## DAY 13

Guide



## DAY 13 Guide

When it comes to discipline, the sad truth is that most of us are doing it wrong. This is because our focus in discipline is on punishment, rather than teaching.

The best discipline focuses on the development of personal strength in children, and it is done in a way that suggests parents are pre-disposed to look with compassion on their children... to help them learn.

In the 21 Days book, I shared that when a child can't read, we teach; when a child can't swim, we teach; but when a child can't behave correctly, we... punish.

It's a tough act. We're supposed to balance the use of our power and authority to enforce reasonable limits with our desire to help our children learn and act responsibly for themselves.

The fact is that we know better. We are wiser than our children. We are bigger than our children. We have more experience than our children. We need to help our children with limits. And our children... well, all they want is freedom!

To discipline effectively, I suggest we focus on four key principles:

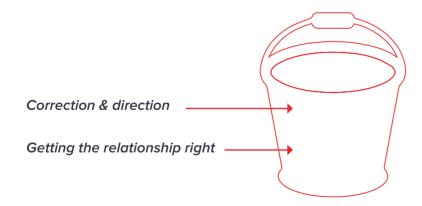
- 1. Always work to understand what is really going on.
- 2. When asking children to do something, ensure they understand why it matters.
- **3.** If there is a clash between our limit and their desire, problemsolve together. Collaborate to work it out.
- 4. As much as possible, minimise the use of controlling techniques. >

I make it a point to do all I can to not get my children in trouble. It's bad for our relationship. I'm not trying to be their friend. I'm trying to be their parent – teaching, guiding, supporting, instructing, and helping them to develop personal strengths and positive characteristics.

And the best way to do that is by example – especially in the way I talk with them and set limits with them. One of my favourite authors, Alfie Kohn, talks a lot about the need to work with our children rather than do things to them.



The diagram below shows an empty bucket. Take a moment to read the two labels that describe what is in the bucket.



At the top of the bucket is correction and direction – what we give our children to help them act in good, kind ways – and at the bottom, 'Getting the relationship right'.

Imagine you were asked to place water into the bucket in direct proportion to the amount of time you spend in your relationship with your children that's focused on correction and direction versus time spent on getting your relationship with them right. For example, if you think about 50 per cent of your interactions with your children are focused on correction and direction, place a line at the halfway point in the bucket. If you feel you spend nearly ALL your time on correction and direction, perhaps you would place the line 80-90 per cent of the way towards the bottom.

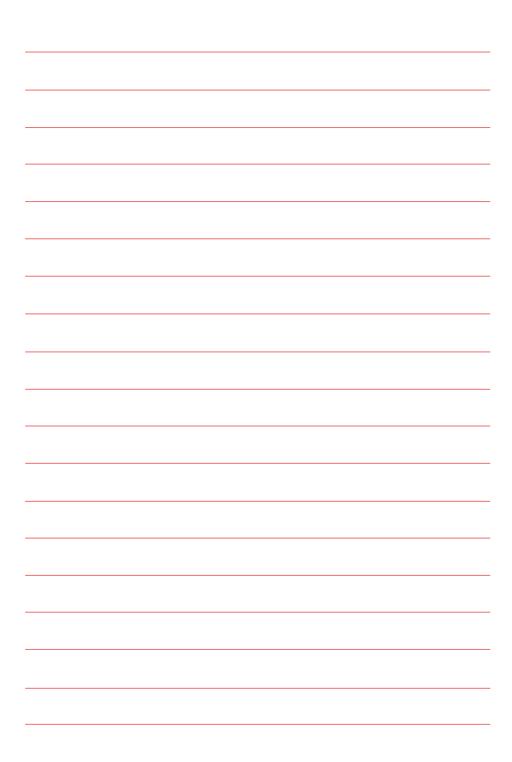
In my work with parents, most of them immediately draw a 'relationship' line that symbolises a splash in the bucket — it feels like the majority of their time is spent telling the children what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and that they'd better hurry up and do it! And there is a problem with this approach.

## Discuss or write:

Where do you draw the line? What does it tell you about the quality of your relationship with your children?

Discuss the following questions with your spouse/partner.

- **1.** What were the typical "discipline" strategies used in your home growing up, when you were a child?
- 2. What are your typical "discipline" strategies in your home now, with your own children?
- 3. As you have worked through this parenting program, have you found that your children have been easier to deal with, harder, or the same as usual?
- **4.** As you reflect on the kind of family you want to have (your vision), and the kind of people you all want to be (or the principles you want to live by), how do your typical "discipline" strategies help you or hinder you?
- 5. How has this session challenged your thinking about discipline? What do you think you might do differently as a result of this session?





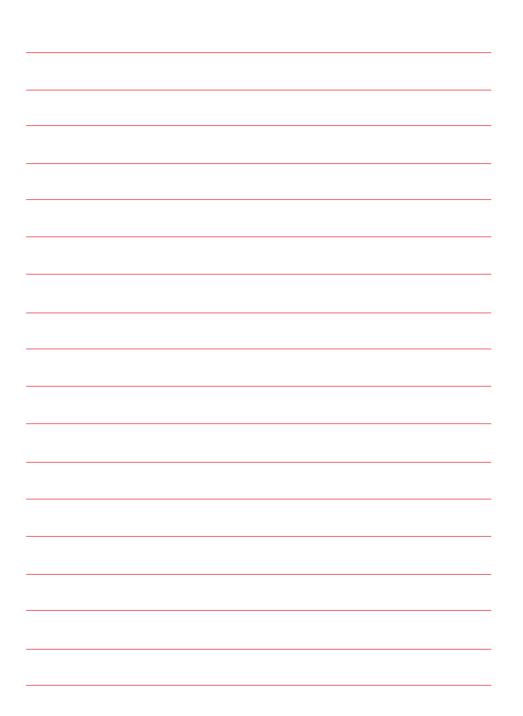
Think of an iceberg. There's a little bit of ice above the water. There's lots of ice below. Our children's challenging behaviour is a lot like an iceberg. Think about the behaviours that your child exhibits that are challenging. Write them above the waterline in the illustration below. Now, discuss together all of the potential unmet needs your child/ren may have that lead to those challenging behaviours.

Does your typical "discipline" approach address the behaviours above the water? Or the needs below the water?



Next time your child requires 'discipline', imagine that he or she is not your child. Instead, s/he's one of the neighbour's kids, and you're looking after him/her. Chances are, you'd deal with someone else's child with a more 'working with' approach than a 'doing to' approach.

Make some notes about what happened, what you did, and what you learned. Can you see opportunities for improvement? Do you feel such an approach can improve the happiness and behaviour of children in your family?



## Take home message

Discipline is a lot more about us than it is about our children. Our task is to:

- Model appropriate desired behaviour.
- Establish and maintain reasonable limits.
- Provide children with developmentally appropriate opportunities to learn responsibility.
- Convey fundamental values underlying basic human decency.
- Teach problem-solving skills.

If we can increase the quality of our discipline (with a clear focus on teaching) and if we can reduce our impulsive reactions, we are on the right path.

The take home message is simple – rather than getting the kids in trouble, we should be looking for ways to connect, teach, and problemsolve when challenges come up. We get better results. Our relationships are stronger, we receive more respect and understanding, our children are more motivated to do the right thing because they've come up with the solutions, and they're more thoughtful of others. It's called "autonomy-supportive parenting", and the research shows it works.