

## Chapter 21

# Discipline Is Love

Many caring adults are hesitant to discipline children. Why should this be? Many of us grew up learning to associate discipline with anger, yelling, and even revengeful punishment. If we believe that discipline is inherently hurtful, naturally we don't want to inflict it on kids we care about. The problem is that when we don't discipline kids, they keep misbehaving, and we become more angry and frustrated. When the discipline finally does occur, it's just as we feared: it's done with anger. No wonder so many adults try to avoid disciplining kids!

Because kids do need discipline, we might as well do it in a way that works, and in a way that also communicates our true intentions. Your approach to discipline depends on your answers to the following questions:

- Why do kids act out? Because they're bad and want to spread their badness around? Or because they have been "triggered"—something hit their sore spot—and they are feeling anxious and unsafe?
- Why do you have rules? To help kids to be safe, to heal, and to learn to do right? Or to get revenge when kids break the rules?

If you believe that kids break rules because they are bad, then you will probably want to use discipline to punish them and get revenge. Unfortunately, that approach to discipline does not really make kids feel safe, nor does it teach them to do right. It only adds more pain to the pile, and teaches them to fear the punishing adult.

If, on the other hand, you believe that kids break rules because they are trying to make themselves feel okay when they are feeling unsafe or insecure, then you will probably want to use discipline to help kids to feel safe, to heal, and to learn to do right. This approach to discipline takes considerable effort, especially at first. The good news is that this compassionate approach to discipline is also the effective one.

This positive, compassionate approach to discipline is based on several assumptions:

1. When kids act out, that means that they feel unsafe or insecure. They use their actions to let us know that they need our help.
2. We want to do what we can to reassure kids, so that they can feel safe and secure again. We can reassure them with discipline.
3. We want kids to learn good things from their experience of our discipline. We want them to learn:
  - They are safe.
  - They can count on us.
  - What they do matters. Good actions get rewarded; bad actions do not get rewarded, and may require discipline.

An effective discipline approach is best offered within the context of a safe, supportive environment (see Chapter 20), in which kids work toward goals they care about (see Chapter 22). We'll be focusing here on several components to the positive discipline approach: focusing on the positive, using a time-out system, and using natural consequences.



### ***ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE***

The first principle in positive discipline is to focus on the positive. This is not just to be "nice," but because it works. Here are some keys to this approach.

#### ***Kids Will Try to Meet Your Expectations***

A famous study was conducted in a public school system some years ago. Researchers came into a few classrooms and gave each child an assessment. After the assessments were completed, the researchers gave each teacher a list of several children in their class who, based on the test results, would be "late bloomers" and do especially well as the year progressed. The kids heard nothing about the lists; only the teachers knew. The tests turned out to be highly predictive, and the kids on the list did do better and better at school as the year progressed. The teachers were very impressed and wanted to be able to use the tests with their future classes.

Maybe you already know the punch line: the tests were phony and the kids were selected for the lists at random! So if the whole thing was a hoax, why did the kids all do so much better? We can only draw one conclusion. The only special thing about the kids on the list was that their teachers believed that they would do better over time. Somehow, the teachers' beliefs and expectations toward these kids were communicated, and the kids responded by coming through, by meeting the expectations they perceived.

Since kids do tend to respond to how people view them, why not use that to their benefit? When we find ways of communicating that we see kids positively and that we expect them to do good things, many kids will naturally respond by proving us right.

### *Attention Is Reinforcing*

Kids learn from experience. When they have a repeated experience of being rewarded, or "reinforced," for doing a certain thing, they learn that doing that certain thing brings rewards. Then they're more likely to do that thing again. So you might as well focus your reinforcements on the behaviors that you hope kids will do again and again.

Give positive attention whenever you "catch" the child doing something right. Your noticing is itself reinforcing. And if the child is also working with a formal incentive system, your noticing will also serve as encouragement that she is on track toward her goals.

You can give positive attention not only for obviously good actions, but for neutral ones, as long as you can find some way to call it a positive action. For example, a boy who sometimes punched other children with no provocation was praised simply for walking down the hall: "I see you walking down the hall keeping your hands to yourself. This makes other kids feel safe around you, so they'll be more likely to want to play with you." Again, he is seen as practicing friendly behaviors, he is reinforced for these, and thus is more likely to continue them.

### *Reinforcement Builds Relationship*

You may know of a family in which the new stepparent attempts to discipline a child before establishing much of a relationship. The child correctly says, "I don't have to listen to you! You're not my [mother/father]!" This highlights an important principle in discipline: we earn the authority to discipline a child by becoming someone he cares about. We become someone he cares about, in part, by providing for his needs and by helping him feel good.

When we focus on the positive aspects of a child, we are building the relationship. Whenever possible, we want to get to know a child in a way that makes her feel that she is seen in a positive light. We can accomplish this by engaging in enjoyable activities together, and by letting her know that we see the good things about her. When she feels that you like her and that you are noticing her positive behavior, she will feel safe and comfortable with you. When you develop a positive relationship with a child, the child is likely to try to please you. The more she cares about you, the more she will value your comments, and the more reinforcing they will be. Finally, if you do need to discipline the child later on, you will have earned the authority to do so.

## **ELIMINATE THE NEGATIVE**

### *Ignore the Negative*

When we ignore behavior that we don't like, we are not reinforcing it with our attention. If the goal of the bad behavior was to get our attention, this strategy will be discouraging. (Certain be-

haviors, such as when one child physically attacks another cannot be ignored. We are obliged to intervene to keep kids safe. Other times, we may have more leeway.)

### *Notice Someone Else's Positive*

While we are ignoring one child's problem behavior, we can actively give our attention to another child's more appropriate behavior. Often, the first child will join the other child in an attempt to get a share of the reinforcing attention.

### *Distract or Rechannel*

Another way to stop a child from doing something you don't want her to do is to engage her in something else instead. With this strategy, you are not reinforcing the bad behavior, and you are giving the child another option to earn your attention and reinforcement. As kids become involved in positive behaviors, we can reinforce them for doing something we approve of.

### *Explain Why the Behavior Is a Problem*

Sometimes when we see a child doing something we don't want him to do, it makes sense to explain this to him. Kids may not know all of our rules or our reasons for them. Often, this kind of explanation can be enough to help a child do better next time.

### *Set a Consequence*

It can be effective to tell kids what will happen if they continue the problem behavior, or if they do it one more time. For a consequence to be a meaningful deterrent, it must be something the child doesn't want, for example, removal of reinforcement, or a punishment of some kind. The latter parts of this chapter focus on this strategy in more detail.

### *Keep the Consequence*

If the child continues doing the problem behavior after you've set a consequence, the next strategy is to keep the consequence. Then the child can learn from experience that when she behaves badly, an unpleasant consequence will occur.

## ***DON'T MESS WITH MR. IN BETWEEN***

It's very important for adults to be firm and consistent in their approach to discipline. Otherwise kids will not learn what you are hoping they will learn. Then they will continue to feel unsafe and insecure, and continue their problem behaviors. Of course, adults are not machines, and no human can be exactly the same all the time. But we can learn from machines, and use this understanding to help us to help kids. Specifically, let's learn from slot machines.

Imagine you are playing slot machines that cost a quarter for each play. Now answer this question: What will you do with a machine that gives four quarters each time you play it? Chances are, you'll put another quarter in, and another, and another. Each time, you are being reinforced with a small win. Play this machine enough times and you can buy yourself a new car.

You've been playing that machine for a while, and it's always worked for you the same way. Now what will you do when you put in a quarter, but the machine does not give the four quarters back? Chances are, you'll say to yourself, "I know that this machine works; it always works."

and you'll put in another quarter, and another, and another. If you're still not getting the four quarters back, after a while you might try hitting or kicking the machine, perhaps out of frustration, or to try to get it to fix itself.

You've put in the quarters, you've kicked the machine, and still you're not getting any quarters back. Now what will you do next? Chances are, you've had enough. You're telling yourself that this machine doesn't work anymore, and you're not going to keep wasting your money on it.

So you've left that machine, and now you're playing a different one. With this machine, you put in a quarter and nothing comes back. You put in another quarter and nothing comes back. You put in another quarter and nothing comes back. You put in another quarter and nothing comes back. You put in another quarter and nothing comes back. You put in another quarter and nothing comes back. Now what will you do? Chances are, you'll put in another quarter, and another. Because each time, you're telling yourself, "The next one could be a jackpot."

Of course, you recognize that last machine as the way the slot machines work in gambling casinos. This exemplifies the principle of "random intermittent reinforcement," and it's the hardest kind of behavior to get rid of. Because the next try could win the jackpot!

So how does this apply to your discipline approach? Imagine a child who is always reinforced for a certain problem behavior. That's like getting four quarters from the machine every time you put in a quarter. It works, so you keep on doing it. This is why kids keep repeating their problem behaviors—because in some way, it's working for them.

Then one day the adults change the rules, and the problem behavior is not reinforced anymore. That's like when the quarters stop coming back from the machine. Remember, the behavior won't stop right away! First, the child may try many more times, perhaps even more than usual, so be prepared for a bit of a storm. But if you hang tough and keep from giving in, if you keep from reinforcing the problem behavior, after a while the child will finally realize that it just doesn't work anymore. Then, why waste more quarters? Better to try a different machine, find some new way of getting reinforcement.

The trick, when you are trying a new discipline approach, is to avoid the in between. What happens if the child is putting in those extra quarters, being frustrated over and over again, and then suddenly hits a jackpot? Then you have created a random intermittent reinforcement system, and the problem behavior will be much more difficult to get rid of, because no matter how many times you stick to your new rules, the child will keep hoping for a jackpot.

You have surely seen the following scene in the checkout line of a supermarket.

CHILD: Mommy, can I please have one of those?

MOTHER: No.

CHILD: Mommy, please?

MOTHER: No.

CHILD: Mommy, please?

MOTHER: No.

CHILD: Mommy, please?

MOTHER: No.

CHILD: Mommy, please?

MOTHER: No.

CHILD: Mommy, please?

MOTHER: No.

CHILD: Mommy, please?

MOTHER: Okay, here. Just be quiet!

I hope you are thinking, "Jackpot!" This mother is training her child to be obnoxious. She is reinforcing the child for asking over and over again, by teaching the child that if you ask enough times, there's a good chance of hitting the jackpot.

If you don't want your kids to be obnoxious, or to repeat their own preferred problem behaviors incessantly, then don't reinforce it. Stick to your rules every time; don't hand out jackpots.

### ***PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTING DISCIPLINE USING A POSITIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACH***

When you are responsible for kids, sometimes you must take actions that they complain about, such as enforce the rules, take away reinforcements, and give other consequences for their behaviors. The following principles and practices will help you to do this in a caring and effective way.

#### ***Problem Behavior Is a Way Children Ask for Reassurance***

Reassurance calms kids down. When you can keep in mind that discipline is reassurance for kids, it will be easier for you to do this from a caring mind-set. Your goal is not to punish but to help kids to feel more safe and secure. When kids are out of control, they need the adult to take charge and get them back into control. You can do this with discipline. Then they feel protected and safe.

#### ***You Are the Adult***

You are the child's rock of security. Kids need to be able to count on you to protect them, to keep things safe and under control, and to keep your own promises.

#### ***If You Are in Charge, You Are Strong and Can Protect***

If you cannot take charge of a kid, then you aren't very strong and can't be counted on for much. You can show you are in charge by enforcing the rules without losing control yourself. Then kids can feel that someone strong and caring is protecting them and keeping them safe.

#### ***Keep Your Promises***

Remember, routines, rules, and consequences are all promises. If you "give the kid a break" and don't enforce the rules, you are giving the kid a broken promise.

#### ***Only Make Promises You Can Keep***

Don't offer treats or special activities that you won't be able to deliver; it will just teach the child that you can't be trusted. Also, don't threaten consequences that are unfair or overly severe. Later, when you are calmer, you will realize that you were wrong, and you will correct it. That also teaches the child that you can't be trusted, that you don't mean what you say. It's better to have small, reasonable consequences prepared ahead of time, so that when it's time to discipline, you already know what the consequence will be. If you find yourself disciplining while angry, you can tell the child that you will decide the consequence later.

### Stop a Problem Quickly

Stop a problem before it gets too bad, and before you become too angry. This is the key to the whole thing. If you stop a problem behavior early, then

- You have offered reassurance at the first cry for help. You've come through for the child.
- The child has not had to escalate the problem behavior to get your attention. He did not have to act too "bad" to get reassurance from you. He is learning that he can get reassurance with small offenses and may not need big ones. This is not the final goal, but it's a good step.
- Because the problem behavior is still small, it only requires a small consequence. This will be easier for the child to tolerate, and easier for you to tolerate.
- Because you have not had a chance to become angry or frustrated yet, you can discipline calmly, from a caring mind-set. Then the child can learn more easily that discipline is love, and so can you.

### TIME-OUT

The exact format of your discipline approach isn't the most important issue. What's really important is that you follow the principles and practices, and that you have a clear system that you stick to. If you don't like the following time-out system, change it to one that you like better; that's fine. But stick to your system, and use these principles.

Many parents have been taught a quickie version of the time-out approach, and have tried it but found that it didn't really work for them. That doesn't mean that time-out will not work in their household. What it does mean is that they were not taught carefully enough, or that they were left on their own to do it, and when problems came up, they didn't know what to do. Time-out does work, but it should be used within the context presented here (including a safe environment, focus on the positive, etc.). Also, don't expect it to work all at once. Kids find the loopholes, and it's our job to plug them up. This is an effective system, but it takes work to get results.

The main point of a time-out is that the child is being removed from the action, from the family or group. A time-out intervention should reflect the following principles:

- Time-out is nonreinforcing. That means that the other activity (from which the child is being removed) should be reinforcing. This is part of the context that makes time-out work.
- Time-out is nonpunitive. The goal is to keep kids safe and to remove reinforcement for bad behavior. There is nothing angry or punitive about giving a time-out.
- Time-out allows for learning. Kids have a chance to learn that certain behaviors lead to removal of reinforcement. They also have a chance to calm down and to think about what they did and how they want to act when they are able to rejoin the group or family.

The advantages of the time-out are closely related to the structure of the time-out, and include the following:

- The time-out keeps the child from hurting someone. This keeps the setting safe.
- The time-out keeps the child from disrupting, from preventing others from doing their own activities. When other kids can do what they expected to do, this means that adults are keeping their promises.
- The time-out removes reinforcement for bad behavior. No more quarters!

- The time-out allows the child time to regain self-control.
- The time-out gives the adult a chance to demonstrate control when the child was out of control. This is reassuring to the child, who has been contained and kept safe.

The time-out method includes the following components:

- Use this with previously established rules. The child should already know the deal before the time-out is given.
- Use with preestablished duration (e.g., one minute for each year of the child's age). Some people use thirty-second or one-minute time-outs, to allow the child to return to the family or group as quickly as possible. In general, shorter time-outs are better, because the goal is really to set a limit and remove reinforcement, not to drag things out. However, for some children, a very short time-out may not have the desired effect, so you'll have to figure out what works best for your kids, in your setting.
- Some actions (e.g., hitting) get automatic time-outs. If damage is already done, it's too late to start talking about it; the child is clearly a danger and must be removed immediately. Additional consequences could occur as well, depending on your rules and on the nature of the offense.
- Some actions (e.g., disobeying) get a warning. When the child still has a chance to correct her behavior, then give her the chance. If she can catch herself and get it together without needing a time-out, that's great.
- Warning: restate request, then count: one, two, three. Tell her what she's doing and what you want her to do instead. Count to three in a steady manner so that each count takes about one second. Do not fudge this or slow the count down, because that would be breaking your promise.
- If the child fails to initiate the action before the end of the count, then say, "Take a time-out." Sometimes the child will do what is asked just after the count has finished. He may say, "I'm doing it; I'm doing it!" but you should tell him, "You missed the chance; you can do it after the time-out is done." If you let him get away with it (if you let him do it without taking the time-out first), you have broken your promise and he will know that he can't count on you to do what you say.
- Time-out occurs in a designated space. This can be a certain chair, wall, or corner of the room, or it can be another place farther away. Your choice of a time-out spot will depend on your facilities, on your staffing, and on the nature of your kids. Make sure that the time-out spot will allow you to accomplish your goals to keep kids safe, to allow others to continue in the activity, and to remove reinforcement during the time-out. If you are traveling or not in your usual setting, you can invent new time-out spots wherever you are.
- Follow rules while in time-out. The child in time-out should not communicate with anyone during the time-out. He should not make faces or noises; he should not ask you if he's almost done. He should not play with toys or jump around. You will have to make your rules realistic for the children you work with; some kids can handle being still and silent, while others should be given something to do such as writing or drawing.
- During time-out, the child should receive no conversation or other attention. If the child in time-out makes faces and other kids laugh, then you haven't removed the reinforcement, and others are distracted and not doing their normal activity. You might control this by locating the time-out spot farther away, by starting the time-out over again whenever the child in time-out misbehaves, and/or by sending other kids to time-out as a consequence for interacting with kids in time-out. There's no one right way to manage this; you'll have to figure out what works for you. If possible, it's good to have the time-out spot in plain view of the rest of the group. Then the child in time-out can see what he's missing, and you



can keep an eye on him. However, with kids who are too disruptive, you will need to devise another plan.

- When the time-out is finished, the child is asked to explain what happened, then is welcomed to return to the group/activity. You can help the child learn from the experience by asking her to state what happened and how she would like to handle it next time. However, the "cognitive processing" component is not always appropriate. For example, if you are using thirty-second time-outs during a high-interest activity, it's probably enough just to name the behavior that caused the child to get the time-out.

### *Time-Out Problem Solving*

Many problems will arise as you try to use these methods, because kids are all different. Here are some of the more common types of problems, along with some suggested strategies for handling them:

What if other kids try to interact with the kid in time-out?

- Have a rule against that. Enforce consequences for kids who try to communicate with someone in a time-out.

What if the child acts up in time-out?

- Then he is breaking the time-out rules. Start the time-out again when he starts following the rules again. After a while he will learn that he is just making his time-out longer.
- If the child in time-out is being too distracting, and this is keeping others from doing their activity, then consider having the time-out spot farther away from the others.

What if the adult can't resist interacting with the kid in time-out?

- If the adult is concerned for the child's health or safety, then it is appropriate to interact, even during a time-out. For example, if the child needs to go to the bathroom and really can't wait, let him go, and then pick up the time-out where it left off. Of course, if he tries this every time, then you'll know to ignore it.
- The adult must not get caught up in arguing or explaining to the child during the time-out. The intervention is negated by giving the child reinforcement instead of removing it. Do not reward the child for breaking the time-out rules.
- If the adult is unable to control his or her own reactions to the child during time-out, consider the situation:
  - If this is a staff member who is unable to achieve self-control, the first strategy is education and training. If it's still a problem, then he or she is probably in the wrong job. It takes a great deal of maturity and self-control to work with distressed kids.
  - If this is a parent, other options must be explored. The quick solution is to find a time-out spot that is far enough from the adult to prevent opportunity for interaction during the time-out. The parent does not interact until the child has completed the time-out properly, to say that the time-out is over. This saves the reinforcement for the positive behavior only (for more detail on this approach, see Chapter 10). In the long run, the parent might benefit from working with a therapist on self-control skills so that she or he can be more effective in handling the child face to face.

What if the child won't go to time-out, or won't stay there? Then some way must be found to enforce the rules, otherwise promises are not being kept and kids are not safe. Here are some ideas for enforcing rules in this situation:

- If the child does not go to time-out immediately, the adult can count to three to indicate the time the child has to start toward the time-out spot. If the child does not start before the count is done, then the time-out period is doubled (or add whatever amount of time was set).
- If the child does not go to time-out and this is an urgent threat to safety, then, depending on the degree of urgency, the adult must take him away, or let him know that he will be taken away if he doesn't go by himself. A typical statement is, "I'll count to three; if you are not on your way by then, then that means that you're asking me to help you get there. One, two, three." If he is not already on his way, then the adult should take his hand and walk him there.
- The same strategies can be used for the child who will not stay in time-out. Set up consequences for this, perhaps additional time-out minutes, or some other consequence such as loss of TV time.
- When safety is at stake, and when these other strategies don't work soon enough to keep safety, physical restraint must become an option. Otherwise, the situation does not keep kids safe.

What if the child likes to be in time-out? It's important to figure out why the child likes to be there. This can take some careful observation and questioning. Different reasons lead to different strategies:

- Some kids like time-out because of the attention that this brings them, from kids or adults. If this is happening, then time-out isn't being used properly. Figure out the weak link and fix it. This might mean moving the time-out spot farther away, enforcing consequences for other kids who encourage this child, or getting the adult under control.
- Some kids get themselves placed in time-out to avoid doing tasks they don't like, or to avoid situations they find uncomfortable. Kids should not be allowed to escape their obligations, so perhaps (for example) missed schoolwork can be made up during recess. However, adults can also learn from what the child is avoiding, and make extra efforts to help her to learn how to handle those challenges.
- Some kids find time-out calming. This is not such a bad thing. Work out a system in which they can take a voluntary time-out to calm themselves down. This can also involve prompting on the part of the adults. This is a good step toward helping kids to become better at self-management.

The real key to the time-out system is to catch the problem quickly. If you are new to using time-outs, try to make sure that you use time-outs at least three times per day in the first week of practice. Even if you must be very, very strict to do this, it's worth it to get the practice and get good at it. If you have allowed a problem to continue long enough to cause you frustration or anger, you probably should have used the time-out strategy previously. That's okay—just use the time-out right away, before the situation becomes worse.

Many parents and child care workers object to this suggestion for such active use of time-outs, stating that this seems overly strict. However, remember that "strict" and "harsh" are very different in the positive discipline approach. The sooner a problem is stopped, the smaller the problem will be, and the less chance you will have to get upset about it. If you use this strategy, and if you stick with it 100 percent for a few weeks, you will find that your kids are calmer and

better behaved. At first they might complain that you're too strict, but they will notice in the long run that you don't yell at them so much anymore.

### *Discipline Is Love: A Story*

This is a story of an unusual intervention made by a therapeutic aide (a paraprofessional) in an elementary school. The purpose here is not to suggest that the intervention be imitated, but to illustrate one way that a direct careworker tried to help a child.

"Tom" was a nine-year-old boy who had experienced significant violence and major losses in his family, including one family member murdering another. His behavior at school was extremely volatile. The aide's job was, in essence, to create a one-person day treatment program for the boy, within the context of a mainstream classroom in the public school setting. Because Tom's behavior could become so disruptive, his time-out spot was not in his own classroom, but in another smaller room down the hall.

By about three weeks after the aide had initiated the milieu treatment program, Tom had learned the system but still didn't quite get the point. One day he had to go to his time-out room for ten minutes. He sat at his desk in the time-out room, jabbing his drawing paper furiously with a marker and muttering to himself. After a few minutes, the aide came by and gave him a couple of cookies, then left again to avoid engaging in conversation during the time-out.

Afterward, the aide asked, "Are you wondering why I gave you cookies?" and they talked about it. The aide was able to explain that he had given the time-out and the cookies for the same reason: that he cared about Tom and wanted him to be safe and to feel good. Although the aide had been using the safety words all along, it wasn't until after this time-out that Tom began to realize that the aide actually cared about him. Someone who is angry at you and punishing you doesn't give you cookies!

### *Natural Consequences*

The time-out system will cover many of the discipline issues that arise, but sometimes kids' behavior requires more of a consequence than a time-out can offer. Even so, angry, punitive revenge must be avoided. Set limits to help kids to feel safe and secure, and to help them learn that their actions do matter, and actions bring consequences. Good actions might bring rewards, bad actions might bring other consequences. We can help kids learn these important lessons by using the natural consequences approach. To make this work, it's important to use the following principles:

- Keep your promises—be willing to follow through on the consequences you select.
- Avoid retaliation or revenge—by definition, this represents adult loss of control.
- Avoid depriving the child of meals, sleep, school, and (if possible) other worthwhile activities. This is bad for the child and becomes a vengeful punishment.
- Use consequences that are fair, make sense, and offer opportunities for a positive outcome.

The natural consequences concept can help kids face the real consequences of their actions and learn from these experiences. Natural consequences are different from punishments in a very important way. A punishment makes you hurt. An example of a punishment would be that if you lie, you get a spanking. A natural consequence just naturally results from an action. An example of a natural consequence is that if you lose the dollar that you were going to use to buy ice cream, you won't be able to buy ice cream. No one is punishing you; it's just what happens. There are several advantages to using natural consequences rather than punishments:

- The child learns that actions have consequences.
- This relies on fairness, not revenge. The focus is not on the child's anger toward the punisher, because there is no punishment. This gives the child the chance to focus on himself and therefore he has a better chance to learn from the experience.

- The child has a chance to “make up” for the misdeed and rehabilitate herself. This is very important for kids who get down on themselves and dig themselves deeper and deeper into their problems and misdeeds and punishments. When a child can fix what she broke, she has a chance to dig herself out of the hole and start again from a better place. She can repair relationships, self-esteem, and perhaps her standing in her program or community. This restores resources and supports, and makes more room for hope.

For some problem behaviors, the natural consequences are very obvious, whereas to find the natural consequences for other problem behaviors can take some creativity. Here are some examples of common problem behaviors and the natural consequence that might be offered:

- You lost that dollar, now you don’t have it for the ice cream you were going to buy.
- You were slow getting ready, so you’ll miss the first part of the movie.
- You made a mess, so you can clean it up.
- You broke it; now fix it or pay for it.
- You didn’t give it back on time. Now I know not to lend it to you again until you earn my trust back.
- You haven’t been keeping your grades up, so now you have to finish your homework before you go out to play. (Of course, in another situation this could also just be a rule and not a consequence at all.)
- You made me wait for you and worry for half an hour after curfew. Now you owe me time. You can do half an hour of chores to pay me back.
- You hurt the group (or family or class or community). Now you can do something to help the group. Note that this strategy is extremely flexible and is the rationale behind community service penalties for minor legal offenses. Here are some examples:
  - You disrupted the art class and slowed down everyone’s work. It will be hard for them to get their work done and still clean up afterward. Why don’t you come in at lunchtime and clean the room up then?
  - When you stole the candy bar, it made everyone here feel unsafe, because now they have to worry about people stealing. What can you do to help people here to feel safe again? Maybe if you share your own candy for the next few days, they’ll think that you’re serious about not wanting to steal again.
  - When you broke that chair, you made this a worse place to be; it’s not as nice here anymore. To make up for that, you can do something to make the place nicer. You can choose. Do you want to do some work in the garden, or some cleaning inside?

### *Response Cost*

In most cases, as long as the primary focus is on positive behavior, the time-out system plus natural consequences will be enough to handle the discipline for the problem behaviors. However, occasionally it can be helpful to include another type of consequence in the mix. This is a special type of reinforcement remover called response cost. The basic method is to “charge” or “dock” the child every time a particular behavior occurs. It should be used carefully and according to the following principles:

- The problem behavior should be very specific and easy to identify. Examples: cursing, name-calling, failing to go to the time-out spot when told to, poking other children with a pencil.
- Use items or activities that are highly valued by the child. You can figure this out by observing the child. What does he covet? What does he spend his time doing?

- Do not use this method to harm the child. That means that you should not be thinking about taking away any object or activity that is important to the child's health, education, or welfare. For example:
  - Don't take away food (except perhaps dessert).
  - If a child is working on social development, don't take away time with peers. If he is spending hours every afternoon phoning or instant-messaging friends, then this is fair game. But if he has only an hour or less for that already, it's important to his social development. Leave it alone.
  - If a child needs exercise, don't take away time for playing sports.
- Find objects or activities that the child values, but you don't. Fortunately, many kids really like to play video games or watch TV, but as adults we don't really mind if the child gets to watch only ten minutes of TV tonight instead of the hour she was planning on.
- Money can also be used as a response cost, but it should be a relatively small amount, with opportunity to earn it back. Otherwise this becomes a real punishment rather than the modest irritant it is intended to be.
- Don't get into a hole! If you find that the child is losing and losing, and getting more and more discouraged, then you are on the wrong track. You should probably make the response costs smaller (for example, pennies instead of nickels) or abandon the response cost strategy altogether.

Response cost can work. However, it is a high-risk strategy because it opens kids to the risk of repeated failure. When kids feel bad and helpless, this hits their trauma-related sore spot and they are likely to overreact. Then it's difficult to pick up the pieces and do well. Also, when they are experiencing failure with you, they become worried about what will happen next, and they don't feel safe. In general, a positive focus is more effective. When the focus stays positive, you don't risk the failure trap. Most kids will work hard for incentives, and in most cases, remaining problem behaviors can be managed with time-out and natural consequences.

### ***EXERCISE: WHEN WE DON'T COME THROUGH***

#### ***Part 1: Challenge yourself!***

1. Think of a time recently that you did not discipline according to the rules.
2. Be honest with yourself: why did you do what you did? Common reasons include the following:
  - Didn't know what else to do that might have helped
  - Too tired/didn't have the energy
  - Too angry or frustrated
  - Didn't want to be hard on the kid, because he or she has been through so much already
  - Wanted to give the kid a break/one more chance
  - The kid deserved it (he or she is bad, doesn't care)
  - Other (what?)
3. Keep notes, just enough to remind you of the situation, what you did, and why.

#### ***Part 2: Challenge One Another! (Ideally, in a Small Group)***

1. Present the situation, your action, and your reason(s) to your small group.
2. Group members, be respectful! This is a person who cares and is making an effort.