6. Choosing the Right Tools

At a Glance...
There are a variety of tools (methods) that parents can use to guide their children. Choosing the right tool for the child and the situation can make discipline most effective.

Time Required
One hour or more, depending on number of participants

Core Concept
Parents will use age-appropriate and situation-appropriate guidance methods for their children.

Objective
Participants will choose one or more guidance techniques they have not used previously and will try them with their children, when appropriate.

Materials
- 3 apples
- 1 Fork
- 1 Paring knife
- 1 Screwdriver
- 1 Plastic bag for apple peels
- Paper towels to clean hands and tools
- Flip chart or chalk board
- Markers or chalk
- For each participant:
  - 16 3x5 index cards
  - Scissors
  - Cellophane tape or clear contact paper
- “My Parenting Tools” (handout D-6-a)
- “Factsheet on Spanking: Information for Facilitators” (factsheet D-6-b)
- Recommended Supplemental Handouts:
  - SP 489-C Principles of Parenting: Something Better Than Punishment — available from your county UT Extension Office
Icebreaker

Ask for three volunteers from your group. Give each volunteer one of the tools (fork, knife, or screwdriver.) Give each volunteer an apple and ask them to peel their apples using the tools they have selected. When the first participant finishes, look at the apples and see who did the best job. Say, “It is important to have the right tool to do the best job.” (Have participants put the apple peels in the plastic bag and give each a paper towel to wipe the tools and their hands.) Note: If the setting is not appropriate for bringing a paring knife such as when classes are held at a school, you may want to ask volunteers to try to remove a screw from a piece of wood using pliers, a hammer, or a screwdriver. If you only have one or two class participants, show them the three tools and ask them to pick one of the tools. Do not tell them what you are going to do. You should pick one of the tools as well. Give the participant(s) an apple and ask them to peel the apple using the tool they have selected. You will do the same with your apple and the tool you selected.

Facilitator Script

There are many ways to discipline children. Remember that discipline means to teach or guide children to learn self-control. However, you already know that no two children are alike, even in the same family. You also know that every situation is different. So, it is important to pick the appropriate tool for the job.

Different tools do different jobs best. The same is true for discipline methods. Some techniques work better than others for different children and different types of misbehavior.

If you use only one tool (discipline technique) for every job, you will not get the best results. Having a variety of tools (discipline techniques) available will make it possible for you to handle a variety of situations successfully.

As a group, let’s see how many different ways we can list for guiding or disciplining children. At this point, let’s not comment on the ideas, just list as many as we can. (Allow group members to brainstorm ways they can discipline or guide their child and list their responses on the board. List all methods given, even if you do not agree with the method. In the discussion, you will talk about what the child learns from each of those methods and when it is best to use them. This will help participants to see that some of the methods they listed may not be best in any situation.)
Facilitator Tip
Spanking is likely to be mentioned as a possible discipline technique. More than 90% of parents in the United States have spanked their children at some time or another. However, most child behavior experts believe that spanking is never appropriate to use as discipline. When spanking is mentioned as an option, write it down, but be sure to get other options as well. When you discuss which options are appropriate, ask what the child learns from being spanked. Ask how the parent feels after spanking the child. A good activity here is to have participants who were spanked as children think about a time they were spanked and try to remember how they felt. What were their thoughts? How did it affect their future behavior? This can help them to think about how their own children may feel when they are spanked, and may help participants choose other discipline methods. Refer to Factsheet D-6-b Factsheet on Spanking: Information for Facilitators, for more research-based information on the effects of spanking. Remember that most court-ordered parents are forbidden to use spanking with their children. Thus, they will need to identify other non-aggressive ways to discipline their children.

(Use the information below to elaborate on any methods that need more explanation. Have participants decide when these methods might be most effective considering the age of the child and type of unwanted behavior.)

- **Modeling** — Modeling refers to teaching by example. This a parent’s most powerful tool. Parents who provide a positive example to their children by being kind and fair, by controlling their tempers, and by behaving in the way they want their children to behave will have fewer behavior problems to correct in their children. Modeling is a tool that should be used at all times.
• **Time out** — Give your child some time away from the situation to cool off. This should not be viewed as punishment, but as a way to withdraw from a heated situation. The child may go to his/her room or to an area away from where the misbehavior took place. For young children, time out should last no more than one minute for each year of age. For example, a 3-year-old should not spend more than three minutes in time out. For older children you may let them decide to leave time out when they have cooled off or can talk about the situation with you. If they are unable to behave when they return, try another method. A variation on time out is to give time to a disputed object. For example, if children are fighting over which TV show to watch, turn off the TV and put in time out for some length of time such as 30 minutes or if children are fighting over a toy, take it away and put in time out for a period of time.

• **Time in** — The opposite of time out, time in is giving a child extra attention when he or she needs it. For example, if a child is on the verge of a tantrum, pull her to you and hold her. You may pat or rub her back. This soothes the child and may prevent a tantrum. It tells the child you really care about her feelings.

• **Ignoring behavior** — If a child’s behavior is mildly irritating, or designed to try to get your attention, ignore it if possible. If children get what they want from undesirable behavior, they will continue to use that behavior to get attention in the future.

• **Recognizing behavior** — When children do what you want, recognize them for that. Thank the child for making his bed. Thank her for taking out the trash without being reminded. Notice when children are getting along well together and comment on it by saying “I really like the way you are playing together” or “Thank you for helping your sister with her homework.”

• **Rewarding behavior** — In addition to recognizing when a child is behaving in a positive way, you may want to reward good behavior. This can be especially useful if you are trying to help a child who misbehaves often. You can set up a chart with the things you want your child to do. This could be a list of chores the child is expected to do, as well as things such as saying please and think you or asking permission to do something. Each time the child does the desired behavior, he or she gets a check mark on the chart. When the child has a certain number of check marks, he or she will get a reasonable reward that you have decided on together.
Redirecting attention — For young children, this can be a good way to prevent the child from doing something you don’t want them to do. If you see a child going toward something that you don’t want him to play with or to explore, find something else that will interest the child, such as a toy or an activity, and call his attention to the new thing or activity.

When/Then rule — This is a good way for both parent and child to get something they want. If a child is putting off something such as getting ready for bed, or doing a chore, tell her, “When you get your bath, I will read you a book” or “When you get through doing the dishes, you can watch TV for 30 minutes.” Choose something you know your child wants to do and offer that as the reward for doing what you ask. This can work for older children as well. “When you finish mowing the yard, you may go to the dollar movie (or fishing, or to see your friend).”

Natural consequences — Natural consequences are what happens as a result of misbehavior without the parents doing anything. These could include toys being broken because of misuse, or the child missing dinner because he did not come in on time. Natural consequences should be used only if the consequence is not dangerous, if it will happen quickly, and if it doesn’t hurt anyone else.

Logical consequences — Logical consequences are consequences that parents and children decide should happen if the child misbehaves. They should be related to the misbehavior and should be appropriate for the child’s age. An example of a logical consequences is that the child will not be able to ride his tricycle for the rest of the day if he is riding where he is not allowed, or if mom has to pick up the child’s toys after play, the toys will be put in a box and put in the top of the closet for a period of time.

Withdrawing privileges — This is a form of logical consequences that may be useful with older children and teens. For example, if the child does not do chores by the time you have specified, she will not get to go to the movie with her friends or if he comes home after the time you decided on in advance, he will not get to go out the next weekend.

Grounding — This is sometimes used by parents when the misbehavior is especially bad. This usually involves keeping the child from participating in any extra activities for a period of time. Parents must be careful when they use this method because it usually means that the parent is grounded, too. Someone must be home to supervise the child. Often, parents get tired of the restrictions on their time and end the grounding before they intended. This tells the child that the misbehavior wasn’t so bad after all, or that parents don’t really mean what they say. This can lead to worse behaviors in the future.
Monitoring activities — One of the best ways to reduce behavior problems in children is to monitor their activities. When children know that they are being watched or supervised, not only will they behave better, but they will feel more secure. Parents need to know where their children are and what they are doing. This means that you need to get to know your children’s friends and their friends’ parents. Set up a plan for how you will know where your child is. For example, if he is allowed to go to Billy’s house, he needs to call you before he goes somewhere else. For preschoolers and younger children, an adult or older teen should supervise them at all times. This means you may want to work out a system with neighbors or family members for taking turns watching the children. Monitoring should go on when you are at home as well. You need to know the television shows your children are watching, the music they are listening to, and what they are reading.

Talk with your children about what you see on TV that is not appropriate. Let them know what you think about it. Limit the amount of time spent watching TV at home. Encourage your children to read, play games, do crafts, or work on hobbies instead of sitting in front of the television for hours. Find other ways to spend your time. Also, limit the amount of time they can spend on the phone talking to friends (this becomes more difficult if the child has a cell phone).

Family meetings — Family meetings are a good way for helping family members communicate better. All members of the family should attend the meetings. Everyone is equal in the family meeting. Young children get to share their ideas in the same way as older family members. At family meetings you can discuss problems that are happening in the home such as chores not being done or children talking back to adults. Children can talk about parents not being fair or the need for more allowance. Family meeting should begin with something fun such as having everyone tell the best thing that happened to them that week or something they like about their family. Family meetings are a good place to talk about each person’s schedule for the week so that everything can run more smoothly that week. By talking about problems and working on solutions together, fighting and arguing at other times may be reduced. You can just post a paper and say “If you have a problem write it on the paper and we will discuss it at a family meeting but we will not argue about it now.” Be sure you talk about it at the next meeting.
Work Tip
The skills needed to handle conflicts with children are much the same as skills needed to handle conflicts with co-workers and supervisors. When you have learned how to deal with behavior problems at home, you can use those skills to handle problems at work.

One of the most important rules when disciplining or guiding children is to be consistent. Whatever discipline methods parents choose, it is important to follow through with the discipline. If parents are not consistent, children learn they can get away with things many times, and they will continue to test their parents. In addition, parents should talk with their children about why they want them to behave in a positive way or why they don’t want them to do certain activities. When children misbehave be sure they know you love them, regardless of what they do, but that you don’t approve of their behavior.

Stress Busters:

✓ When the children are getting on your nerves, it may be time for a time out for you, the parent. Instead of sending the children to their room, tell them that you need a time out. Set a kitchen timer or alarm clock to go off at a certain time. The amount of time out you take will depend on the ages of your children or whether there is another adult who can help to watch them while you are away from them. Use the time to relax, read, listen music, or lay on the bed with your eyes closed. You will be better able to handle things after time to yourself. Your children will get the message that they were bothering you, and they won’t be getting your attention.

✓ When you feel like you might lose control and hurt your children, get some help. Simply talking to another parent may give you the chance to talk out your anger. Other parents may have ideas about how to handle problems. You can call the Parent Hotline (800)356-6767 to get some assistance. Your Family Services Counselor or other counselor may be able to get the help you need. To prevent stress from building up, it is good to talk out problems as they happen. You might form a parent support group in your neighborhood. You could meet once per week with everyone bringing a snack or drink. Everyone could pool their money to hire a couple of teens to watch the children in another room. Having someone to talk to who understands is a great way to relieve stress.
A good carpenter has a tool box in which to keep all of the tools he or she will need to complete a construction job. We are going to construct a tool box for parents. We will start with the effective tools we talked about today. As you learn about additional tools, you may want to add them to your tool box.

Distribute copies of “My Parenting Tools”(handout D-6-a*) index cards, scissors, and tape to each participant. Instruct them to cup apart the sections and tape each section to a 3x5 index card. You may have participants cover the cards with clear contact paper to make them more durable. Suggest that participants keep these cards in a card file or drawer where they can find them easily and refer to them often. These tools will give them a variety of guidance methods that may be more effective than the methods they have practiced in the past. Remind participants that the goal of discipline is not only to teach children what not to do, but also help them learn what to do instead.

Final Thoughts

Changing children’s behavior takes time and patience. In fact, when you start using new techniques with children, their behavior might get worse before it gets better. Remember, they are used to what you have been doing, and when you try something new, that seems inconsistent to them. They won’t know how to react. So, if it doesn’t work the first time or if it works once, but then it seems not to work, keep on trying it for awhile. When children realize you are serious, they will begin to respond appropriately. However, if the technique seems not to work after several tries, it just may not be the right tool for that child or for that situation. If so, try another tool. No technique works for every child every time. Also, remember, that you will slip up and go back to your old ways of doing things. When that happens, forgive yourself, apologize to your children, and try the new technique the next time. This is a learning experience for everyone.

Assign homework. Ask participants to select two guidance methods they learned in today’s class and use them with their children this week, if they have an appropriate occasion. Have them report to class what they tried and what happened as a result.