



Disciplining Your Child at Home for **School Misbehavior**



The Problem:

Parents frequently have questions about how they should discipline their children at home for misbehavior that occurs at school.

They usually want to address school misbehaviors at home for two reasons:

- To reduce future misbehavior at school
- To promote consistency in expectations for their child's behavior at school and at home

Conversations at home about behavior at school can be difficult for children and parents. Children may dread talking to their parents after they already

received a consequence for their behavior at school. Parents may struggle to find a way to explain to their child that what he or she did at school was not acceptable without ruining the whole family's evening at home.

In most cases, teachers have discipline strategies in place for dealing with misbehavior. Discipline at school usually involves having a child lose recess for the day, doing an extra assignment or classroom chore, or staying after school for detention. Most teachers also routinely notify a child's parents when a child breaks a school rule.

When they learn of their child's misbehavior, parents at least want to talk to him or her about the issue and may even want to give a consequence like taking away a privilege at home.

The intended outcome of using consequences both at school and at home is to help children learn this lesson: **"When I break a rule at school, I'm also going to get punished when I get home. Therefore, I don't want to break rules at school."**

But while this makes sense in theory, children can have a difficult time applying their experiences in one setting to change their behavior in a different setting. So punishment and lectures at home for misbehavior that occurs at school often only create opportunities for negative communication between parents and children.

Furthermore, repeatedly taking away privileges at home for misbehavior at school may reduce a child's motivation to follow any rules because he or she only ends up getting more negative consequences.

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The Solution:

Before addressing a school misbehavior issue with your child, make sure you have all the information you need from your child's school.

- **When did the misbehavior occur?**
- **Did it occur during a structured (e.g., math class) or unstructured (e.g., recess) time?**
- **What was happening before the incident?** Was your child arguing with a peer? Was he or she told "No"? Did another student take something away from your child? Had an adult just given an instruction?
- **Was your child aware of the expectation or rule he or she broke?**
- **How did the school address the behavior with your child?** Did he or she receive a consequence?
- **What will the school/teacher do in the future to prevent this behavior?**

Once you have this information, thank your child's teacher or administrator for letting you know what happened and let him or her know how you intend to address the issue with your child.

Then sit down with your child and talk. If the misbehavior appears to be an isolated incident involving a minor infraction (e.g., talking out of turn, forgetting homework, not sharing, calling another student a name, etc.), tell your child in a calm and matter-of-fact tone, "Your teacher let me know that (describe your child's behavior) happened at school today and that your consequence was (describe the consequence). I am disappointed that this happened, and I hope you have a better day at school tomorrow." Keep this conversation short and to the point!

If relevant, you and your child can briefly brainstorm specific ways he or she can avoid similar incidents in the future.

If the misbehavior is serious or has happened two or three times in the past, you may want to develop a system for managing this behavior at home




and school and set up a procedure to regularly communicate with your child's teacher.

On days when your child displays positive behavior throughout the school day, praise him or her at home and let your child choose a special reward from a "reward list." Rewards might include going to the park with Mom or Dad, playing on the iPad or picking a special dessert for dinner. Make sure your child gets to select a reward every day he or she has a good day at school.

When your child does not have a good day, he or she does not get a reward. Briefly explain why by saying "I see you did not meet your goal at school today. You do not get to pick a reward. Let's try again tomorrow to have a good day." You may have a brief conversation about what your child needs to do to have a good day, but keep it short and sweet!

Then have your child follow his or her normal after-school routine and play with your child as you normally would. Over time, this approach can help reduce your child's misbehaviors at school and help him or her understand that good behavior earns enjoyable rewards.

 **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.

