

Parents as Leaders

What can we learn from this about discipline? We need to let children know we trust them to make their own judgments and sometimes to make their own mistakes and accept the consequences if they fail. They also need to know we will be there to discuss their decisions with them and help them to pick up and get back on track if they do make a wrong decision about their behaviour. As well, they need to have faith that what we expect of them is within their reach. A four-year-old told to tidy her messy room will not do it because the task is most likely too big and beyond her – but she is more likely to co-operate if she is given a ‘reachable’ instruction such as asking her to put ten toys into the toy box.

We begin with lesson One:

Lesson 1: Trust is the foundation for everything

McClure begins by talking about the importance of two-way trust between her dog and herself that is built up by working together over time. She knows that her dog, Ivy, will stay in a set position until she calls her, and Ivy knows that she will be there to give her direction about what to do next. Ivy also trusts her with absolute certainty that she will not ask her to do anything that she cannot. Move the cursor to the next page of your life.

Lesson 2: Put your relationship first

McClure says that the relationship between Ivy and herself is the most important thing of all. They play together at the beginning of a task and celebrate together at the end, no matter what the outcome.

Sai Baba says: Only when there are differences, there is conflict. Push aside these differences and live with the feeling of oneness.

Sai Baba says: Parents and children must develop constructive companionship. The parents must share the sorrows and joys of the children as keenly as if they were their own.

What can we learn from this about discipline? We need to create time to develop a quality relationship with each individual child, built on love and understanding. This is the foundation for the trust and communication and other important qualities to grow.

Lesson 3: Make it fun!

In developing her dog’s discipline skills, McClure always tries to make the learning fun. If Ivy is full of enthusiasm and gusto she is much more likely to achieve what her owner wants her to achieve.

Sai Baba says: Life is a game. Play it.

What can we learn from this about discipline?

*Use humor. Humor is another excellent way to get children to obey. As long as they don't see your command as a game, then a funny song or funny face might swing them around. Playfulness can be a wonderful way to gain cooperation, for example, ‘Let’s pack up the toys before they hide from us and the toy basket’.

Lesson 4: You need three-way vision.

Three-way vision means looking at the situation from different perspectives. First, McClure looks at the dog herself on the agility course. Second, she must look at the course from the dog's point of view in order to see what the traps are, to understand what the dog might be thinking. And to realize how the handler's actions and reactions affect Ivy's thinking. Third, the handler must be able to take a step back and to see the whole thing from the "balcony", that is to take a birds' eye perspective of Ivy's actions and reactions and her own.

One of the important lessons she learned is that Ivy does not always take her cues from the signals that her trainer gives. As the handler waves her arms and calls out to her, Ivy may well have developed her own technique of looking very closely at the handler's smaller movements, such as the placement of her feet.

Sai Baba says: When you want to teach good principles to children, first you practise and then set an example. For example, if you smoke your children will also emulate you and start smoking.

Sai Baba says: The true characteristic of good education is good teaching. Good teaching brings about transformation in students. It will make the children confess their mistakes before the teacher. I know this very well. Sometimes I punish my students for their mistakes and am strict towards them. Yet I love them and give them what they need. This transforms their hearts.... and I forgive them by saying, "My dear son, whatever I do is for your good". All teachers can learn to emulate this example.

What can we learn from this about discipline? Always make a point of using your three-way vision to look at incidents from the child's point of view and the "balcony" view as well as your own. And as you look from the child's point of view, try to be aware of the subtle cues that the child may be using to determine his/her behaviour. We may think it is our words when in fact it may be some subtle form of non-verbal communication that the child is picking up.

Lesson 5: Never take your eyes off your partner

McClure reminds us that if you turn your back on your dog for even one second you will break the connection between yourself and your dog. Most likely you will lose track of where your dog is and your dog will lose track of you. Only when the handler and the dog are closely tuned into each other can the team be successful.

Sai Baba says: Sometimes one needs to be strict. That is what I do. I can be harder than diamond when the situation demands. Otherwise I am softer than butter

**What can we learn from this about discipline?* Listen to your children, and be involved in their lives. Give your children undivided attention every day. They have a lot to say, and sometimes it's easy to just tune them out. But they'll be more cooperative if they know you listen and understand how they feel. Older children can even resolve their own problems -- with love, support and guidance from you. (This, of course, is the long-term goal -- to teach them how to solve their own problems). They'll be more comfortable doing it, however, if they know you're there.

Lesson 6: Do your job and let others do theirs

McClure works with Ivy in training to ensure that she understands how to correctly perform the obstacles on the agility course even if her handler is not there. She explains that she does not want the team's performance to be held back because she cannot run fast enough to keep up with the dog – on the other hand, a dog running ahead independently can sometimes make the wrong choices, so building the dog's independence also necessitates that the handler develop even better communication skills that can work at a greater distance.

Sai Baba says: We should strike a balance between freedom and restriction in a student's life. The parent must advise the child regularly that his conduct will be responsible for the name he earns for his whole family....Sometimes parents give too much freedom to the children and children in turn misuse this freedom to interact with their friends with laxity in behaviour.

Sai Baba says: They must be taught to strike a balance between freedom and discipline. The child must be groomed well right from the beginning itself. Just as speed-breakers control the speed of vehicles on the road to ensure safety, so too restrictions must be enforced upon children's freedom for their safety. The child should be given freedom in areas related to right conduct and must be punished when it errs. When the parents give freedom to their children, they should watch carefully as to how the children behave. It is then that the child will tread the right path.

What can we learn from this about discipline? Tell your children you will not always be there watching over them and that this is why they need to train their own consciences to examine the situation before they act rather than relying on whether or not you are going to "find out". Encourage them to make their own decisions but make sure you discuss with them the consequences of their choices – and have mechanisms for "checking in" so they know you are there to give them guidance if they lose their way. There is a need for frequent reviews with them of how they are going

Lesson 7 Communicate

The handler needs to develop a language of communication that the dog will understand, so she can communicate clearly to Ivy what will happen next. She highlights that the really important messages need to be stated consistently in as many different ways as possible.

Sai Baba says: Man can derive Ananda only through the human form: we can receive instruction, inspiration, illumination only through human language and human communication.

What can we learn from this about discipline?

Recognise, though, that you can only control your child if you have already established a channel of communication with it, if there is true and open sharing between parent and child. The trouble with many families today is that that communication has broken down. Parents are busy earning a living and so children are allowed to watch television and to play for long hours on computers, thus relating to nobody but the television and the computer. As a result of this many children are losing social skills, are losing the ability to communicate thoughts and feelings, to relate to society as a whole, to discover the diversity and complexity of human incarnation. They have little grasp of the principle of service, of helping those less well off than themselves. (From Right Parenting, David Jevons, <http://saibaba.ws/articles/rightparenting.htm>)

*Make sure they're listening: Be creative in dealing with a toddler and preschooler. Sometimes a very young child just doesn't hear or absorb what's being said (don't believe it? Ask the child to repeat what you just said, and see the blank look that comes back). It helps to get down on the child's level and make sure you're being heard. Try singing the instruction. Try a funny instruction. Try a race. Try using a catchphrase that gets the point across. Or, just make sure they are looking at you, and listening. Have them repeat what you said.

*Don't nag or argue. Make it happen: Say what you want, and expect that it gets done. If a child "won't listen," it's because the parent isn't making the behavior happen the first time the child hears the words. Someone suggested to us that it's kind of like training a dog (you have to be patient for as many times as it takes the dog to understand), and this rang true with us. Your children want to learn, but some things just take time. Your patience will help -- just make sure your tone is respectful, and that your child is actually hearing you.

*Say what you mean: You can wish ("I wish you would..."), you can muse ("That behavior isn't appropriate..."), you can lecture ("Someday, when you're a parent..."), you can manipulate ("It would be really nice if someone..."), but none of these is an effective or lasting way of disciplining. Tell your child what you want, and try to be specific ("Please pick up these crayons"). Then make sure it happens.

*Keep it simple and be specific: Keep your instructions simple (a child can't absorb several directions at once), help your child if the task is difficult or daunting -- and if you can, make the task fun and light-hearted. Make sure the child can actually do the task. If so, stay calm, and don't let the child off the hook - this only makes it tougher the next time. Some parents find that a silent Look-That-Means-Business does the trick. Do be specific. "Clean up your room" means little to a child. However, "hang up your clothes" and "put your toys in that box" tells your child exactly what needs to be done.

Lesson 8 Positive rewards produce the best learning results

In good agility training it is important not to give negative feedback to the dog. McClure points out that this is important if the dog is to be enthusiastic and to love the sport, and says that "handlers cannot criticize their dog into a brilliant run". Ivy responds with enthusiasm to recognition of her good work, right at the time of an achievement, not sometime later.

Sai Baba says: Words can confer strength; they can drain it off. Words can gain friends; they can turn them into enemies. They can elevate or lower the individual. One must learn the habit of making one's words sweet, soft and pleasant. A person is judged by his words. Words inflict damage in other ways too. Whenever we talk despairingly or defamingly or sarcastically or hatefully to others, they get recorded on the tape, which is our mind.

Sai Baba says: Give them all the confidence they need to become good, honest and self-reliant children.

Sai Baba says: If you want to take children into your confidence, you have to approach them with love. You have to point out their mistakes and lead them on the right path. Only then will they follow the right path and accept their mistakes.

What can we learn from this about discipline? Please refer to the second article in this series for some tips about how to give positive feedback to children and avoid the negative.

Lesson 9 The mistakes are your fault

McClure makes the claim that in agility, if the dog makes a mistake it is generally the handler's fault. For example, Ivy might sense her anxiety about their performance and try too hard. She points out that the handler needs to take responsibility by going back and re-training, perhaps in a different way, or analyzing their own signals to see what was unclear

Sai Baba says: The right teacher is one who is an embodiment of love and teaches the student to love all, to cultivate right relationships and to develop human qualities.

What can we learn from this about discipline?

*Reinforce the behavior you want by doing it yourself. Listen to yourself communicate. If you are hearing something from your child that you don't like, ask yourself if your child is getting it from you. If you swear, lie, yell, forget to say please or thank you, only half-listen, pout, blame others, etc. -- that is the behavior your child has no choice but to learn. The best way for your children to learn good behavior is for them to watch you behave that way.

Lesson 10 The prizes are theirs

McClure points out how important it is to recognize that the handler's is a "back room" job and that all the prizes are issued to Ivy, not to her.

Sai Baba says: Whatever I do is for the happiness of the devotees. I don't need anything for Myself. I don't have any desires.

What can we learn from this about discipline?

The message here for our children is that the positive outcomes of their behaviour are for them to enjoy – and the consequences of making the wrong choices are also, ultimately, theirs to face up to. The parent can do everything possible to lead, guide and facilitate – but at the end of the day it's the child who has to make the right choices, so we need to create an environment that makes it easiest for them to be able to do this.

*Tell 'em you love 'em: Safer Child highly recommends consistently telling *and showing* your children that they are beautiful and capable people who mean the world to you, whose company you enjoy and whose opinion you value. We believe that such ongoing affirmation of their self-worth will go a long way toward preventing discipline problems - at the toddler stage and beyond.

References

McClure, P. (2004). 10 lessons on leadership. *Educause Review*, 39, 2, 18-26.

Note: Discipline tips marked with *have been extracted from www.saferchild.org