

No More Misbehavin' **by Raelee Peirce**

It's mid-morning on a summer day and my 3 and 6 year old are cooperatively playing a game they've created. I drink my coffee in peace for the moment. Things are going well until the energy shifts and the game gets louder; I hear a door slam, muffled yelling, and then the spitting begins. I arrive on the scene to find my 6 year old outside making faces through the glass of the door at her 3 year old brother who is slobbering on the glass door.

"Okay guys, it's time to go outside! Shoes on." My redirection shifts them back into a new space together and they scramble to get their shoes. My daughter collects paper and crayons and they run to the club house to color.

Many parents would say that discipline is the most important thing to enforce in order to maintain a peaceful and calm home. Discipline is about teaching children how to behave appropriately. In the past, discipline has been about shaming or physically hurting a child into making a better choice. However, we now know when children refuse to listen or calm down, a non-punitive response works best. In my [Free Noble Mother Parenting Kit](#), parents receive a Free Report, "Creating Consequences That Work!" These are non-punitive alternatives that teach.

Interestingly, consequences don't need to be your first response to your children's inappropriate behavior. [Sharifa Oppenheimer](#), a parenting guru of sorts for me, explains that it is our job to find the happy medium between structure and freedom for our children. When we look at the past, we cringe from the strict rules and harsh punishments parents of that generation enforced. The task for us is not to swing too far in the other direction and let go of boundaries and structure all together.

[Oppenheimer](#) describes the family as a "container" where our children feel safe to make mistakes and to grow naturally into the person they are meant to be. She compares the container to a ceramic pot, "firm solid exterior of clay, and the open, empty interior space. When we create the container of family, we work with both of these principles, firm structure, and open flexibility."

Last night, I made chicken salad for dinner. Immediately my 6 year old said, "I don't like that!" Following suit, my 3 year old chimed in, "I don't like that either!" I don't set out to make meals that my children don't like, but I don't cater to their processed-food-taste-buds, either. Both of them had thoroughly enjoyed this same chicken salad dish just weeks ago.

Instead of "weakening the container" by making them something else for dinner, or eliminating it from their plates, I held the boundary that we *try* everything on our plate, (our firm solid exterior of clay - or the structure), and placed a small taste on their plates, providing them the choice to decide if they like chicken salad, (the empty interior of the pot, or the flexibility).

Another example of this structure and flexibility at work is at bedtime. I often hear, "I'm not tired!" As long as they stay in their beds, they may read books quietly until they're tired. This

enforces the boundary that it is bedtime, but allows them the flexibility to fall asleep when they're tired, (which for my children usually mean within 20 minutes).

Within this container, our family culture is developing. Instead of immediately creating consequences, I'm striving to make my first thought about the atmosphere and the rhythm of our home and what needs my attention when inappropriate behavior breaks out. This morning, the children needed to shift their energy into a new play space, the outdoors. I didn't need a consequence for spitting or ugly faces, it just called for redirection.

Many times, when my 3 year old is bothering my 6 year old, I can distract him with a new game of his own or a way he can interact with her in a positive way, rather than creating a consequence for trying to take her colored pencils. If he continues to take her colored pencils away, I invite him to help me with my activity - making dinner or putting clothes in the dryer, for example.

[Oppenheimer](#) explains that "bringing him close to you physically helps him to re-establish his own inner rhythm by attuning to yours. There are current studies that show the human heart's electromagnetic field has a direct influence on others. This influence is called "entrainment." So when you bring your child to your side, to sweep, rake or sew with you, he comes into the electromagnetic field of your heart, and thereby his heart-rhythm becomes attuned to yours."

And yes, there are times when distraction and bringing him closer is not working and he becomes out-of-control. He is communicating that he needs me to define the structure of the container again, what is the boundary? This is when creating [a non-punitive consequence that works](#) is necessary. I often will need to remove an object that's causing problems, or I take him to his room and hold him, or tell him to spend quiet time until he's ready to join us again. I will say, "I will not let you hurt your sister. People who hit go to their rooms. We talk to each other when we're upset, we don't hit." Or in another instance I might say, "Children who eat healthy foods can have a popsicle."

What inappropriate behaviors are showing up right now in your home? First, look at your family culture - do your children need more outdoor time, are there too many structures without enough flexibility, are you keeping your child too busy, not busy enough?

Second, think about your own state of mind. Are you feeling overwhelmed, tired, and cranky? So much of our child's behavior can be an extension of the energy message we are sending out. I struggled so much in our 3-week New Hampshire experience this summer to keep my energy positive. It was evident that the children had a more difficult time there as well because their caregiver was not calm and content!

Third, are you using discipline to teach or to punish? Use distraction and pulling your children to your side as a way to bring them back to cooperation and calm. When those strategies don't work, think about setting a clear boundary without emotion. We know you'll get lots of practice! It is not always easy to remain unemotional when children are pushing.

Reflect on these ideas today. As your parent coach, I encourage you to think about the environment of your home. Keep things simple. Look at the indoor and outdoor play spaces for

your child, look at the ways you engage your children through family play and work, examine your daily rhythms and routines, and the creative outlets that allow your child to reach out to the world. The modern-day family can be a model of what living consciously and intentionally is all about!