PARENTING, PUNISHMENT & THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT ON CHILDREN

A self-reflection questionnaire

How we discipline children can influence how they understand themselves, manage emotions and develop relationships with others.

This questionnaire invites parents and caregivers to reflect on their beliefs and responses when children misbehave. It is not about judging or achieving perfect parenting. Its purpose is to encourage awareness, learning and safer, more respectful ways of guiding children.

How to use this questionnaire
For each question, tick the answer that most closely reflects your usual response or current belief. There are no scores and no right or wrong answers. You may leave any question blank.

PART ONE — REFLECTING ON DISCIPLINE

1. When a child misbehaves, what is your most common response?

- ■ I remain calm and explain what is expected.
- ■ I raise my voice or become frustrated.
- ■ I use threats or punishment to gain compliance.
- ■ I sometimes resort to smacking or physical punishment.

2. Do you believe smacking is an acceptable form of discipline?

- ■ No. Children can learn without physical punishment.
- ■ Only in certain circumstances.
- ■ Yes, if a child repeatedly misbehaves.
- ■ I am unsure and would like to understand the impact.

3. What do you think a child may learn when they are hit for misbehaving?

- ■ To understand why their behaviour was inappropriate.
- ■ To fear the consequences of upsetting an adult.
- ■ That physical aggression can be used to resolve conflict.
- ■ I have never really considered this.

4. How do you respond when a child becomes upset or cries after being disciplined?

- ■ I listen and help them understand their feelings.
- ■ I give them time and space to calm down.
- ■ I tell them they are being overdramatic.
- ■ I expect them to stop crying immediately.

5. Have you ever used hurtful words, humiliation or threats when disciplining a child?

- ■ No. I try to communicate respectfully.
- ■ Yes, occasionally, when overwhelmed.
- ■ Yes. I believe children need to understand who is in charge.
- ■ I find this difficult to reflect on.

PART ONE — REFLECTING ON DISCIPLINE (CONTINUED)

6. Do you believe children can respect adults without being frightened of them?

- ■ Absolutely.
- ■ Sometimes fear is necessary.
- ■ Respect and fear are much the same.
- ■ I am not sure.

7. How were you disciplined as a child, and has that influenced your parenting?

- ■ I experienced positive discipline and try to repeat it.
- ■ I was smacked and have continued the tradition.
- ■ I experienced harsh discipline and consciously choose differently.
- ■ I have not really reflected on this.

8. When you lose your temper with a child, do you take responsibility afterwards?

- ■ Yes. I apologise and try to repair the relationship.
- ■ Sometimes, depending on the situation.
- ■ No. Children should know not to provoke adults.
- ■ I find this difficult.

9. Do you think repeated shouting, criticism and humiliation can affect a child's self-esteem?

- ■ Yes, significantly.
- ■ Possibly, but children are generally resilient.
- ■ No. Children need tough treatment.
- ■ I would like to learn more.

10. Would you be willing to explore alternatives to physical and harsh punishment?

- ■ Yes, absolutely.
- ■ Perhaps, if I understood them better.
- ■ No. Traditional discipline works.
- ■ I would like guidance and support.

PART TWO — YOUR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a little time to consider the questions below. You do not have to share your answers with anyone.

What did discipline look and feel like in your own childhood?

_____

_____

Are there any responses you learned growing up that you would like to change?

_____

_____

What helps you stay calm when a child’s behaviour challenges you?

_____

_____

How could you repair trust after a difficult interaction with a child?

_____

_____

What would you like a child in your care to remember about how you made them feel?

_____

_____

PART THREE — HEALTHIER WAYS TO GUIDE CHILDREN

Emotion coaching: Help children name feelings and find safe, appropriate ways to express them.

Respectful boundaries: Set clear, consistent limits without intimidation, threats or humiliation.

Natural and proportionate consequences: Where safe and appropriate, help children understand the outcomes of their choices.

Positive reinforcement: Notice and encourage helpful behaviour, effort and cooperation.

Repair and reflection: Take responsibility, apologise when needed and rebuild connection after conflict.

“When your child looks back on their childhood, what do you want them to remember about how you made them feel?”

A final thought

The aim of discipline should be to teach, not to frighten; to guide, not to control; and to help children develop respect without teaching them fear. Children need boundaries, consistency and adults who help them feel safe.

Important note: This questionnaire is an educational self-reflection exercise. It is not a diagnostic tool, parenting assessment or substitute for professional advice. Physical punishment and emotionally harmful treatment should be taken seriously. If you are concerned about a child’s safety, seek advice from an appropriate child-protection professional or local safeguarding service.

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