

# Balancing Rewards and Punishment

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Is caning the answer to the drop of discipline in schools? This article suggests that discipline actually begins at home where parents must balance discipline and rewards for best results.

There have been talks again recently about bringing back caning to schools. Arguments from both sides are being floated about whether it is an effective form of punishment. This is a rather delicate issue and needs to be handled carefully. However, the proponents and opponents do agree on one thing, that the level of discipline among the young ones has somewhat dropped, contributing to the increasing cases of disruptive behaviours in schools.

Like many other things, discipline does begin at home. Before blaming other parties, parents must first evaluate their approach at home. Are they being too strict or too lenient? Is there a basic rule for the little ones to live by? Are they being fairly rewarded and punished? Are their parenting actions effective?



# EFFECTIVE PARENTING

These are some of the tough questions confronting parents today. In all aspects of life, we want our actions to be effective. We want to see positive results in whatever we do, including disciplining our kids. Unfortunately, many parents succumb to their emotions along the way. They are inconsistent in their rewarding and punishing their kids. If they are in a good mood that day, they can overlook many glaring mistakes. But if their moods are bad, a tiniest error can turn their home upside down.

Such parenting styles will never be effective because the children will be left confused. They may not be able to differentiate between right and wrong because it all depends on the parents' emotional state.

For the kids to understand and learn, their rewards and punishment must be consistent and rational. We are all emotional creature, so to be rational in times of great distress is rather difficult. Therefore, parents must find a way to ensure that they have a good reference and guide that will provide the needed consistency in dealing with their kids.

Fortunately, there have been many workable methods to achieve this state. Some parents have used "points system" where good behaviours and performances will earn the kids valuable points. On the contrary, any violations will result in point's deductions. Though this sounds like a lot of work, it is hard to deny its effectiveness.

# MUTUAL DISCUSSIONS

The effectiveness of any methods used can only materialize if it is agreed and accepted by the kids. A very smart way to achieve this state is to through mutual discussions by getting the whole family involved. Create a safe environment for everyone to share their opinions, feelings and needs without any prejudgement and hidden agendas. Even the little ones, as early as four, can get involved. We will be surprised at their demands and desires. Chances are, we will be left smiling and even more motivated to honour them.

For something like this to work, it has to be a two-way process. If parents choose to walk on a one-way street where only parental needs and demands are important, chances are it will be a lonely and hazardous street. On the other hand, parents who chose to travel on a two-way street will find that their journey is a much more pleasant, calm and even exciting.

We all can be on this happy street. All we need to do is to ask them to do what we want while committing ourselves to deliver what they need. Through the mutual discussions, sincerely open your heart and give them the access. Dig deep to understand their true needs and pledge to honour them. This powerful action would prove too much for our kids to resist. In return, they will provide us with their utmost cooperation and commitment to be the best they can be.

# FINDING THE BALANCE

Once we are able to come up with such a fair system, we will find that kids will do their best to achieve the pre-agreed rewards while avoiding the punishments. Clear rewards are such a motivating factor. They don't have to be expensive materials or gadgets; just sincere words of appreciation coupled with a warm hug will do. Once in a while, treat them to a nice meal for a job well done. On a really special occasion, a more valuable gift can be offered if they deserve it. At other times, it's the thoughts that count and kids are not expecting much more.

But if a punishment, including the physical one, is necessary, they would gladly take it knowing that it is done in the fairest and most rational manner. Instead of animosity, kids will learn to accept the consequences of their behaviours positively. The effects may be gone after a few days but the lessons stay for life.

Such is the power of a clear rewards and punishment system. If done well, we may be able to kiss the dreaded rotan a goodbye.

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