Connecting When Correcting

Discipline Practices for Foster Care Volunteers

As a volunteer relating to children in foster care, you are responsible to adhere to the same disciplinary guidelines followed by foster parents. It is always a good idea to inquire of the foster parents which methods have been the most successful with the current child(ren) in their care. Below are effective ideas for ways to positively connect with children in foster care when correction is necessary. Please note the mandated disciplinary stipulations as stated by Ohio DFCS.

# Child Services Prohibited Disciplinary Practices:

1. Spanking, slapping, switching, or hitting a child with your hand or any object
2. Shaking, pinching, or biting
3. Tying a child with a rope or similar item
4. Withholding of meals
5. Denying mail, family visits, telephone contacts with family, or activities with the services worker or other Department staff
6. Criticizing the child’s family or the child’s experiences with the family
7. Humiliating or degrading punishment that subjects the child to ridicule. Such as:
   * Cutting or combing the child’s hair for punishment
   * Name calling and public scolding
   * Forcing any child to wear clothing or accessories usually associated with the other sex
8. Threatening a child with removal from the foster home. This creates fear, anger and increased anxiety
9. Locking a child in a room/closet or outside the home
10. Group punishment for the misbehavior of an individual child
11. Delegating authority for punishment to or allowing punishment by other children or adults
12. Destroying the child’s property

# Alternative and Acceptable Methods of Discipline:

1. Reinforcing acceptable behavior – “I love how polite you’ve been today. I’ve heard ‘thank you’ at least five times. Way to go!”
2. Using logical consequences for behavior – “You rode your bike past the boundary, so you may not ride your bike for the rest of the afternoon.”
3. Criticizing the behavior, not the child – “Hitting is naughty and hurts people.”
4. Loss of privileges – “You will not have screen time today if you don’t finish your homework.”
5. Redirecting the child’s behavior or attention – “Oh! Let’s play with your trucks right now.”
6. Time-in/Time-out for an appropriate timespan corresponding to the age of the child – eg. 3 minutes for a 3-year-old. Stay close to the child while they take a break, or allow them to sit with you while they calm down.
7. Allow a “do-over” – “Would you like a chance to ask me again with polite words?”
8. Allow a compromise – “Would you like 5 more minutes before we clean up?”

10 Tips for Making Positive Connections when Correcting:

1. Respond to behavior as quickly as possible.
2. Wait until a child is calm to discuss their negative behavior.
3. Focus on the child’s *behavior* and not on the child.
4. When speaking, look the child in the eye and get down to their level by kneeling or squatting.
5. Try using a playful tone.
6. Lower your voice to a whisper.
7. Use as few words as possible - no lecturing.
8. Do your utmost not to embarrass the child, particularly avoid shaming language/tones.
9. Once the discipline is over, hug or high-five the child so they know it’s finished.
10. Make sure the child is frequently hydrated and has had access to healthy snacks.

Visit [**www.empoweredtoconnect.org**](http://www.empoweredtoconnect.org/) for further discussion and helpful video clips about connecting with children from hard places. Topics deal with common misbehaviors such as lying, disrespect, eating issues, etc.