

As seen in

Question: I hear so many things about discipline and punishment these days.... Do you have any tips for us as parents of a toddler?

Response: Thanks for your question. It can definitely be challenging. Parents try to help their children develop a strong sense of self-confidence and self-esteem, but need to remember that discipline and rules are important too.

You need to pick your battles with children of all ages, followed by clear messages and limits.

Picking your battles is the first and most important step. Everything else follows.... If you decide that you really don't want Julia to write on the wall with that marker in her hand, you need to tell her so. It is best to do this in a clear tone and without asking her "OK?" at the end. She may want to test you to see what you do, and this leads us to counting....

We suggest counting to three to give your child a chance to do what you're asking. You might say: "put down the marker" (clear instruction) ... "by the time I count to 3" (chance to think about it) ... "or you're going to get a Time-out" (consequence). Then count to 3 with no fractions, and with a set rhythm, and always, always get all the way to "three" (even if she complies after 2). Counting allows her to consider following your instruction and over time, she will use that time to make decisions and she will feel more in control.

There are several potential pitfalls when it comes to discipline, but with this basic framework, you're set up for success. Your pediatrician should offer resources and suggestions if you have questions. Although you won't be popular with them at the time, children appreciate the structure and predictability that clear discipline provides.