

RESTRICTIONS THAT WORK

Rationale

When older children get in trouble, we often punish them by restriction. Typically, children older than ten should not be spanked, and never by the opposite gender parent. Because they are becoming old enough to use abstract reasoning, it is time for parents to restrict, rather than to spank.

Restriction holds your child accountable for her wrongdoing. She can accept responsibility for making a poor choice, and she can learn from her mistake. Punishment, on the other hand, can be confusing to your child if there is no link to the problem behavior. If your teen stays out past her curfew and you punish her by having her do push-ups, what's the lesson?

Punishment can also harm her self-esteem and will damage her relationship with you. Using a set number of "licks" with a switch, belt, or the hand, at any age, is not only harmful and marginally legal, but also generates fear as the rationale for being good. Restriction is the best measure of discipline, especially for older children and teens.

Types of Restriction

Confinement --- Placing your errant son in a time-out chair, or in his room, is a means of limiting his movement. The rule of thumb for time-out is to leave him alone in his time-out space for no more than two minutes for every year of his age. Thus, a 10-year old would have a time-out of no more than twenty minutes.

When using confinement, tell him why he is going into time-out. Be very clear and concrete. "You're a bad little boy," serves no helpful purpose, other than for you to vent your

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anger. "Hitting mommy with a stick is bad. Never hit anyone with a stick. You could hurt them very much." This example is clear, concrete, concise, and it provides directive and reason.

Typically confinement locations are pretty sparse in terms of distraction. If you send your child to his room, restrict him from using the TV, CD, computer, or other items that would make the confinement more bearable. After his time-out, have him tell you why he's in time-out and how he can avoid future time-out. If he cannot give you a reasonable strategy to avoid future times out when you get back with him, then give him the correct answer and have him repeat it back to you. When he can repeat it back to you, or offer it voluntarily, without negative attitude, the confinement should end. He can then come out of time-out.

Loss of Privilege --- Taking things away from her is loss of privilege. With teenagers in particular, there is often confusion between what is a right and what is a privilege. Food, clothing, and shelter are the rights of teens. Everything else is a privilege. Privilege occurs as a reward for good behavior and for his conforming to your parental expectations. The basic tenet is do good and good things happen. Do bad and good things are lost, for a while.

Privileges controlled by parents include toys, games, cell phones, use of the family car, use of your teen's own car, since it is titled in your name, CD's, DVD's, MP3's, Xbox, and the like. Loss of privilege helps teach your child that his actions have consequences, and that with responsibility comes privilege. If he is acting irresponsibly, then he loses privilege.

You want to restore his lost privileges when you are satisfied that he has learned the lesson by demonstrating consistent responsibility over time, and after he makes amends. While the time frame is inexact, too long a time may generate hopelessness in your child. You lose credibility when he feels hopeless to have his privileges returned. Too long a time and loss of privilege becomes another form of punishment. You want loss of privilege to be a disciplinary

learning tool. Too short a time frame may void the lesson and lead to recurring rule violations. If he can do without the privilege, then he might think his crime is worth the punishment.

Continue to talk to your child throughout his loss of privilege and you will get a feel for his sincerity and integrity. Sprinkle active listening into your talks and you both will gain insight as to where this rule-breaking came from in the first place. Depending on the violation, loss of privilege rarely should run more than a day for every year of your child's age.

Restriction --- Creating a deprivation of significant magnitude is a restriction. Oftentimes, restriction is the result of confinement and loss of privilege adding up. Restriction is best used for bigger violations, where a life lesson has been lost on her and she needs a viable disciplinary learning tool. Many parents call this "grounding." There are helpful and unhelpful ways to ground your child.

It is unhelpful to ground her for obscure reasons, for an excessive time, or for an indefinite time. If she's "being bad," that's too obscure. If you are so mad that you blurt out that she is grounded "until you're 30," or, "for the rest of the year," that's too excessive. If you conclude that she is grounded "until I say you're off grounding," that's too indefinite.

These unhelpful contexts for grounding can lead to emotional harm to your child. They could also promote a conspiracy among siblings or a manipulation of parents to get around the grounding. Unhelpful grounding is rarely a learning tool that promotes respect for rules and for authority. It also rarely develops positive character. Such grounding is merely punishment that helps you feel powerful and provides you a means to vent anger at your child.

Helpful ways to ground start with heartfelt discussion with your child about the difficulty, her response, your perspective, and your hopes for how she can learn from this problem. Out of

this discussion comes a clear understanding of what she did and of how the restriction can help her remember to think before acting next time and make better choices.

For example, your daughter brings home a poor school progress report. Getting bad grades is too general and she can dismiss this as your simply being unfair or expecting too much of her. However, if your heartfelt discussion and active listening uncovers the path to bad grades, then you have given her a gift of understanding. You might discover that she had not brought home her agenda, leading to her missed assignments, which she failed to turn in to her teacher. Missing the assignments led to her not having all of the material to study for the tests, which led to low test scores and the poor progress report. Without the discussion, you miss an opportunity to help her connect the dots and appreciate how her actions (or inactions) have consequences.

When you are not specific, too excessive, or indefinite in your grounding, you risk your child simply becoming angrier, feeling more hopeless, and being indignant. If she doesn't know why she's being grounded, and the grounding seems forever, then why should she bother to make any changes. She will just wait you out until you get tired of enforcing the grounding or forget about it. Or worse, she will just go underground, sneak around, and undermine all of your efforts.

A Model Restriction Format

Helpful ways to ground promote a working together by parent and child toward the common goal of learning from the difficulty and getting back in your good graces. It is also helpful to encourage his control over his own destiny.

Punishment is usually thought of in terms related to the penal system. When a child is restricted, he considers himself "in jail." If you relent on his "sentence," he "got a reprieve," "got

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paroled,” or, “got sentence commuted to time served.” Unfortunately, some parents use these references as well, even though they promote an adversarial relationship between parent and child. This punitive model serves no useful purpose on your journey of raising independent, responsible adult children.

A more user-friendly model comes from Scripture. In the Old Testament, God is usually portrayed as a distant, but concerned parent who is watching over his Chosen People, the Israelites. The whole idea of monotheism is just taking hold and the Israelites are constantly under extreme influences. When they step over the line, the Bible tells of how God holds them accountable and exacts *Judgment* on them. This often comes in the form of casting them out or inflicting other consequences.

As the Israelites “get it,” show remorse, and are penitent, then God relents and shows them *Compassion*. This is where the consequences are lessened and things begin going better for them. As the story unfolds, and the Jewish faith in one God solidifies, the Bible moves into the New Testament, where Jesus Christ is introduced.

With the teachings of Jesus, the people of God are introduced to God’s *Mercy*. This is where the consequences are lifted because the people have accepted God’s role and developed an on-going, personal relationship with Him. In this more user-friendly relational model of parenting, a child’s restriction can progress from Judgment to Compassion to Mercy.

Judgment. Here, after your heartfelt discussion with your child, you tell him what his consequence is. For example, following the poor grades scenario, you might conclude, “Until I can see consistent improvement in your responsibilities to bring your agenda home daily, complete and turn in your homework on time, and study hard for your tests, you will not be able

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to use your cell phone or leave the house after you get home from school for the next four weeks.

This is my judgment. Any questions?”

Compassion. As he accepts your judgment and begins to bring his agenda home, completes and turns in his homework, and gets higher test grades because of his more effective studying, then you have the opportunity to show compassion. You might say, “Wow! I’m impressed that you haven’t asked for your cell phone back or tried to go out after school this past week since we talked. This ‘B’ on your math test shows me that you are really trying. Tell you what. I’m going to show you compassion. Your restriction is now for only three weeks instead of four. You’ve completed one week already. Only two to go. Good job!”

Mercy. Another week has gone by and your son continues to respect his restriction and work on his grades as you had discussed. At this point, you might say, “Son, what a great job you are doing. I think you have learned something here. What do you think?”

If he is able to convey a positive learning with sincerity, then you might follow with, “You know what? You’ve got it. I’m going to show you mercy. You’ve completed two weeks of restriction and I am lifting the rest of it. Good for you. I’m proud of you.”

Impact of the Relational Model of Restriction

When using this relational model, I encourage you to actually use the words Judgment, Compassion, and Mercy. These are powerful words that convey both your authority and you Christ-centered parenting. The sequence in this restriction from Judgment to Compassion to Mercy promotes your child’s accountability with both cooperation and hope. He can play a role

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in lessening his consequence by simply conforming to your expectations. The focus of the relational model remains on using restriction as a learning tool, rather than solely as a means of punishment. Your positive parent-child relationship remains secured.