



Each child is a unique individual with different strengths and abilities

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If you have questions or need this document in a different format, please contact your local DHS office.

What about discipline?

Straight talk about a complicated subject



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It is important that discipline offers every foster child a positive experience that will teach them healthy and appropriate ways of living.

The challenge for many of you as foster parents is to teach your foster child without resorting to physical discipline. A bond of mutual love and shared history is the strongest element in effective discipline with your own children. In most circumstances, this has not been established with foster children entering your home.

The foster parent role requires a level of planning and thought that will likely be different from that which you use with your biological children.

Dealing with difficult behavior

A simple formula for approaching a child's problem behavior:

- Consider the child's developmental age as opposed to his or her chronological age.
- Ignore behaviors you can tolerate that are not health and safety related.

- Collect information about a specific behavior problem:
 - ...What time of day does it occur?
 - ...Where does it happen?
 - ...With whom?
 - ...What is the behavior a reaction to?
- Brainstorm possible solutions.
- Test your ideas and select the most effective solution.
- Problem solve with the child's caseworker and/or your foster home certifier.

The most effective foster parent will...

- Establish routines and clearly stated rules that are few in number
- Provide discipline that is warm and encouraging.
- Set reliable and fair limits.
- Recognize the child's feelings and his or her right to those feelings.
- Provide a physically and emotionally safe place for the child to live.

Helpful hints for positive discipline

- Catch the child being good!
- Use praise and encouragement.
- Strive for consistency.
- Teach by example.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Get support for yourself.
- Know when to ask for help and ask when you need to.
- Help your child have choices.
- Respect the importance to the child of his or her biological family and cultural traditions.
- Avoid criticism and sarcasm, as well as words that hurt or humiliate.

Training & support

Your local child welfare office provides training to foster, adoptive parents and relative caregivers on topics such as Positive Behavior Management and Child Development. Please ask the child's caseworker or your certifier for the next available training.