

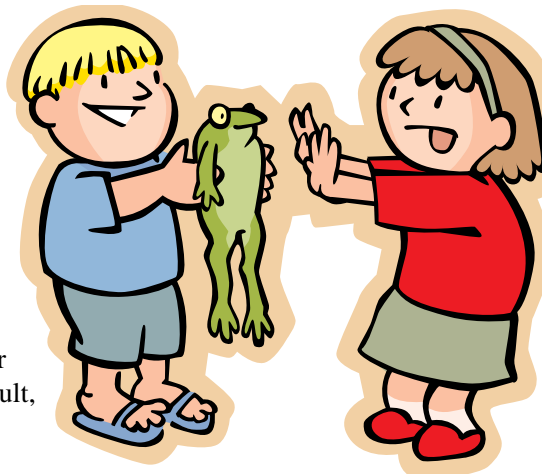


Teasing and Bullying

by Rick Peterson, Ph.D.

Not all teasing is harmful. In fact, playful teasing can be fun for children and adults. Playful, good-humored teasing can lead to smiles and laughter, even on the part of the person being teased. Researchers have discovered that this type of teasing can help children develop social skills they will need in later adolescence and adulthood (Ross, 1996).

Unfortunately, quite the opposite takes place when teasing becomes hurtful. Ridiculing, name-calling, and putting-down another person can lead to feelings of sadness, hurt, and anger. Hostile teasing may include tormenting or harassing another person and may call for intervention by a caregiving adult, parent, or teacher.



Why Children Tease

Children tease for a number of different reasons. One likely motive is to receive *attention*. Even if the attention received is entirely negative, teasing can have the effect of causing others to notice the negative behavior of the person doing the teasing. For some children, negative attention is better than no attention at all.

Some children may tease because they are simply *imitating the behavior of others*. Children who tease may mimic the

same behaviors they have experienced at school, in their neighborhood, or even in their own homes.

Children may tease because teasing can lead to *feelings of superiority or power*. Putting others down through ridiculing and name-calling can make a child feel in control when the child who is being teased becomes physically or emotionally upset (Olweus, 1993).

Another reason for teasing is *peer acceptance*. Unfortunately, for some children, teasing may be seen as the cool thing to do. By joining in and putting another person down, the child may feel like they are part of the “in” or “popular” group.

Misunderstanding differences or a lack of understanding of differences may lead to teasing (Freedman, 1999). Cultural or ethnic differences, along with physical and/or learning disabilities, may result in some children becoming the target of teasing.

Lastly, *media influence* may play a role in why children tease. Children are often exposed to teasing through television programs where put-downs and other forms of teasing are depicted.

When Teasing Turns into Bullying

Bullying is the willful, conscious desire to hurt another person and put him/her under stress (Tattum & Tattum, 1992). Bullying consists of more than one single act of aggressive

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behavior and may include physical contact, name-calling, making faces, dirty gestures, or being intentionally excluded from a group. In addition, bullying can be classified as direct or indirect. Direct bullying is characterized by open attacks, while indirect bullying is characterized by social isolation or exclusion from the group. Bullying is an ongoing pattern of physical or psychological aggression that victimizes the person being bullied.

Who Bullies and Why

Bullying occurs among both boys and girls. According to researchers, boys are more likely to be bullied by other boys, while girls tend to be victimized by both boys and girls (Schuster, 1996). Girls tend to use ridicule and the spreading of rumors to victimize, while boys typically use physical forms of attack to bully.

There are several psychological factors that are associated with those who bully. Researchers have found that bullies tend to have higher levels of anger, depression, and impulsivity. They also tend to lack confidence in the use of nonviolent strategies for dealing with problems, lack a sense of belonging in school, and have more problems at home. It is also thought that childrearing practices may contribute to bullying behavior. One researcher found that authoritarian, or punitive, parenting can lead to bullying. In other words, children brought up in a harsh, aggressive environment may become angry and aggressive themselves. Children whose parents practice coercive parenting behaviors, such as yelling, name-calling, and threats of punishment, have children who tend to model this aggressive behavior with their peers.



Who Are the Victims of Teasing and Bullying?

Researchers have discovered that victims of teasing and bullying share some common characteristics. Some of these characteristics may include physical weakness, poor social skills, willingness to submit to the bully's demands, outward signs of distress (e.g., anxiousness, depression), and possession of few friends.

Consequences for Victims and Bullies

Victims of bullying may suffer from anxiety, fear, and low self esteem. They may avoid peers, school, and social activities where they may be exposed to teasing or bullying. Victims may become depressed and, in some cases, suicidal.

Some victims may try to bully other children as a response to being teased and bullied themselves.

Stopping bullying behavior early is critical for both the victim and for those who bully. One study found that males who were bullied were more likely by age 20 to be depressed, and they had lower self esteem than a comparison group who had not been bullied (Olweus, 1993b).



Negative consequences for those who bully have been demonstrated as well. There is some evidence that shows that childhood bullies are more likely to perform poorly in school, become aggressive later in life, and become involved in criminal activities (Olweus, 1979).

What Can Providers Do?

Effective interventions must focus on a number of levels, including the teaser/bully, the victim, peer culture, the school, and the home environment (Garrity & Baris, 1999). Since teasing and bullying often occurs away from the presence of adults, and thus goes undetected, adults must recognize the problem and investigate when they suspect teasing and bullying is going on. Once detected, a variety of intervention plans can be enacted. Effective intervention plans focus on:

- helping the bully and the victim develop a healthy self esteem,
- establishing a no-tolerance policy for teasing and bullying,
- creating and enforcing rules of respect and responsible behavior,
- educating students on what to do when confronted with teasing and bullying as well as the negative consequences of such behavior,
- educating and training staff on the nature of the problem and ways to intervene, and
- involving parents and the community in the process.

Successful anti-teasing and bullying programs send clear messages that this type of behavior is not appropriate and that all children will be safe.

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Discipline: Converting Children's Negative Behavior into Valuable Life Lessons

by Stephen Green, Ph.D.

One of the most challenging aspects of being a child care provider is deciding upon a style of discipline that is appropriate, effective, and in the best interest of each child. As frustrating as it may be, it is entirely normal for children to test limits and engage in behavior that might be considered inappropriate. How you respond to such behavior depends on a number of factors, including the child's age and developmental stage, the personality and temperament of the child, the severity of the behavior, and your views concerning discipline.

While it may not appear this way on the surface, addressing children's misbehavior provides you with a great opportunity to teach children valuable life lessons. Unfortunately, for many adults, the word "discipline" simply means to punish. While punishment is certainly a part of discipline, the word also brings with it many positive connotations. Discipline can also mean to teach, instruct, or train someone physically, intellectually, emotionally, morally, and socially. When you think of discipline in these terms, the importance of discipline becomes very apparent.

As a child care provider, you play an important role in modeling and encouraging positive behavior in children. Although no one has all of the answers when it comes to disciplining children, some general guidelines follow that can assist you in your efforts to discipline the children in your care in a loving, fair, and effective manner.

1. Have Realistic Expectations. Having realistic expectations as a caregiver requires a basic understanding of where children lie on the developmental spectrum. This can be challenging because not all children develop at the same pace. For some children, their physical development outpaces their emotional or cognitive development. A common mistake made by caregivers is to assume that because a child is physically mature, the child is also emotionally mature. When caregivers set unrealistic limits for the children in their care, they unknowingly set them up for failure. When it comes to discipline, there is not one particular technique that works effectively with all children in all circumstances; therefore, when considering how to deal with a child's negative

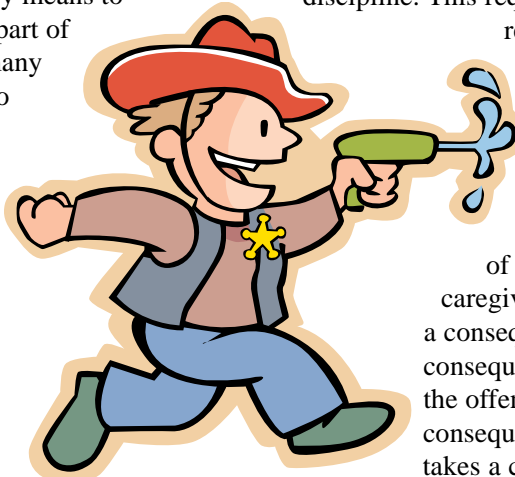
behavior, think about that child's developmental capacities, and consider how to use the misbehavior to teach a valuable, age-appropriate life lesson.

2. Communicate Expectations Clearly. Children will have a very difficult time following the limits established by their caregivers if they do not know what those limits are. Likewise, when children violate the limits, it is critical to let them know that they have violated a limit. If some type of disciplinary action is taken, it is also helpful for you to let the child know why she is being disciplined. Taking advantage of these "teachable moments" promotes positive behavior and helps prevent future misbehavior.

3. Establish Reasonable Consequences. Establishing reasonable consequences is an essential aspect of effective discipline. This requires caregivers to distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable consequences. What constitutes reasonable versus unreasonable depends on the age and developmental stage of the child and the severity of the behavior. A child who clearly understands and is capable of following a rule established by a caregiver, yet fails to do so, should experience a consequence for this behavior. The consequence, however, should be in line with the offense. For example, a reasonable consequence for a three-year-old child who takes a cookie from the kitchen just before lunch would be not letting the child have a dessert after lunch. An unreasonable consequence, on the other hand, would be not letting the child eat lunch at all.

4. Be Loving, Yet Firm. Researchers have discovered that the most effective style of discipline is an authoritative one, in which adults openly express their care and concern for the children in their care, yet expect them to behave in ways that are consistent with the guidelines they have set in the center or home. When rules and/or limits are violated, consequences are implemented that are intended to teach the importance of proper behavior.

5. Be Consistent. Consistency is another factor that is associated with effective discipline. Consistent caregivers do what they say they are going to do, when they say they are



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going to do it, without partiality. If you tell a child she is going to receive a consequence for violating a rule and you fail to enforce it, you are not being consistent. Children are very observant. They pick up on inconsistencies in adult behavior, which can lead to misbehavior on their part. Children who are cared for in a consistent manner know what to expect from their care providers. They are not surprised when they suffer consequences for misbehavior.

6. Discipline in a Positive Way. Caregivers who truly care about the well being of the children in their care discipline them because they want what is best for the children. Discipline that is done to teach, guide, protect, and promote self-responsibility is positive discipline. In contrast, discipline that is done out of anger or revenge is negative and can be harmful to children.

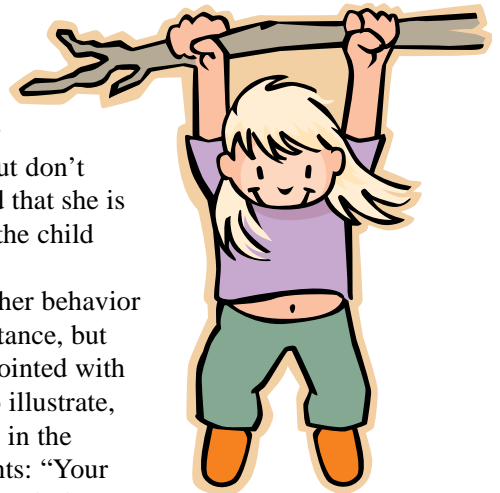
7. Model Appropriate Behavior. Children tend to model behavior they see on a regular basis. As individuals who have extensive contact with large numbers of children, you have a unique opportunity to model positive and socially acceptable behavior. Whether it is picking up after you make a mess or settling differences with another staff member in a respectful manner, you will demonstrate to the children the skills you want them to acquire. If you want children to treat you and others with respect, you must model respect for others in your

daily interactions. If you want children to listen to what you have to say, you must be willing to listen to them.

8. Discover the Origins of Misbehavior. Children misbehave for a variety of different reasons. A child may “act out” because he’s tired, hungry, frustrated, seeking after attention, or having difficulties at home. Make an attempt to find the root cause of the behavior and deal with it. Doing so can prevent a situation from escalating out of control and bring a quick resolution to an otherwise potentially difficult situation.

9. Make a Distinction between the Child and the Child’s Behavior. When a child misbehaves, it is helpful to distinguish

between the child and the behavior. Label the behavior as unacceptable, but don’t convey to the child that she is unacceptable. Let the child know that you are disappointed with her behavior in a given circumstance, but you are not disappointed with her as a person. To illustrate, note the difference in the following statements: “Your behavior was disappointing,” versus “You are a disappointment!”



Web Resources on Bullying

“Bullying – How to Stop It!” – Fact sheet from Nebraska Cooperative Extension
<http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/family/nf309.htm>

“Bullying” - Fact sheet from American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/80.htm>

“Bullies” – Fact sheet from North Dakota State University Extension Service
<http://www.ext.nodak.edu/extpubs/yf/famsci/fs570w.htm>

“Easing the Teasing: How Parents Can Help Their Children”
<http://ericass.uncg.edu/virtuallib/bullying/1060.html>

Bullying in Schools – ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
<http://ericass.uncg.edu/virtuallib/bullying/bullyingbook.html>

“Bullying Prevention” - Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado
<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/publications/factsheets/safeschools/FS-SC07.html>

“Bullying: Information for Parents and Teachers”
<http://www.lfcc.on.ca/bully.htm>

10. Learn from Your Mistakes. No parent or child care provider has all of the answers when it comes to dealing with children’s problem behavior. All of us who have our own children, or who have cared for children, have made mistakes when attempting to set and enforce limits with them. Disciplining children is one of the most difficult aspects of child care; however, effective caregivers learn from their mistakes. As time wears on, they become more efficient at handling difficult behavior, and they are able to teach children valuable lessons that will last a lifetime.

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Family Child Care Connections Editorial Staff Texas Cooperative Extension

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