is still hope”!

When I stop and think about it, the responsibility of parenting is HUGE! My kids’ future is being shaped now. Their understanding and appreciation of God and people, their work ethic, the way they handle money and power, the way they address conflict and view tough times, how they engage with their spouse and children, and a lot more of **what happens in their future is dependent upon how I discipline them in the present!**

Kids are not born with healthy, positive, good characteristics like generosity, compassion, integrity, etc. Nope, these kind of characteristics are developed and nurtured through discipline. I always tell people that if you do not believe people are broken from the point of birth... you have never been a parent! Seriously, I have never had to teach my kids to lie, steal, be greedy, or any other unhealthy character trait. They do those things naturally! Quite the contrary, I have had to teach them how to tell the truth, be generous, etc. **We do not have to teach our children how to be bad... we have to teach them how to be good! That is where discipline comes in.**

I cannot tell you exactly how to discipline your child, but I can give you six ideas that you should consider as you discipline. So let’s get into them...



Discipline should always be in the context of love.

My dad always used to tell me right before he would discipline me, “This hurts me more than it does you.” At that time, I did not understand that at all! Now I do.

When you love someone, you are willing to let him or her hurt, or even be the source of their pain in an effort to help them get better.

Watching my children lose privileges kills me! They do not understand that... yet. They just see me as an ogre taking their toys, suspending their friend privileges, etc. But, what I see is an adult being made. I see that this is the time, the “window of hope” in which to love them enough to be a point of pain in their life; but this must be done in a context of love.

So how do I love well? GREAT question!

Here is what I have found: **the greatest way to show love is through time.** You spend time with the things/people you love. When I spend time with my kids, two things happen: the first is that I have to discipline less. Kids who have their parent’s positive attention seem to need less negative attention. In other words, when I spend proactive time with my kids I find I spend less reactive time with them! The second phenomenon that happens when I spend time with my kids is that when I do discipline them, the discipline is received better, because they know I love them.

Now there is something interesting, in a bad way, that happens when I am too busy to invest time with my children. When I do not spend time with my kids and I discipline them, they might naturally see themselves as an inconvenience and an intruder. Say, for instance, that I have spent no time with my daughter in a few days. I am working hard on a project and she wants/needs my attention. If I've not cared well for myself and I'm tired and stressed, I'm likely going to snap and be mean with my words, or worse yet... physically, and that's when discipline is no longer seen as loving but as aggravating and disheartening.

One of the heroes of my faith, St. Paul, speaks directly to dads about this, but mom, listen in because you might be doing it too! Right after telling children to obey their parents, he wrote to fathers: "Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). In another, similar, letter he wrote, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The point here is that discipline done outside of love will be aggravating and cause anger and discouragement. Dad and mom, the most effective discipline happens in the context of love! **If your kids question your love, they will not receive your discipline.**

We we must make sure that our kids know we love them BEFORE and AFTER we discipline... and the best way to do that is to spend time with them!



Discipline should be done with an eye to the future.

Remember what the American Humane Association and Solomon said about parental discipline?

- AHA - "...positive discipline helps children grow into responsible adults."
- Solomon - "Discipline your children while there is hope. Otherwise, you will ruin their lives."

Both of these see discipline as being in the present for the purpose of the future. However, here is something we need to keep on the front of our mind: **if we are not careful, discipline can quickly become more about the present than the future.** If we are not careful, we will discipline because we are irritated, tired, inconvenienced, etc.

Discipline done in these contexts is not normally helpful and, in fact, may be destructive for your child's future! Be careful when you discipline your child that it is not because you are aggravated, but because you are concerned.

Okay... okay... I know that even the best among us have moments when we discipline out of aggravation. I am simply encouraging you to be thoughtful about how and when you discipline. It is helpful, when considering how and when to discipline your child, to ask this question, **"If this behavior continues, what kind of an adult will my child be?"**

STOP!

Before you read the next page, make sure you are awake! I have some important questions to ask you!

Here are some examples of behaviors that need discipline. Think about these actions and characteristics and ask yourself that question:

- My child has a habit of interrupting. *“If this behavior continues, what kind of an adult will my child be?”*
- My child is disrespectful in how he/she talks to me and other adults. *“If this behavior continues, what kind of an adult will my child be?”*
- My child spends a LOT of time watching pointless and even stupid videos on social media. *“If this behavior continues, what kind of an adult will my child be?”*
- My child just will not clean up his/her mess! *“If this behavior continues, what kind of an adult will my child be?”*

Think about it like this, your child is blazing a path with her actions. Every time she walks down that path, it becomes more familiar. The more familiar it becomes the more likely she will make that her normal traveling route.

Are you okay with your child traveling like this for the rest of her life... or at least until the point someone or something drastically intervenes to change her?

What she does today will determine who she is tomorrow. Are you okay with that? **Do you want to interact with the adult your child is becoming?** Would you hire him? Would you want to work for her?



I read a story about child whose parents are not thinking about the future and it is going to cost them... actually, it did cost them. A couple in China had this odd habit of allowing their toddler to tear up old books. They thought it was cute and it kept him entertained, so they would regularly restock the shelves with old books for his destructive habit. If you are thinking they were silly for doing that, wait until you read what else they did. They kept their savings account hidden in a box under their bed. Hey, when you are a toddler paper is paper... right? That little man found dad and mom's savings box and did what he had been allowed to do... he ripped up all the paper... a total of almost \$4700! When his mother was interviewed by a reporter for this story she said, "We don't have much time for reading here" (Ummm... that might be a clue to the problem at hand). Then she doubled down on her parental insanity and said, "We didn't really care when he ripped up the old books we had lying around, and it was easy to buy very cheap old books down the market which he happily ripped into small pieces. I thought if I left him alone with a book for an hour it would be no problem and we could hear the ripping sounds from the kitchen but didn't think anything of it." However, it was not as if she wasn't warned about the danger of this thoughtless neglect. She told the reporter, "My family told me that it was not [a good idea] and I now realize they were right after he found all our money and ripped it up. It was all our savings."



Oh my gosh! There's so much wrong with that story! However, probably the worst part hasn't happened yet. You can replace \$4700. What you cannot replace is the "window of hope" that is closing for this child. If these parents do not begin to discipline their child, he is going to do a lot more damage than just destroying \$4700.

This story brings to mind another line from Solomon, "To discipline a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child" (Proverbs 29:15). Your child may not be tearing up books or life savings, but what is left undisciplined now will disgrace you and destroy him in the future!

Please love your child enough to discipline her! Her future depends upon it!

Ok, let's move on to the third idea about discipline, and here is where things get more practical.



Discipline should be predetermined.

I have discovered that **if the discipline is NOT predetermined, it will be dependent upon my mood.** In other words, if I do not have a **plan** for discipline the severity of the discipline will depend on how I am feeling. For instance, if I am in a bad mood, tired, stressed, hungry, etc. I will likely choose an extreme, unnecessarily harsh method of discipline. Let's say I am tired and hungry. I call the girls to come to supper. One of them does not come until the third time I call... so I ground her from her iPod for a month (That is when Sherri pulls me to the side and reminds me of this lesson).

On the other hand, suppose I am in a good mood and we are all having a good time. I call the girls for supper and no one comes. If I am in a good mood, I am more likely to "let things slide." Maybe I will make up a song and do a silly dance up the stairs to escort them down (Again that is when Sherri pulls me to the side and reminds me of this lesson).

What happens in this scenario is that I teach my children that my mood determines how quickly, if at all, they should respond. That is not okay! If discipline is the key to my children's future (and Solomon and the AHA agree that it is), then I must be thoughtful, intentional, and consistent about it!

Let me give you a real practical idea on how to do this.



A few years ago, Sherri and I realized that we were consistently addressing the same set of issues in our home. We kept addressing, but they kept happening.

We realized that the problem was us... we were disciplining based on our mood.

We simply were not being consistent. We were putting our kids in a situation where they had to determine whether or not we were serious based on our mood, and that is not fair to anyone much less kids.

So we sat down and identified the handful of problem areas in our home. We named the problem AND a punishment that came along with it. Then we tailored it to fit each child. I will talk more about this in a minute. We put it in a Word document (We call it our “Fixing Problems” document), and held a family meeting. In this meeting, we explained the document to everyone, and then hung it on the fridge. Now whenever an infraction occurs, the discipline is never dependent upon our mood, and there is no question about what is going to happen. The kids know what is coming, in fact, they will call it out! They know IN ADVANCE, “If I hit... I go to the corner.” “If I leave a mess... I lose the mess.” “If I yell... I lose media time.” Here is the key: **predetermined discipline takes the guessing out of it... for you and your child.**

If you have not sat down and identified the problem areas in your home... do yourself and your kids a favor and do it! Then take the next step and attach a point of discipline to each problem.

To get you started, here is what our “Fixing Problems” worksheet looks like:



Problem	Punishment
Name the problem here (e.g. lying, disrespect, not cleaning up your mess, etc.)	Name the punishment here (e.g. stand in the corner, lose “friend time”, etc.)
Name the next problem here...	Name the appropriate punishment here...

If you want a copy of this document, e-mail me and I'll send you one (paul@firsthalfparenting.com).

Okay, on to the next and perhaps most controversial point about discipline...



Discipline should be significant.

Parents! Read this next sentence repeatedly, because it is fundamental to the science of discipline: **If discipline does not cause pain, the problem will not stop.**

Parents who refuse to administer significant discipline to their children will someday have to watch as someone else administers significant discipline to them. Your job as a parent is to figure out what “significant” is to your child (*We have written an e-book about this – “Baby Step #4 – Get a Ph.D. in your Child”*).

For some kids, timeout will never work; what they need is a “thump on the rump”... “a hit where they sit”... “a smack on the crack” (These are all jingles we have made up in our home... much to the chagrin of Mrs. Peterson). For other kids, a good solid spanking just will not do. They need time out.

As a parent, your job is to know your child and what will cause them the greatest pain/inconvenience. This is where having a “Ph.D. in your child” comes in handy! You must know his way! What is the way of discipline that will most likely teach her to stop doing foolish and start doing wise? You must be an expert in the field of your child. That expertise will help you determine the type of discipline that will be most effective for your child.



In our home, when our children consider their choices, **I want them to think, “It’s not worth it to disobey.”** That is what significant discipline does.

I see many parents setting their children up for a disastrous future because they will not cause some pain (I am not talking physical pain here... though a smack on the crack is often just what is needed).

If your child knows there is no significant pain/inconvenience attached to disobedience, then why wouldn’t she do what she wants? You do the same thing! Think about it, are you more likely to speed on a backcountry road where there are few police officers and a chance of getting off with a warning if you do get pulled over? On the other hand, are you more likely to speed in a construction zone where you can go to jail for speeding if caught? Does the penalty have anything to do with your answer? Of course, you are more likely to break the speed limit on a backcountry road, and less likely to speed in a construction zone, because the penalty is much greater if caught! What is true for you is true for your children; if the discipline is not significant do not expect your child to slow down.

OK, so far we’ve said that discipline should be: done in the context of love and with an eye to the future. We have learned that it should be predetermined and significant.

Now let’s talk about the fifth component...



Discipline should be personalized.

This is somewhat connected to the previous idea that discipline should be significant, but there is an important point here: **what is significant to one child is meaningless to another.**

I have a child that melts when I shoot her a disappointed look. I have another child that will stare me down when I shoot her a disappointed look. I have one child that hates “corner time”, and another that will create her own fantasy world in that corner. I have a child for whom the threat of a good thump on the rump is enough to help her think twice, and another that I could hit her with a flying elbow off the top ropes and she would jump up and kick me in the knee (a little WWE lingo there). The point is this; every child has his or her own way! The method of discipline that works for one child may not, in fact, probably will not work for your other child! Here is the key, **if discipline is to be effective, it must be personalized.**

In our home, we have discovered that when we predetermine our discipline it helps to talk about each child. Keep in mind that age and interests play a big role in this decision. This is not as hard as it might sound. I mean think about it: spanking a teenager is not cool or appropriate. On the other hand, timeout for a 2-year old is generally not effective. What I have found is that **parents who do not predetermine and personalize their children’s discipline will default to the easiest or the harshest.** The easiest is to “let it go this time” and the harshest is to get physical for every indiscretion.



I will tell you the easiest way to personalize your children's discipline: find what they love the most and work your way down from there.

For one of my children, being banned from social media is the equivalent of being abandoned with no food, shelter, or defensive weapons in the middle of a zombie apocalypse. Most other forms of discipline are merely a temporary inconvenience, but the threat of being banned from social media is a strong deterrent for her.

Before she chooses to disregard our family values or ignore our expectations she thinks, "Is it worth losing social media over?" For her, the pain of being banned from social media is significant enough that she often decides to align her actions with what dad and mom are expecting of her. However, that is just her. We have other kiddos for whom that could not matter any less. For them it is corner time, losing access to a pet, having to write sentences, etc. The point is this, **know what hurts them... and be willing to do it.**

If that sounds harsh to you, remember what Solomon wrote, "*Discipline your children while there is hope. Otherwise, you will ruin their lives*" (Proverbs 19:18).

Ready for the sixth component of effective discipline?



Discipline should be consistent.

Sometimes the worst part of discipline is that it requires me to get off the couch! I am tired. I have been working all day. Supper is done and cleaned up. Sherri and I are wrapping up our evening talking or watching Netflix. We are happy. Content. Then we hear noise upstairs. Things moving around. Yelling. It literally sounds like things are falling off the walls. What do we do? Remember how we talked about having a predetermined plan for discipline? Having a course of action that you take every time? But tonight is different. You are REALLY tired. So, you let it go. You might yell up the stairs, but that is a long way up there and you are tired. You let loose a few more bellows then you just ignore it until it subsides. The next night the same thing happens. This time you are not as tired, so you storm up the stairs and, because you are still a little mad about last night, you go beyond the predetermined plan! You are mad so you really punish them. What we have here is a case of inconsistency. One night you ignore the disobedience. The next night it is a hit with an atomic bomb. Dad and mom, if you discipline your children based on your mood or your energy levels you will be inconsistent. **When you are inconsistent with your discipline your kids will not know what to expect, and when they do not know what to expect you can expect the worst.**



Inconsistent discipline leads to inconsistent behavior in your children, which leads to inconsistent adults. Another way to say that is an adult with a “ruined life.” Remember what Solomon said? “Discipline your child while there is hope. Otherwise, you will ruin their lives.” If your discipline is dependent on your mood, your energy level, or your stress level you are going to be inconsistent and unnecessarily complicate your children’s lives. What we are looking for here is consistency. We want our children to know what will happen every time they disregard family values or parental expectations. No surprises. I know this is a tough one because it requires that you get off the couch, excuse yourself from conversations, and often be inconvenienced to be consistent in disciplining your child! However, remember this, **discipline that inconveniences you today will make you proud tomorrow.**

Stay with it, parents! Say what you are going to do then do what you said... every time!



Review... and a great story!

Okay, let's review the six big ideas about discipline. Effective discipline is

- done in the context of love
- done with an eye to the future
- predetermined
- significant
- personalized
- consistent

During one of our "Family Movie Nights" we watched a movie about a single mom with two young boys. She had been abandoned by her husband, lived in poverty, and struggled with depression. When her boys were pre-teens, she made a decision to significantly cut TV time, required them to read two books a week, and write a report on what they had read! When she first rolled this out to them, they responded, "**You're the meanest mom ever.**" But, she stuck to her guns.

Today, you know one of her boys. Though he started in an environment that was NOT a typical breeding ground for successful people, he had a mother who understood how to discipline and did it well. You know this man. His name is Ben Carson, a famous neurosurgeon and 2016 Republican presidential candidate.

He had a mom who understood what Solomon wrote, "Discipline your children while there is hope. Otherwise, you will ruin their lives" (Proverbs 19:18 NLT). Her decision to discipline created a great man. Your decision to discipline will produce a great adult too.



You've got this!

You have this Dad! You can do this Mom! Disciplining your child is one of the toughest and most important actions you will take as a parent! Please do not be reactive! Be thoughtful, prayerful, intentional... Be proactive! You'll not regret it, and someday your children will thank you for it!

In this e-book, we have discussed six principles for effective discipline; in our next e-book will discuss **"Baby Step #6– Call Mulligans."** Sherri and I can't wait to share what we've discovered about admitting mistakes, asking forgiveness, and starting over!

Until then...**You can do this! You've got this!**

F I R S T

half parenting

You can find out more about Paul on his social media:



[Instagram.com/thepaulpeterson](https://www.instagram.com/thepaulpeterson)



[Facebook.com/thepaulpeterson](https://www.facebook.com/thepaulpeterson)



“The better you are, the better your kids will be!”

Paul Peterson

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