

Dad's Discipline Blunders

The two biggest mistakes that most Dads make trying to use positive discipline with their children are these: **Too Much Talking** and **Too Much Emotion**. Does this nighttime conversation sound familiar to you?

Dad: *"Honey, don't you think it's time for bed? It's 9:15 already."*

Honey (7 years old): *"No."*

Dad: *"But you don't want to be all tired in the morning, do you?"*

Honey: *"I want to read another story."*

Dad: *"We've already done four stories. I think that's enough."*

Honey: *"I never get to do anything."*

Dad: *"You never get to do anything?! What do you call the zoo ALL DAY? Nothing!?"*

Honey: *cries*



Thinking of kids as little adults and talking and chattering too much is bad because it either doesn't work or it takes you through the [Talk-Persuade-Argue-Yell-Hit Syndrome](#). Ironically, too much talking and explaining makes kids less likely to cooperate because it irritates and distracts them.

Why is too much emotion destructive?

Don't people today tell you to "let it all hang out" and show your feelings? "Express yourself and don't keep it all inside" is the advice of the moment. Is this a good suggestion if you are a father? One-half of it is good advice and the other half is not. The good half is this: If you are feeling positively toward a child, by all means let it show. Express your affection. You are not going to do anything harmful and you will do some good.

The bad half of this advice, though, applies to times when you are irritated or angry with your children. "Letting it all hang out" at these moments can be a problem, because when we dads are mad we often do the wrong thing. Angry adults can yell, scream, belittle and nag; they can also physically endanger their kids. 1-2-3 Magic is as much a control on parental anger as it is a control on children's behavior. Uncontrolled expression of parental aggravation is never a good idea.

There is another reason why too much emotion can interfere with effective parenting and effective teaching. When they are little, kids feel inferior. They feel inferior because they are inferior. They are smaller, less privileged, less intelligent, less skillful, less responsible and less of just about everything than their parents and the older kids. And this “lessness” bugs them a lot. They don’t like it. They do like to feel they are powerful and capable of making some mark on the world.

TIP #1: Don’t let your child’s actions create a big “splash”

Watch your two-year-olds. They want to be like the five-year-olds, who can do a lot more neat things. The five-year-olds, in turn, want to be like the ten-year olds. And the ten-year-olds want to be like you; they want to drive cars and use credit cards! They want to have some impact on the world and to make things happen.

Have you ever seen a small child go down to a lake and throw rocks in the water? Children can do that for hours, partly because the big splashes are a sign of their impact. They are the ones causing all the commotion. What does throwing rocks in the water have to do with what happens at home? Simple. If your little child can get big-old you all upset, your upset is the big splash for him. Your upset makes your child feel powerful. His reacting this way does not mean that he has no conscience and is going to grow up to be a professional criminal. It’s just a normal childhood feeling: Having all that power temporarily rewards—or feels good to—the inferior part of the child. Fathers who say, “It drives me absolutely crazy when she eats her dinner with her fingers!! Why does she do that?!” may have already answered their own question. She may do that—at least partly—because it drives them crazy.

An important rule, therefore, is this: If you have a child who is doing something you don’t like, get real upset about it on a regular basis and, sure enough, she’ll repeat it for you.

TIP #2: Be consistent, decisive, and most of all calm

When it comes to discipline, therefore, you want to be consistent, decisive and calm. So what we recommend in [1-2-3 Magic: 3 Step Discipline for Calm, Effective, and Happy Parenting](#) is that you apply—during moments involving conflict or discipline—what we call the “No-Talking and No-Emotion” Rules. Since we’re all human, these two rules really mean very little talking and very little emotion. This point is absolutely critical to your effectiveness. There are discipline systems other than the 1-2-3, but you will ruin any of them by talking too much and getting too excited. These two mistakes, of course, usually go hand in hand, and the emotion involved is usually anger.

Some dads can turn off the talking and the emotional upset like a faucet, especially once they see how effective it is to keep quiet at the right times. Other adults, however, have to bite their lips bloody to get the job done. I saw a T-shirt a while back that said, “Help me—I’m talking and I can’t stop!” **Lots of dads have to remind themselves over and over and over again that talking, arguing, yelling and screaming not only don’t help, they actually make things worse.** These “tactics” merely blow off steam for a few seconds.

If, after a month to six weeks of using 1-2-3 Magic and you find that you just can't shake these habits, it might be time to face some facts: Some sort of outpatient evaluation and counseling might be needed (for the adult, not the child!).

How can it be different?

So let's apply the tips above and redo our scene with Dad and his little girl. Dad has set up a routine: 9 p.m. is bedtime, 8:30 is time to get ready for bed. The faster daughter gets ready, the more time is left for stories before 9 o'clock rolls around.

Dad: *"Kayla. 8:30. Time to get ready for bed."*

Kayla: *"I want to read a story."*

Dad: *"You know the deal."*

Kayla: *Runs off to brush teeth*

Much better, Dad.