

Strategies for Disciplining Children

This article is about approaching discipline in an Educare way. In this we will provide strategies to address some of the concerns expressed by a group of parents that their children *do not follow their requests, can be stubborn, need to be chased to get anything done and whine when told “No”*.

The above human interaction can be stressful both for children and their parents. This article will focus on describing some ways to talk to children that will stop the parents getting stressed by their behaviour. In Educare the focus is on eliciting discipline from within the child rather than imposing it externally.

Very often when children are exhibiting one of the behaviours listed above, we lapse into trying to impose it externally. We use our power of being the parent to force the child to do what we want. We may do it by threatening or we may do it by bribing. One might ask: “What is wrong if we use power to force children to do what we want?” It is very risky because they will respond with FIGHT, FLIGHT or SUBMISSION. The relationship will likely be damaged, sometimes permanently.

The teacher (parent) should not try to rule through the easier means of fear, for that is full of dangerous consequences to the pupils. Try the path of love.

Sathya Sai Baba



Before you read further, you may wish to pause for a few moments and reflect on the following question:

When you were a child what were some of the things your parents or teachers or grandparents said to you if you were naughty? Especially think of situations when they used power to get you to do something. Reflect on how this made you feel.

The need to choose vocabulary wisely, so as to use every opportunity to uplift and empower the child:

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.

Sathya Sai Baba

Keep a strict watch over what you say. If the foot slips you may suffer a fall and sustain a temporary injury. But a slip of the tongue may cause lasting harm.

Sathya Sai Baba

Below are some examples of the kinds of things that parents often say when they are trying to get their children to obey them.

Things parents often say	The likely consequence
Ordering, e.g. “Do it!”	This shows you do not think much of the child.

Threatening, e.g. “Do it or I’ll beat you.”	This can make the child feel unaccepted, scared, or resentful.
Preaching, e.g. “You should do ... Shouldn’t do”	The child can feel guilty or become defensive and say “Well you shouldn’t either...”
Arguing/nagging	This causes more argument and often causes the child to switch off and stop listening
Blaming/criticizing, e.g. “You’re acting like a baby, You’re lazy.”	The child feels she is stupid or no good. She might retaliate with “You’re not so wonderful yourself!”
Bribing, e.g. “If you do this I will buy you the video game you want.”	The child may learn to expect rewards for all actions rather than developing intrinsic motivation to do what is asked.
Saying “Don’t....”	Children told only don’t (“don’t throw your clothes on the bedroom floor”) never learn what they should be doing. The result may be that one misbehavior is replaced by another (children begin throwing their clothes on the bed).

In all of the above examples the CHILD is the loser. The parent will probably eventually win through using power, control, punishment, or even reward. We can call this an “I win/you lose” situation. On the other hand, if the parent gives in and says “OK, you don’t have to do it”, or the child gets his own way by begging, sulking or manipulating, this situation is equally undesirable because then the parent is the loser (“I lose/you win”).

The essence of Educare is to create situations in which EVERYONE – the child and the parent – is a winner (I win/you win). In this kind of situation the parent does not use power, reward, punishment, etc. The parent is not in the role of a law enforcer so that no resentment results but only respect, trust and often increased affection.

Creating a win-win situation

The whole aim of an Educare approach to discipline is to enhance peace, the inner peace of the child and the parent, and hence the peace of the home environment:

Where there is peace in the individual there is peace in the home. Where there is peace in the home there is peace in the community. Where there is peace in the community there is peace in the world.

Sathya Sai Baba

A situation of “I win, you win” is the essence of peace. Educare parenting is not about power and one party winning, it is about empowering and both parties winning.

The characteristics of a win-win situation are:

- Fairness;
- Everyone’s needs are met;

- no power is used;
- the relationship is based on love/respect;
- “I messages” are used (that is, you are talking about how you feel about the child’s behaviour – and you are criticizing the behaviour, not the child).

In other words, Educare discipline is helping children to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

Win-win things to say to your children when they refuse to do what you have asked.

The following are some examples of win-win ways to respond to a child who has refused to do what you ask. The important thing, as Sai Baba reminds us, is that an Educare parent needs to be consistent and to role model the expectations placed on children.

Try to say at least two of these to your children during the next week, and reflect on whether there is any shift in the balance from either the parent or the child winning to becoming a win-win situation for both.

1. You sound upset. Why are you so upset? Tell me more.
2. So you don’t want to do what I have asked? What would you need to feel good about doing it?
3. I love YOU but I don’t love your behaviour. I can’t force you to do it. I hope you will do it because it is the right thing to do.
4. When you do xxxx I feel angry/hurt/sad. I don’t want to talk about it now because I feel that way now. Let’s talk about it later.
5. I don’t want to talk about it now because I can see that you are angry/hurt/sad. Because I care about you and what happens to you I would like to talk about it later when you feel better.
6. I can’t make you do this. It is your choice whether you do it or not. But if you do not do it, there will be a consequence. (For example, with a young child: “When you have picked up your toys we can read a story together”, “If you do not there will not be time for the story because I will have to pick up the toys”. With an older child: “We agreed that you would take responsibility for putting your dirty clothes in the laundry. If you didn’t do that and your jeans haven’t been washed, you will either have to wear them dirty or wear something else.”)
7. We need to do.....(e.g. keep the room clean). How can you help?
8. Instead of saying, “You have to do this”, say, “This needs to be done. What can you do to help?”
9. If children are not sharing tell them firmly that it is not the right behaviour to take something away from another person. If necessary tell them that the consequence is they cannot use that toy, and gently but firmly take the toy away. Then sit down with both children together and read them a story about sharing, do silent sitting together, or do something together like helping you to prepare the meal.

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