



Discipline or Punishment

Does grounding work?

Discipline means to "teach". It helps teens learn what to do and helps teens and parents feel good about themselves. Discipline is a positive way to teach a teen self-control and confidence that emphasizes nurturing and guidance.

The characteristics of discipline include:

- focuses on what the teen needs to do in the future
- relates to the misbehaviour
- helps the teen develop self-discipline and learn how to become responsible
- intended to help the teen accept natural or logical consequences of the misbehaviour



Punishment is an artificially created consequence for a given behaviour, e.g., grounding, sending to the bedroom, removal of privileges, withholding of allowance etc. Does punishing teenagers work? It definitely helps parents to believe that they are in control of their teen. They are able to relax for a while until the next misdeed. Does punishment change teen's behaviour? Yes, but only for a brief time. Usually teens will continue to do the same things they were punished for, if they think they can get away with it.

One of the troubles with punishment as a way to teach teens proper social behaviour, is that it makes them feel weak, impotent and incapable. Punishment teaches teens to look to external authority to decide for them how they should behave, rather than looking to themselves. They do not learn how, in collaboration with others, to make choices; they do not learn how to decide what is good for them and for those who are important to them. What they learn instead is to submit to authority and power, to obey. By being punished and treated as inferior beings, they become inferior beings - they do not develop the power of the human individual to love and trust. Teens



who are regularly punished learn to fear their parents. They learn the behaviours that their parents like and don't like and also, how to hide these behaviours from their parents. They develop "proper" behaviour out of fear, not choice.

So what about grounding I hear you ask? Grounding is typically the consequence of choice in the heat of the moment when a parent wants to witness the effects of punishment on their teenager. Unfortunately all this does is escalate the tension, anxiety, and general bad feelings.

Grounding is usually ineffective and in essence when you ground your teenager you are also grounding yourself. When a teenager is grounded the parent must provide more structure for the teenager to reflect and learn from the misbehaviour.

So what is the alternative? Learn to negotiate and make an agreement with your teenager before the misdeed even arises. Try not to introduce consequences at this time as they create a punitive environment, such as "if you don't do this then the result will be x". Requesting an agreement keeps it respectful and indicates that the teenager has a choice. The agreement should be based on persuasion rather than coercion. It is better to partner in a decision than to dictate a decision.

If the teenager breaks the agreement then a logical consequence can ensue. Discuss the consequence with the teen and keep it related to the agreement. For example, if the agreement is around picking up their clothes off the floor at the end of each day and putting them in the laundry the consequence should be related to the laundry - resulting in the teen doing their own washing.

"If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves."

Carl Jung