

**Prepared for:**

**W. T. Henning Elementary School  
Sulphur, Louisiana**



# **Common Discipline Problems Of Elementary School Children And How to Deal With Them**

**One of a series of Parent Guides from**



## **Parent Guide**

# **Common Discipline Problems Of Elementary School Children**

And How to Deal With Them

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## Introduction

What makes living with an elementary schooler so much fun? He's\* independent, creative and free spirited. What makes living with an elementary schooler so challenging? He's independent, creative and free spirited.

In other words, the things that make elementary schoolers so interesting are the same things that can make raising (and disciplining) them somewhat tricky. After all, a full school day brings with it new experiences, new social situations and new opportunities to test boundaries.

But those boundaries are critical because, like all children, elementary schoolers thrive on loving, consistent discipline. Even though staying lovingly consistent will be tough at times—"Because I said so" rarely placates the elementary schooler the way it does his younger sister—it can be done.

What follows are 10 of the most common discipline problems of elementary schoolers, along with strategies and suggestions for guiding your child through these exciting, inspiring years.

*\*Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*



## Five Unwavering Truths About Discipline

1. Discipline means "to teach"—it does not mean "to punish." Accordingly, it should be done out of love.
2. Consistency is key. No matter what approach you take to discipline, it's crucial to be consistent about it. In other words, this morning's rules should also apply this afternoon.
3. Be patient. No discipline strategy works all the time—but that doesn't mean the strategy isn't working overall.
4. Children need and want limits. Effective discipline doesn't stifle kids—it gives them a strong, dependable foundation from which to grow and mature.
5. Discipline isn't just about correcting what your child does wrong—it's about celebrating what he does right. The more you praise and reinforce the good things he does, the more he'll want to do the right things.

### Discipline Dilemma #1: Lying

**Smart Solution:** Your child knows you're not going to believe her wild tale about the gerbil eating her homework, but she tells it to you anyway. Why? Chances are it's not because she's covering for the dog. Kids lie for lots of reasons, but that doesn't make it okay. Here are some ways to deal with your honesty-challenged youngster:

- Figure out why she lies. If her whoppers result in you giving her your undivided attention, that could be what she's seeking: your attention. The solution may be to spend more one-on-one time together.
- Look at her schedule. Is her daily life overly regimented? Is everything she does preplanned and mapped out? If so, she could be lying to assert some authority and feel more in control.
- Let her take responsibility for her actions. Okay, maybe the gerbil did eat her book report. Let her explain it to the teacher—without any buffer from you—and deal with the fallout herself.

**Real Life Remedy:** "My nine-year-old son had a terrible habit of leaving his socks, shoes or sweat-shirts wherever he took them off," says a mother of two. "I started instituting a 'one extra chore for each item of clothing left' policy. After two days of having to do some of his sister's chores, I heard a sound. I asked him what he was doing, and he said, 'Putting my shoes and socks away.'"

### Discipline Dilemma #2: Homework Headaches

**Smart Solution:** Remember the good old days when your children were younger and their "homework" consisted of coloring the duckies yellow and the sky blue? Oh, how times have changed. Now, your third-grader comes home with stacks of long division and your fifth-grader regularly needs to construct macaroni models of the Parthenon. (And chances are they're not thrilled about it.) To keep homework hassle free, try these tips:

- Create a routine. Whether it's "kick a ball around the yard before hitting the books" or "shoot some hoops and then buckle down," find a system that's workable for your child. No routine is one-size-fits-all, but consider implementing one that involves exercise (it'll help her blow off steam).
- Be predictable. Find a comfortable, quiet spot for her to work—the kitchen table, her bedroom floor—and have her use it every day.
- Don't help too much. There's nothing wrong with guiding her through a problem or two, but if your child constantly expects you to feel her homework-related pain, it's time to pull back.

### Discipline Dilemma #3: Defiance

**Smart Solution:** A strong spirit and fierce independence are admirable traits ... in other people's children. Okay, so you admire them in your own youngsters, too. Still, kids' constant challenging of authority and questioning of the rules can wear down even the most resilient moms and dads. To deal with your children's defiance—or prevent it in the first place—try these ideas:

- Let your child help come up with the household rules—when possible. Yours is still the final say, but consider getting your child's input on family hot-button issues.
- Pick your battles—Do you reflexively say "no" to your child's every request? Does each infraction (no matter how miniscule) result in an angry lecture? If your role has shifted from parent to warden, you may need to reevaluate.
- Accept defiance—to a point. Yes, it's normal for your child to be belligerent sometimes. But that doesn't give him the right to be disrespectful or hurtful. If his defiance crosses the line, let him know it by enforcing an appropriate consequence.

### Discipline Dilemma #4: Misbehavior at School

**Smart Solution:** For exhausted parents, it's tempting to want to "clock out" during school hours and let your child's teacher handle whatever discipline issues arise. But maintaining good, effective discipline means that you need to be on top of your child's behavior wherever she is. Here are some ways to handle—at home—behavioral issues that crop up at school:

- Enforce consequences. Even if your child's misbehavior at school resulted in punishment (such as the loss of a recess), it's still appropriate for there to be a follow-up penalty at home (for example, a one-day grounding).
- Talk with your child about acceptable classroom behavior. She's dealing with lots of different kids in lots of situations, but the same basic rules should apply: no hitting, no name-calling, etc.
- Demonstrate to your child that you and her teacher are a team. Communicate regularly with the school about ongoing discipline issues (ask for weekly reports, if necessary), and make sure she understands that misbehavior at school, just like misbehavior at home, will not be tolerated.

### Discipline Dilemma #5: Sibling Rivalry

**Smart Solution:** Do your kids go together like kerosene and matches? Worse, do you wish they got along that well? Even though their sibling rivalry is a natural (if dreadful) phenomenon, it doesn't have to turn your home into a war zone. To implement a cease-fire, try these strategies:

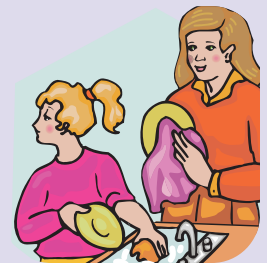
- Don't take your children's arguing too seriously, assuming there is no blood shed. Yes, you must intervene if they're out of control or hitting, but if they're simply bickering, stay out of it.
- Don't take sides if you're not sure what happened. If both parties are being cantankerous, send them to their separate corners (or rooms) until things cool down.
- Remove the touchstones that set them off. Do your kids always fight over what TV show to watch after dinner? Impose a one-week, post-dinner, TV-free period. If the temporary blackout doesn't encourage them to get along, make it permanent.

**Real Life Remedy:** "One of the best discipline tips I learned from a mother of older kids was—when my kids got into elementary school—to make a no-TV policy on weekdays," says a mom of three. "Yes, sometimes my kids whine that this is mean and all of their friends are allowed [to watch TV], but I tell them that their childhood is short and I want them to know each other well."

### Discipline Dilemma #6: Chores

**Smart Solution:** Believe it or not, most kids aren't born with the urge to vacuum, feed the cat or empty the dishwasher. Still, helping around the house is an important way for children to learn responsibility (and to realize that they're vital parts of the family). Here are some ideas for keeping your children's chore-related crises to a minimum:

- Designate a weekly chore time. Whether it's Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning, schedule a regular period when the whole family tackles the big jobs—such as mopping the floor and dusting the furniture.
- Give your child real responsibility, not busywork. Let her discover that her effort at setting the table means that the family gets to sit down together to a meal. Don't give her pointless tasks that otherwise wouldn't need doing.
- Provide clear instructions. Instead of saying, "Clean your room," try, "Toss your dirty clothes in the hamper, make your bed and put away your books." Once she completes the task, don't redo it for her.



## Discipline Dilemma #7: Backtalk

**Smart Solution:** “No, why don’t *you* put away *your* toys?” your child sneers, mimicking your sternest tone. Ah, backtalk. When you’re finished recoiling in horror and wondering why you became a parent in the first place, try some of these ideas for combating the dreaded—but oh-so-normal—problem of talking back:

- Let her know that what she’s doing is wrong—“Speaking to me like that isn’t acceptable”—before enforcing an appropriate consequence.
- After you’ve told her that what she’s doing isn’t all right (see above), tune her out until she changes her tone. If she continues being rude, consider sending her to her room: “You need some time alone to think about how you’re acting.”
- Give her an opportunity to make amends. When the smoke has cleared, talk with her about better ways to speak. If she’s truly sorry about how she acted, this will give her a chance to apologize (and give you a chance to discuss politeness).

**Real Life Remedy:** “The first thing I tell my kids is that they have the meanest mother in the whole world, and they will have to grow up dealing with that,” jokes a mom of four. “And the second thing I tell them, when they are really convinced that I am the meanest mom in the whole wide world, [is] that I love them anyway!”

## Discipline Dilemma #8: Bedtime Belligerence

**Smart Solution:** A few years ago, your biggest bedtime challenge was probably getting your child to sleep through the night. Now, just herding him into his room at a reasonable hour can feel like a major production. But sleep-deprivation is no laughing matter: Studies show that kids who don’t get enough zzz’s may perform poorly at school and have trouble concentrating. Try these tips for making sure your child gets plenty of rest:

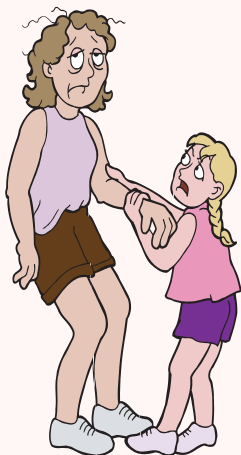
- Rely on routines. Whenever possible, stick to the same order of events every night—such as “snack, bath, story and bed.” Once the routine becomes habit, your child may be less likely to balk at it.
- Have your child unwind before bed. It’s good to unplug at least half an hour before bedtime. TV and video games can keep a child keyed up and make it hard to fall right asleep. Instead, try letting your child pick some soft music to listen to as he reads before bed.
- Be flexible. Yes, sticking to a set bedtime is important, but it’s okay to bend the rules once in awhile. Letting your child stay up a bit longer on special occasions—such as when company visits—may prevent meltdowns and power struggles.

## Discipline Dilemma #9: Carelessness & Irresponsibility

**Smart Solution:** Has your fourth-grader left his backpack on the school bus so many times that you’re considering having it surgically attached to him? Chances are, he’s been stricken with one of the most common childhood maladies: carelessness. But what do you do about this irritating habit? Read on:

- Make it easier for him to remember. Teach your child to use charts, a calendar or notes on the fridge to remind himself of upcoming events. Is his book report due on the 12<sup>th</sup>? Have him mark it in red on the calendar.
- Develop “anti-forgetfulness” routines, and remind him to follow them (experts say it takes 21 days for a new practice to become habit). His nightly routine might include checking the family calendar (see above) after dinner.
- Don’t bail him out. It’s okay to let him experience the consequences of his carelessness. If he goes hungry today because he forgot his lunchbox yet again, it may inspire him to be more responsible tomorrow.

## Discipline Dilemma #10: Whining and Begging



**Smart Solution:** If you thought whining (and its evil twin, begging) was for toddlers and preschoolers only, think again. At times, that annoying whimpering sound seems like the universal language of childhood. To make your home as whine-free as possible, try these ideas:

- Don't give in. If your child consistently begs or whines, it might be because it's working. If whining gets her what she wants, she'll keep it in her arsenal.
- Be clear about your expectations. If today's errand-running absolutely will not include a trip to the park, tell your child before you set foot in the car. "We're only going to the grocery store today, but we may stop at the playground tomorrow."
- Tune it out. As with backtalk, it's often best to ignore whining. Paying attention to it will only encourage your child to keep it up (and will likely drive you crazy).

**Real Life Remedy:** "Our basic discipline rule is that we do the 'cause-effect' rule," explains a mother of two. "Take, for example, my son. He knows that before he can play the computer or go to a friend's house, his homework and chores must be done. If he hasn't finished them, then he can't play."

### Phrases to Use Every Day

Looking for easy ways to boost your child's self-esteem and reinforce his good behavior? Try using some of these phrases—as suggested by the National PTA—at least once a day:

- Thank you.
- How can I help?
- You can do it.
- Good job.
- I love you.

### Appropriate Penalties

According to a 2002 study by Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty, the more a child is spanked, the more likely he is to act aggressively and misbehave again. Instead, try these consequences when your child misbehaves:

- Time-out or grounding.
- Extra chores.
- Loss of privileges (for example, no computer, no skateboard).
- Silence. Used occasionally, a little "silent treatment" can be highly effective.
- The Look. The one that means your child had better knock it off. Now.

### Natural vs. Logical Consequences

There are two types of consequences, natural and logical. Natural consequences, which require no intervention from you, are like automatic penalties. For instance, if your child leaves his bike out in the rain, the consequence is that it gets rusty (thank you, Mother Nature).

Logical consequences, on the other hand, are imposed and should clearly relate to the child's action. If he watches a forbidden TV show, a logical consequence could be that he loses all his TV privileges for a week.

Whenever possible, rely on natural consequences. That is, let your child observe (and endure) the results of his actions. The less often you rescue him—such as by always running his forgotten homework to school—the sooner he'll see the value in being conscientious.

## Where to Go for Help

Despite your best efforts, is your child acting up (or acting out) more and more? If so, consider getting outside help. Here are some places to start:

- Other parents. Never underestimate the wealth of knowledge and insight that fellow moms and dads can offer.
- Your child's elementary school teacher.
- Your pediatrician or family physician.
- The public library (which may provide information on parenting classes or other community resources).
- Your county health department.

## For More Information

### **"10 Alternatives to Spanking"**

ParentSoup  
[www.parentsoup.com/print/0,,554700.html](http://www.parentsoup.com/print/0,,554700.html)

### **American Academy of Pediatrics**

847/434-4000  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

### ***Discipline the Brazelton Way***

by T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., and Joshua D. Sparrow, M.D.  
 Da Capo Press  
 1-800-255-1514  
[www.dacapopress.com/](http://www.dacapopress.com/)

### ***Go to Your Room!***

by Shari Steelsmith  
 Parenting Press  
 1-800-992-6657  
[www.parentingpress.com](http://www.parentingpress.com)

### **Family Almanac: Why Is This Boy a Chronic Liar?**

by Marguerite Kelly  
*The Washington Post*  
[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

### **The Chore Challenge**

by Mimi Greenwood Knight  
 Parents.com  
[www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com)

### **The Key to Homework Success**

by Kathy Henderson,  
 Child.com  
[www.Child.com](http://www.Child.com)

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1-800-756-5525  
[www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)

### **Words to Parent By**

National PTA  
 1-800-307-4PTA  
[www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/parenttalk/pt\\_wordstoparentby.asp](http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/parenttalk/pt_wordstoparentby.asp)

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*Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them*  
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*How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests*  
*Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork*

### **School Success—Set 3**

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*How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child*  
*Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School*

### **When There is a Problem—Set 1**

*Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying*  
*Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure*  
*How to Help Your Struggling Student*

### **Other Important Titles**

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*Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School*

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