



## Discipline: Old School vs. New School

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When Carol Marks' 10-year-old son made a mess in the backyard with lemons and limes he picked off their trees, she calmly informed him that she'd be withholding his weekly allowance.

Marks had warned the youngster about wasting the fruit, and she wanted him to learn that actions have consequences.

But instead of the adolescent tantrum Marks expected, she got a surprising response.

"He said, 'Mom, I don't deserve to get my allowance.' And he gave me a big hug."

According to Marks, a parenting instructor and hypnotherapy expert in Pacific Palisades, kids of all ages want their parents to set - and enforce - reasonable boundaries.

While that sounds like common sense, it runs counter to some of the liberal doctrines of recent decades, when parents worried that practicing discipline would bruise their kids' self-esteem.

But experts also note that it doesn't mark a

return to the authoritarian parental role that sparked the revolution in family dynamics.

"We learned that spanking and corporal punishment were a problem and then we swung the pendulum too far," said Bette Alkazian, a mother of three and a licensed marriage and family therapist in Westlake Village.

Over the past few decades, she and other experts have seen people who grew up in a strict environment raising their own children with few, if any, limits on their behavior. The effects of that ultra-lenient style are surfacing, as parents seek help in coping with rabble-rousing preschoolers, insolent teens and self-absorbed college students.

"Punishment and rewards are both a form of control," said Dr. Aletha Solter, director of the Aware Parenting Institute in Goleta. "The problem is that neither of them lead to true self-discipline, and they don't teach children real values."

Experts say many parents turn a blind eye to inappropriate behavior because they don't want a confrontation with their children.

"There are parents who watch their kids hit during play and say, 'Well, they're only 3. They don't know any different,'" said Kimberley Clayton Blaine, a licensed therapist who runs the parenting Web site TheGoToMom.TV. "I would say 40 percent of parents do not respond to violence."

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Other parents are allowing their kids to make decisions that they themselves should be making.

Diane Clarridge, director of the Growing Place in Westlake Village, recalled hearing a parent ask a 4-year-old to decide if he should attend the preschool three or five days a week.

"You get the feeling that they don't want their children making scenes, so they give in to the child," Clarridge said.

Blaine, for instance, had a client who stopped giving her young son a bath rather than simply telling him not to slap the glass doors around the tub.

And a client of Alkazian took avoidance to the extreme. The woman said she'd never asked much of her son. But now that he was 26, she wanted him to move out.

"I said, 'Now is the time to draw the line in the sand,'" Alkazian said.

Indeed, most therapists say it's never too late to change behavior, although it gets harder after the child turns 5.

And the better you do disciplining at a younger age, the less you'll have to do later.

"Parents need to be parents, not friends," Alkazian said.