



Some General Ideas about Young Children (Ages 2 – 8)

1. Children are great perceivers, but horrible interpreters

- In other words, children will pick up on emotions, but they won't know what to do with them. They will often assume that the negative emotion has something to do with them since many of them are egocentric and have difficulty taking other people's points of view. For instance, if contention exists in a marriage, the children of that marriage may assume that they are the *cause* of the contention.
- Intervention: When you are experiencing a deep emotion, explain what you are thinking or feeling to the child in very clear terms. Don't leave things unsaid or you may be amazed at your child's interpretation of things.

2. Children cannot understand consequences in the future unless they experience consequences in the present.

- Lecturing is too abstract, it delays consequences, and it may reinforce them with attention. For instance, children will not understand "bad things happen when you lie" until the *experience* something bad (e.g., timeout, no dessert after dinner) happening because they lied.
- Intervention: Provide consequences and walk away rather than lecture. You can always go back later and teach.

3. Children live in the moment.

- Threatening or telling a child about a potential distant consequence for their behavior (e.g., "When your father gets home", "if you keep this up you'll never go to college") is generally never as effective as providing a consequence in the moment.
- Intervention: Think out consequences (e.g., timeout, movie time taken away) in advance so that: (1) you can give them to the child immediately; (2) you don't have to decide "what to do" when your angry; and (3) the child consistently knows what will happen as the result of their behavior.

4. Children remember what you do, not what you say (unless you lie)

- *Modeling* (or your example) has a powerful impact on children. It will "trump" any church lesson or lecture you give them. Also, a lack of consistency (what you tell them will happen vs. what actually happens) will be remembered.
- Intervention: Don't do what you would be tempted to lecture you child on. Also, don't say things you have no intention of following through on. It is better to not give the command.



5. Many children are reinforced by knowing that they've pushed their parent's buttons.

- Even though they may be “punished” for doing so, the knowledge that they can affect their mommy or daddy’s feelings is incredibly powerful to many children. So don’t be surprised if they cuss, say they “hate” you, or say you “don’t love” them when they are being punished.
- Intervention: First, remember that they don’t mean what they say. They haven’t learned to master their emotions yet. Ignore these words or you risk teaching them how to manipulate. If your child feels like they’ve found a “soft spot” they will continually be tempted to exploit it when they are upset.