

Parenting Basics: Letter to a parent

Since I don't know what your background is with Biblical Parenting, I'll start with some basic concepts before talking about spanking, okay?

1. When God gives children, He gives the responsibility of training them properly. This is hard work, and sometimes inconvenient and taxing! Kids rarely give us the most trouble when we are fresh and energetic!

Pr. 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Psychologists do tell us that personality and character is formulated at young ages. And even our unintentional examples get woven into our children, both good and bad. (Also Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2)

2. Set a family standard for things. Most parents do this unconsciously, but being intentional about positive traits you want to train in and negative traits you want to work out of your children gives focus. We find these standards in the Bible.

- (A good resource is *Proverbs for Parenting*, by Barbara Decker. Available from Lynn's Bookshelf, P.O. Box 2224, Boise, ID 83701 It is a topical organized list of scriptures dealing with issues like work, anger, foolishness, envy, lying, etc.)

Ultimately, God's ways are best. Being intentional also prevents just reacting to what we don't like in the moment or out of embarrassment when other people are around. Teach principles. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Make sure you and your husband agree on things. Have your discussions about family standards when the kids are not there to hear. Present a united front.

Your goal is to train the child to control himself. In school he'll have to respond properly to authority. He'll have to be able to sit still for awhile and focus on tasks. As an adult, he'll have to go to work when he doesn't feel like it. You can ask, what will this behavior look like in 6 months if I let it go on? What will it look like when he is 12? (Or 18, or 25?)

- Proverbs 29:15b
- Proverbs 10:1b
- Proverbs 17:21

3. Make the consequences, punishment, etc. clear ahead of time. *This* issue brings *that* discipline. Let the child know that they have a choice. Being obedient brings you joy and them happiness. Being disobedient brings sadness, bad consequences. But in the end it is their choice. You will just carry it out. (Ephesians 6:4)

Don't threaten anything you won't really do. They need the security of your word being dependable. Don't say, "I'll hang you up by your toes if you do that." Of course you

won't. Calmly say, "If you _____ (hit your brother), I will have to give you a swat." Then calmly follow through with your promise. They will grow up knowing you can be depended on, and that consequences are their choices, not your retribution.

Don't "count". ("I said do it! 1, 2, 3,...") Kids love to push as far as they can get away with. They may try to be in control. They're smart. They know how to push your buttons. Be matter of fact about consequences and carry them out. If you're on the phone and they're acting up, excuse yourself and take care of the problem. If you're in the car, pull over.

They must be able to obey immediately. (Col. 3:20a) Sometime it might be a life-threatening matter. One of our daughters was running between cars and could not see the car coming toward her. I yelled, "Amanda, stop!" and she just did, missing being hit by inches. We had trained her to immediate obedience, thankfully. That's not to say we were constantly telling them what to do. There are just some areas where adults are more experienced and must be obeyed.

4. Use natural consequences as much as possible. This is what adults' experience. If you spend all your money, you won't be able to buy the thing you must save for. If you drive carelessly, you'll have an accident and your insurance goes up. Make the punishment fit the crime. For example, if you throw a fit to get attention, we will isolate you in your room and not listen. If they fight over a toy, put it up. No one gets it. If they disobey and touch a hot stove, they learn there is an immediate consequence. If toys are not picked up, you might put them up.

5. As to spanking, here are the main scriptures on it. I recommend it only for willful disobedience. A lot of times young children are just childish, immature. That needs training, teaching, not swats. On the other hand, there were days with a number of offenses and swats.

- 2 Samuel 7:14
- Hebrews 12:6-8
- Rev. 3:19a
- Proverbs 13:24
- Proverbs 19:18
- Proverbs 22:15
- Proverbs 23:13-14
- Proverbs 29:15

Willfully disobedient action brings "the rod". Explain what they have done wrong. This is something you do *for* the child, not *to* them. You are not trying to satisfy your frustrations or anger. If you are angry, have the child sit or lay on their bed until you cool down. You can tell them, "I am too angry to deal with this matter now. You sit on your bed and read a book. I'm going to my room to cool down, then I'll be back to talk to you about it."

We recommend only a swat or two, with a flat paddle or a flexible switch. (Court cases have involved more than 5 strokes.) A switch gives a sting and usually eliminates the power struggle for boys to pretend it didn't hurt. Make sure the child holds still. You don't want to miss the padded part of their body and hit their back. With one of our children, we had to hold them between our knees then bend them over our leg to deliver the swat. They did not willingly accept correction.

Some children will start crying before they get the swat. It is still an earned thing, not an emotional decision. Life has consequences even when we are sorry. And sometimes they are sorry they got caught, not sorry for what they did.

6. Consistency and follow-through are probably the hardest parts of parenting, but bring the best rewards. That scripture Pr. 29:17 "*Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your heart,*" is true! The harder you work when they are young, the easier the job is when they are teenagers! Hang in there!

A couple of other good books are *What the Bible Says About Child Training* by Richard Fugate, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp (about having their heart, not just their actions), and *The Strong-Willed Child* by Dr. James Dobson.

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