

Taming the Hidden Scientist

As children grow, the scientist in them sometimes emerges and finds it necessary to test boundaries. In a moment of weakness, we may decide to avoid the conflict and ignore the scientist. Although tempting, what works best for children, and scientists alike, are clearly defined limits accompanied by clearly defined consequences. Both boundaries and consequences must be consistent.

Discipline is most successful when it is balanced with love, respect and understanding. At Bridges, we use positive, effective disciplinary techniques. Our rules are few in number, but very clear. It is much easier for children to follow rules if they know what to expect. Each rule is accompanied by a clear consequence. "If you throw the puzzle piece again, you will not be permitted to play with it." Now, there are always those children who want to be sure we mean what we say. As their test begins, we must stand our ground and remain strong in our decisions. No bargaining. We calmly explain that because you threw the puzzle piece again, you are not permitted to play with the puzzle today. Being firm and consistent lets a child know we are serious.

Positive feedback is an important component of successful discipline. It encourages students to try even harder. Teachers prefer to highlight accomplishments, not spotlight setbacks. When we see positive behavior, we acknowledge it. "Thank you for cleaning up the blocks so quietly. You did a great job!" Every child likes to be noticed. Earned praise fosters internal pride which helps build a positive self image.

Confidence building is a slow process. As children complete assigned tasks, they begin to develop inner confidence. Provide opportunities for your child. Carefully and slowly demonstrate how a task should be accomplished. Allow the children to watch so they can learn. When they are ready, let them try to complete the assignment on their own. Praise their efforts and offer corrections for their mistakes. Encourage them to try again, reminding them that they will get better at something when they properly practice it.

While these tactics have a high success rate, there are some days when nothing works. That is the time to dig deep and thank God for the gift of patience. The world needs scientists.

