

Eyes on



# Discipline

How much is enough?



PARENTS



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
CLUSTER ON EARLY

*child development*



**“Good discipline helps children develop their social skills and succeed in school.”**

## What do we know?

- Discipline is what you do everyday—it is about *teaching* and *guidance*, not punishment.
- Discipline teaches children what is acceptable and what isn't.
- Discipline that combines high levels of warmth and acceptance with firm control helps children to follow instructions, to respect rules, and to be attentive.
- Parents who establish clear rules and limits encourage the development of positive behaviours and attention in children. They also encourage children to explore their environment while respecting certain limits.
- Good discipline helps children develop their social skills (empathy, cooperation, problem-solving) and succeed in school.
- Children have a higher likelihood of developing behavioural problems when parents react with punishments or temper outbursts in face of misbehaviours.
- Attitudes toward discipline and control vary based on the social and cultural context.
- Too much parental control may limit children's ability to make decisions for themselves and to express their needs to parents.
- In contrast, children who are allowed to do anything they want tend to have trouble distinguishing between what is acceptable and what is not. Poor parental supervision also increases the risk of injuries in young children.

## Paying attention to...

## What can be done?

... situations that might lead your child to lose his cool.

- Support your child by offering enjoyable ways to calm down. For example, you can change activities, do a few belly breaths, or redirect your child's attention.
- Remove the source of conflict. For example, take away an object that is a source of conflict between two children. You can also ask the child to withdraw to a quiet place where he can calm down.

... the different ways you can reduce your child's negative behaviours.

- Establish clear rules.
- Tell your child what will happen if the rules are not respected.
- Be kind and firm when you follow through.
- Make sure you and your partner are consistent with discipline.
- Ignore your child's negative behaviours to avoid reinforcing negative attention. Intervene if your child is aggressive or disrespectful to others.

... your child's positive behaviours.

- Reinforce your child's positive behaviours by telling him what he does well (e.g., "I like that you put your toys away").
- Congratulate your child using both words and actions (hugs, smiles, winks).
- Develop a token system (e.g., a sticker chart) to reinforce your child's positive behaviours.
  - Make sure to tell your child what these positive behaviours are.
  - Reward your child with a token (sticker) whenever you see the desired behaviours.
  - Allow your child to give his input into what rewards he would like to earn after accumulating 5, 10, or 20 tokens.



Encyclopedia  
on Early Childhood  
Development

**Coordinator:**  
Valérie Bell

**Collaborators:**  
Michel Boivin  
Mélanie Joly  
Richard E. Tremblay  
Isabelle Vinet (CPEQ)

**Copy editor:**  
Lana Crossman

**Graphic design:**  
DesJardins Conception Graphique inc.



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development

# Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of discipline, consult our topics Aggression and Parenting skills in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

Several organizations financially support the CEECD and the SKC-ECD, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Université Laval, and private foundations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of these organizations.

We are grateful to the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon for its financial contribution to produce this information sheet and to the Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation for its financial support of this revised edition.

## **Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development**

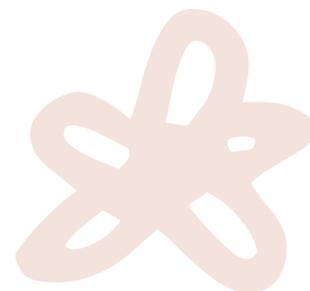
Université de Montréal  
3050, Édouard-Montpetit Blvd., GRIP  
P.O. Box 6128, succursale Centre-ville  
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7

Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2541  
Fax: 514.343.6962

E-mail: [cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca](mailto:cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca)

Websites: [www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca](http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca) and [www.skc-ecd.ca](http://www.skc-ecd.ca)

In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.



STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
CLUSTER ON EARLY  
*child development*

**Prévention**<sup>MD</sup>  
Fondation Lucie  
et André Chagnon

**M W M**  
Margaret & Wallace McCain  
Family Foundation