



parenting
With **positive**
guidance

Tools for Building **Discipline** from the **Inside Out**.

By Amanda Morgan, MS

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::: This book is dedicated to my husband, my perfect partner in parenting, as well as to both sets of our parents, who first showed us the way. :::

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This book may be purchased at www.notjustcute.com, where you may also read more from Amanda Morgan as she blogs about supporting whole child development with activities and articles that are more than just cute, for young children who are much more than cute too.

Underlined text is hyperlinked. Addresses may also be found in the Resources and References section. Referenced books are linked to Amazon.com simply to help you find them. At this time, I receive no incentive from Amazon.com, authors, or publishers for promoting their books.

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Introduction

A Disclaimer

Before reading this book, it's important to me that you realize that I am not a perfect parent. I've long been leery of the term "parenting expert" because such a title instantly invites scrutiny, and quite frankly, I don't feel up to the inspection. With three boys age six and under, I am still very much on the proving grounds of parenthood. My own kids, and those I work with, throw tantrums, tackle playmates, and even – if you can believe it – shout at me now and then about how much they don't like me anymore. In other words, they're normal kids.

While I still bristle at the term "parenting expert", I do feel qualified to be called a "child development expert". My bachelor's degree is in Elementary and Early Childhood Education, and I earned my master's degree in Human Development, where I focused on the early childhood years. I've worked with children in a variety of settings: As a university lab preschool teacher, as a public school teacher, as a supervisor to student teachers, and as a consultant and trainer to early childhood professionals. **Certainly all that experience has been put to the test on a daily basis in my ultimate teaching role as "Mom".**

Because of my background and work experiences I have become more aware of a variety of tools that I use inside the classroom and inside my home to approach difficult behaviors. While I don't claim to have supernatural powers that allow me to control all child behavior, turning each little one into the offspring of the Stepford Wives, I do use these tools to make what I do a little bit easier for me and more effective for the children I love and teach.

This e-book won't give you a magic wand to wave over challenging children, instantly instilling them with perfect behavior. There is no magical, easy, or perfect approach to dealing with challenging childhood behaviors. If there was, there wouldn't be shelves full of books on the topic in every book store and library. There would be one very short book and we would all have it memorized! I won't promise to give you a new kid by next Tuesday, or outline specific steps to follow for just 10 days to elicit a magical transformation. **No**

book you read will ever change your child. It can only change *you* and how you react to your child in daily situations. It's the difference in those interactions that will effect real change in your child. What I will share with you here are lifetime skills – tools, attitudes, and approaches that you can use every day to address difficult behaviors and teach children to make better choices about their own behavior, and thereby build internal discipline.

Simple Tools for an Important Task

Raising good kids is hard work. **Don't let anyone try to tell you that you must be doing something wrong just because it's hard.** Other programs might make it seem easy or they may promise instant results. Too often these quick-fix programs rely on manipulating and bribing children into behaving rather than doing the hard work of teaching intrinsic moral discipline.

It is hard work, but with the right tools the hard work begins to *feel* easier. And the best part is, by doing the hard work of teaching for long term growth rather than controlling for short term results, you will eventually be able to step back more and more as your children become increasingly capable of monitoring their own behavior.

I'll be the first to say that these tools are not my own unique invention. I don't have a patent on the practical combination of sound theory and good judgment. What I am writing here is a compilation of my own internalization and application of the work of many, many people in the area of ***Positive Child Guidance***. After studying child development for years and applying that study in amazing teaching experiences in the university and public school settings, I became a parent. I found I had a new challenge: To reconcile my textbook and clinical knowledge with the often messy reality of parenthood.

These writings are largely written to myself. They are reminders and words of encouragement from the "child development expert" side of my brain to the "often overwhelmed parent" side of my brain. I realized long ago that I learn best by processing my thoughts through writing. As I began to share what I wrote with others through my blog, [Not Just Cute](#), I was honestly surprised at the reaction I got. There were parents who, like me, found themselves in the typical daily battles with their young children, facing power struggles and tantrums, and

they wanted a new approach. There were also parents who shared with me personal stories of childhood abuse and manipulation and a desire to create a better childhood for their own children. As I continued to write for myself, and then for them, some began to request it all in one book as a guide they could use and share with others. And so, ***here it is***.

This book is divided into three parts. Part one introduces the philosophy of positive guidance. Part two outlines the ten tools you can use to encourage positive behavior while building internal discipline. This section could be read all at once as an overview, but may also be helpful as a reference and reminder of individual tools. Part three discusses how this all comes together in a meaningful way for your individual family; how you can tailor all these principles to meet your unique goals and vision, creating a positive family culture and strong and loving family bonds.

Part One: Building Discipline from the Inside Out



"Goodness consists not in the outward things we do, but in the inward things we are. To be good is the great thing."

-Edwin Hubbell Chapin

Chapter One: Positive Guidance

The philosophy at the center of this book is generally referred to in child development literature as “positive guidance”. Positive guidance is based on the belief that any means of child guidance should focus on building up a child’s self-control rather than solely focusing on an immediate behavioral outcome. We first must realize that it is not our job (as parents and teachers) to eliminate conflict, disappointment, and frustration from the lives of our children, rather it is to teach our children how to appropriately deal with those situations and emotions. It is part of our stewardship to help our children make better choices now and in the future by helping them build self-mastery and social competence. **Positive guidance focuses more on building the child’s control over self than the adult’s control over the child.**

Perhaps I can better explain what positive guidance is by explaining what it is not. It is not your typical sticker chart or reward system for good behavior. These systems often get quick results, but their long-term influence on behavior is sparse. Once you run out of stickers, candies, or toys the child no longer has motivation. Likewise, children who respond to such circumstances in one situation, at home for example, have no incentive to carry over those same good behaviors when they are away at school, or with friends, or anywhere else.

Think of it this way. If I offered \$50 to anyone who could do 10 push-ups, you would at least attempt it, right? But does that mean I have effectively made you a healthier person or taught you to choose a healthier lifestyle for yourself? Of course not! You could collect your \$50 and spend it all on chocolates and cheesecake! (Please invite me if you do!) If I continued to make this offer over time, you would begin to weigh out the offer, deciding if the effort was worth the \$50, rather than considering the actual lifetime choice before you: whether the effort was worth your good health. Now this is not to say that rewards and incentives should *never* be used. They must simply be used sparingly and appropriately. They should focus on specific behaviors and skills being mastered (not just “being good today”), and should have a plan for being phased out rather than relied on as a permanent system for controlling behavior. **Don’t substitute**

short-term behavior gimmicks for teaching attitudes and skills for the long term.

When you use positive guidance, you take a step back, check your own emotions, and calmly take on the role of encouraging and training a child to build the social skills and self-control necessary for future challenges. You accept that, just like learning to walk, social skills and self-control are learned. And, just like learning to walk, there will be missteps along the way. In every learning opportunity – walking, talking, reading – we accept that children will make mistakes and that mistakes are part of the learning process. We encourage them to keep trying and tell them that we know they are capable of mastering it. We can approach behavior in much the same way.

Discipline vs. Punishment

I'm not trying to argue over semantics here, but I would like to offer a change in perspective. To many people, the two words above carry the same meaning. But let's think about that here. **Punishment is something that happens to someone. Discipline is something found in someone.** It's a quality. Something that has been fostered and developed. When a person has discipline they have the inner fortitude to make right choices, to do what needs to be done.

Children aren't born with this discipline. They aren't born knowing they shouldn't take toys away from other kids, color on the walls, or flail in the middle of the aisles of the grocery store when we say we won't be buying the Super Crunchy Sugar Bombs. **As young children they have a limited – but growing – amount of impulse control and a thin slice of social grace.** But they are growing and developing, and they can learn. Consider a new baby whose arms flail wildly until, over time, the baby develops enough control to generate purposeful movements. Similarly, it takes time for preschoolers to develop the ability to move from acting on wild impulses to making controlled, thoughtful choices.

As I mentioned before, self-control and discipline are learned behaviors. As with any learned skill, there will be mistakes along the way and some steep learning curves. It's our job to help and teach along the way. When a child struggles to learn to ride a bike, we take some extra time to clarify the process

and coach her through. **We teach social skills in the same way: give extra support and extra practice, clarifying and coaching until that skill becomes second-nature.** Whether it's riding a bike or making friends, mastering new skills takes time and multiple failed attempts before a child meets with success. When we remember that young children are learning and growing, and that there is a developmental aspect to their behavior (not just spite), it makes it easier to step back and keep the proper perspective. **Perceived patience is actually a byproduct of increased understanding and appropriate expectations.**

When a person says a child "*needs to be disciplined*" they are referring to the fact that the child appears to lack that inner discipline. But you can't force that on a child in one instance. And so the meaning of that phrase seems to evolve into a more actionable meaning, "*that child needs to be punished*". Punishment is an easy reaction. It doesn't require much thought. Its aim is merely to make an experience unpleasant. As a childcare center director shared with me in a discussion, "*Punishment hurts. Whether it's physically or emotionally, the intention of punishment is to hurt the child.*" She recognized that this approach does little to instill real discipline. A young child often sees little or no connection between their action and an adult's hurtful reaction. The relationship between the action and the punishment becomes convoluted and distorted. **Discipline comes from an understanding of choices and consequences, not force, punishment, and pain.**

Let your focus be on guiding your children to develop actual discipline. This is not the fleeting good behavior that can be bought and bribed; this takes work. It requires effort, and time, and being present to guide a child to learn from his mistakes and not simply be punished for them.

When the focus is on **punishment as a reaction** to improper behavior, we are only teaching the child not to "*get caught*" being "*bad*". When we choose **proactive discipline**, we teach moral decision-making. **Instead of trying to control our children, we teach them to control themselves.** Rather than governing out of anger, we guide out of love. That doesn't mean we don't feel anger. Parents are humans after all, and we tend to feel anger when an entire pitcher of orange juice comes splattering down to the floor during a tantrum. But

when we react out of anger – shouting, spanking, throwing adult-sized tantrums ourselves – the teachable moment for creating real discipline is lost.

Relinquishing Ownership

We have to let go of the notion that this is all about us. Let children own their own behavior. **Focus on teaching, not on blind compliance.** Here's an example. My oldest son, Spencer, recently asked me if he could play a game on the computer. I was pretty sure that my husband had told him on the previous day that he had used too much time on the computer and would need to make up for it by not playing the following day.

I asked Spencer if I had understood their deal correctly. He initially agreed, but then slowly said, *"But...I think he said I could play...for just a **short** time today."* Well, my initial impulse was to get into an argument about whether or not that was the truth and whether or not he should be able to play and whether or not too much computer time would eventually turn his brain into overcooked oatmeal. Instead, I decided to let him own his behavior.

"How about this," I said. *"You think about your deal with Dad and let me know what you decide to do. Then we'll let Dad know what your choice was when he gets home."* Spence thought about this for a while before asking, *"Could you just tell him while I'm upstairs?"* I could see where he was going. *"No, Buddy. You're going to tell him what your choice was, and if you think you're going to feel bad about your choice, that's probably not a good one. But if you think you'll be proud to tell Dad your choice, then I think you made the right decision."*

He thought for a long time. Then he tried one last tactic. He cried and thrashed and whined about how much he really wanted to play computer. It was an impressive performance, but because I had already made the decision to let him own his behavior, I didn't get worked up about the tantrum. It wasn't about me. I could easily and calmly say, *"I understand you want to play. And it really is your choice. I'm not telling you not to play. You do what you think you'll feel good about when you talk to Dad tonight."* My calm response, reminding him that the decision was not mine, helped him to quickly realize that the fit was going to get him nowhere.

I held my breath a little, the control-freak in me wanting to “make” him do the right thing, but I knew he had to own this small choice or he’d not likely learn to navigate more perilous choices through life. Guess what? He didn’t play the computer that day. And when he talked with my husband about his choice that day, he was proud of the choice **HE** had made.

I could have forced Spencer not to play the computer by turning it off, or bribing him with candies and stickers, or by simply putting my foot down and clinging to the “my way or the highway” doctrine. That would have gotten the behavior I wanted...for that moment. But by letting him own his own behavior and giving him the opportunity to learn through the challenge, even when that meant giving him the opportunity to fail, he gained skills and an understanding of choice and consequence that will transfer to other situations. **He built discipline.**

Children are certainly capable of intentional misbehavior, but adding our own emotions to theirs rarely serves a constructive purpose. Instead of looking at a child’s behavior as a personal affront to you, remove yourself from the equation and look at the learning opportunity created. Positive guidance includes the philosophy that every child has the potential for learning correct behavior (within a developmentally appropriate level) and that with guidance and practice they will. **All you need are the proper tools.**

Thank you for reading this excerpt!

For the full text of *Parenting with Positive Guidance: Tools for Building Discipline from the Inside Out*, go to <http://www.notjustcute.com> and click on the “books” icon.

The full text is also included as part of the Parenting with Positive Guidance ecourse, found at <http://courses.notjustcute.com> or when you click on the “courses” icon on notjustcute.com