

# Secrets of Discipline

## An Overview

Adapted from the book  
*Secrets of Discipline: 12 Keys for Raising Responsible Children*  
By Ronald G. Morrish

For the past 25 years, experts have told us that children should be allowed to make their own choices. They said this would raise their self-esteem and teach them responsibility. Now, we've come to realize that children, given freedom of choice, tend to make choices we can't live with. Far too many choose to underachieve in school, to engage in high-risk behaviours, to be non-contributors in their home and school environments, and to use violence and intimidation to take control. Clearly, today's popular discipline isn't doing the job it's supposed to do. How can we get it back on track?

*Secrets of Discipline* is all about real discipline. This isn't some new theory – we've had enough of those. Real discipline refers to the techniques that effective parents and teachers have always used to teach children to be responsible and cooperative. How does this differ from what's going on today? Real discipline has three key elements to it. The problem with today's popular discipline is that it is missing two of them.



The first part of real discipline is called **training**. With these techniques, we teach children to comply with rules and limits and do what they are told to do by people in a legitimate position of authority. Today's popular discipline omits this training component. It actually substitutes choices where children need limits.

The second part of real discipline is the **teaching** component in which we teach children the skills and attitudes for being responsible and cooperative. This part is also omitted from today's popular discipline which assumes that children will learn their skills from the consequences provided by adults.

The third part is called **managing** in which we provide children with more and more choices as they get older so they learn how to handle independence. Today's popular discipline concentrates on this part to the exclusion of the other components. What we have forgotten in our rush to provide children with freedom of choice is that adults are supposed to prepare children to handle choices and make sure they are ready. It is well-trained, well-taught children that handle choices responsibly and with respect for the rights and needs of others.

***Now, let's look at the Secrets....***

- #1**  
**Never give a choice when it comes to limits.**
- #2**  
**If you bargain for compliance now, you'll beg for it later.**
- #3**  
**When children are well-trained, it's habit-forming.**
- #4**  
**Rules worth having are worth enforcing.**
- #5**  
**Behaviour that needs to be learned, needs to be taught.**
- #6**  
**Today's practice is tomorrow's performance.**
- #7**  
**Independence isn't "doing your own thing"; it's doing what's right on your own.**
- #8**  
**Keep responsible decisions in responsible hands.**
- #9**  
**Discipline comes best from the heart, not the hand.**
- #10**  
**Beware of self-indulgence disguised as self-esteem.**
- #11**  
**Prevention is the best solution.**
- #12**  
**There is no great discipline without great commitment.**
- Today's discipline substitutes choices for limits. Parents say, "If you hit, you will sit" but that's a choice. It says, "If you don't mind sitting, then hitting is one of the things you can do to get your own way".
- Parents have been taught to get children to comply by offering rewards and threatening/giving consequences. This quickly leads to excessive bargaining and deal-making.
- For adults, basic compliance is a habit. We stop at red lights because we always stop at red lights. Similarly, when children are well-trained, they pick up after themselves because they always do so; it's a habit.
- Rules must be enforced, but punishment is not the main tool for doing so. First, parents must present themselves as being in charge; then insist that children do what they are told to do; then punish if necessary.
- Children learn appropriate behaviours through correction and positive practice, not consequences. Instead of using time-outs for rudeness, say, "We don't speak that way in our home. Now *start over.*"
- Sports skills are taught and practiced before a game so children will perform well during the game. Similarly, behaviour skills have to be practiced ahead of time - i.e.: bedtime routines at 2:00 p.m., not at bedtime.
- In real discipline, independence is more than just "doing whatever you feel like doing". It's the ability to do what's right on your own - the ability to make the same decisions when you are unsupervised as you would have made if you were directly supervised.
- Adults make choices for children because adults care about the outcomes of the choices. Children are ready to choose for themselves when they also care about the effect their choices have on themselves and others.
- Positive relationships are important. They help children perceive that discipline is positive influence, not excessive control. Children learn that parents who discipline are parents who care.
- Real self-esteem is built on genuine competence and positive relationships. If you try to build it separately, you end up with children who feel much better about themselves while they continue to misbehave.
- Today's popular discipline is reactive. Real discipline is preventative. Think about what to do *before* there is a problem, not after. When a problem does arise, create a structure that avoids future incidents.
- It takes time to supervise, direct, teach, correct, and review. It takes time to build good habits and routines. There are no shortcuts to real discipline. Parents can't expect great kids without putting in the time & effort.