

# The Discipline Toolbox

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There are ways in which I am coming to see a correlation between dealing with a home improvement project and dealing with the discipline needs of our kids. So here are some lessons learned from my attempts to “remodel” the behavior of my children:

—**Don’t use a hammer when tweezers will do.** I’m afraid in learning to handle my first child’s behavioral issues I thought I had to pick every battle. I don’t even want to go into how harshly I responded to his desire to launch his sippy cup off the highchair. That same behavior from my fourth child now gets a chuckle from his siblings and I put the sippy cup away. Getting angry over the little things means you’re pretty much always going to be angry because kids are always doing little things. Sometimes a gentle response or redirection can fix a problem without all the theatrics.

—**Sometimes you really do need a hammer.** Some behaviors are unacceptable. Period. Don’t feel guilty for being tough when you need to be.

—**Different projects require different tools.** Some of my kids require a really heavy hand. Some of my kids require some serious gentleness. Don’t assume the same techniques are going to work for each kid. Be willing to change your tactics to get the best response out of your child. And whenever possible, make the punishment fit the crime (You put all your clean clothes in the hamper so you wouldn’t have to put them in the drawers? You are now my laundry helper.)

—**Do your research.** There are lots of great parenting books. Read some. They won’t have all the answers for your specific situation, but they will challenge you to think about discipline or parenting philosophies from a new angle.

—**You’re going to mess up.** Whether it’s a home improvement project or training up your children, we learn by doing. Sometimes you will try a discipline tactic that hurts your relationship with your child. Maybe you lost your temper and said something awful. Go make it right. Don’t do it again. Forgive yourself.

—**You need a level.** Balance is really important. Too far towards being a pushover or too far towards being a jerk are both bad decisions. You need to be firm, but loving. It’s not easy, but it’s a balance worth pursuing.

—**Ask a pro.** There are many amazing parents who have gone down this road before us. If you see a mom who is raising some awesome kids, humble yourself and ask her what she’s doing right. Maybe her solutions won’t work for your kids, but you might be surprised. You might be even more surprised by how great it is to have a mentor in your corner who has been where you’re walking.

—**Compressed air makes everything better.** It’s amazing how powerful compressed air is since it’s essentially just air. I like to think whispering runs on this same principal. You can scream at your kids, but I think whispering is twice as terrifying without being nearly as damaging. Kneel down to their level, put your hand on their shoulder, look right in their eyes, and whisper whatever you need to say (“We are not going to ride the dog like a horse again. Do you understand me?”). It’s amazingly effective. When in doubt, compress your air.

—**Let the project speak to you.** There is a specific tool that’s best in each discipline situation. How do you know what that tool is? Part of it is knowing your child. Here’s my other revolutionary thought—ask your child. So your son whacks your daughter with his t-rex toy (not that that has ever happened in my house. . . ). Tell him that was not okay and that he’ll need to have a consequence. Would he like to sit in time-out for five minutes or would he like to bring you the t-rex for the rest of the morning? Decide on two punishments that are equally acceptable in your opinion and let him pick his poison (although you do need to stay away from actual poison). I like this because it really helps the child understand the consequence belongs to him. He won’t be mad at you, he’ll be mad at himself.

—**Things don’t generally get better without your intervention.** Ever left a home improvement project to finish itself? How’d that work out? Right. Kids need you to enter their world. Misbehavior is often a cry for somebody to take an interest, set some boundaries, be consistent.

**What are your most valued tools? I’m always looking to add some to my toolbox.**