



HELPING  
FAMILIES  
TEAM

**NHS**

South London  
and Maudsley  
NHS Foundation Trust

# BOUNDARIES AND DISCIPLINE

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## SHORT QUICK TIPS



**CPCS**  
THE CENTRE FOR  
PARENT & CHILD  
SUPPORT

# INTRODUCTION

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COVID-19 restrictions mean it is a particularly tricky time for parents to hold boundaries and manage disruptive behaviour. You may find yourself getting stuck in a cycle of withdrawing from difficult behaviour, or escalating punishments, which can damage self-esteem.

Increasing your options for discipline and holding boundaries can help you feel more confident as a parent and increase your child's wellbeing and settled behaviour.

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## **Helping Families Team**

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# USING PARENTING GROUNDWORK: STAYING CALM, CONNECTED AND KIND TO YOURSELF

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Have a look at our separate Quick Tips guide on Parenting Groundwork before trying these strategies. Be kind and check in with yourself before trying parenting strategies:

- Ask, 'how am I feeling right now?', and 'am I feeling calm enough and ready to connect?'
- If not, give yourself permission to settle yourself first. Try a groundwork strategy such as deep breathing
- Ideally aim for a relaxed and calm tone of voice, giving eye contact, a relaxed and open body posture, a friendly or relaxed expression, and kind words.

# ROUTINES AND STRUCTURE

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Normal family routines have been severely disrupted. Making an effort to establish new routines will help children to feel safe, and both you and your child to feel more in control.

- Have a routine for both weekdays and weekends
- A visual timetable using pictures and times may be particularly helpful
- Adolescents can be encouraged to come up with their own timetable
- Try including: social contact, exercise, getting up time and bedtime, some learning or concentrated activity, free play, chores /responsibilities, screen time



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Create a visual timetable of your daily routine with your child.

# HOUSE RULES

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Normal social rules have gone out the window. It is helpful to think with your family about rules you can all stick to during social distancing.

- Have a family meeting. Seek out your child or adolescent's ideas about how you can respect one another. Ask what they need from you as a parent.
- What is the 'bottom line' for your family; things that you can commit to doing 100% of the time? Be realistic about what is achievable in the current context
- Frame rules positively. For example, 'We will try hard to respect each other's opinions?'
- Make a contract with your adolescent about their behaviour and what's allowed. For example, when they can go for a walk
- Try writing these out and displaying on the wall



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Have a family meeting to create five house rules

# DISCIPLINE: PRINCIPLES

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Discipline is about more than consequences for negative behaviour. Consistent discipline helps children feel a sense of safety, establishes mutual respect, and increases the likelihood of constructive and settled behaviour.

- Start positive – try the ‘Connecting and Strengthening’ guide first. Encouraging positive behaviour will reduce disruptive behaviour
- Ensure you are feeling calm and connected before disciplining.
- Make sure you have your child’s attention
- Use short instructions and simple language
- Be positive! Let your child know you think they can do it
- Empathise with your child to calm them down and reduce the likelihood of needing to discipline, for example, ‘I know you’re feeling angry right now and that’s okay’

# DISCIPLINE: IDEAS FOR CONSEQUENCES

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Use consequences to help your child understand the impact of their behaviour and learn to make choices.

- Punishment comes after the behaviour, whereas consequences are given before your child acts. It means offering your child a choice about what they do next. For example, 'Please turn the TV off now or you will lose 5 minutes of screen time after dinner'
- Think about realistic consequences; screen time, bed time, pocket money or treats?
- You and your child do not have access to as many enjoyable things right now, so restrict these in moderation. Rather than take away an activity or possession completely, reduce your child's access to it by a small increment, such as 10 minutes less screen time
- Agree consequences in advance with your child or adolescent, and with your partner if you are co-parenting

# DISCIPLINE: HOW TO USE CONSEQUENCES

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Explain exactly what you would like your child to do, and why. If you'd like your child to stop something, tell them what you'd like them to do instead

Give clear timescales for behaviour. Warn in advance; for example, 'I'd like you to stop watching TV at 8pm'

First review: if your child has done as instructed, praise them and let it go. If they haven't, give them a clear warning to do as you ask immediately or there will be a consequence

Second review: if they have done as you asked, praise and let it go. If they haven't, implement the consequence, explaining why you're doing so



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Try using very clear, specific, positive instructions for something you would like your child to do. Notice the effect.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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Having defined responsibilities helps children to increase their sense of value and self-esteem. This is especially important at the moment when you may need your children to help out at home.

- Everyone can help out, no matter what their age. Match responsibilities with your child's age and developmental stage
- Draw on your child's strengths and interests and negotiate what they can do
- Encourage your child to take responsibility
- Keep the focus positive, for example, using praise and encouragement



## QUICK WIN SUGGESTION:

Come up with a new role or responsibility for your child that you both feel they can do well at. Notice the effect of your child managing this responsibility.