

DISCIPLINE REDEFINED



Using *Loving Regulation* to Manage Your Children's Behavior

Every parent wonders how to handle their children's behavior when it needs to be managed, from the full-blown tantrum to just getting a toddler to put on his boots when leaving the house.

Smart Love presents a unique answer to these challenges. Instead of prescribing consequences, counting to three, timeouts, threats, withdrawal of privileges or getting angry, Smart Love helps parents understand the meaning behind their children's behavior. When parents can respond to the meaning behind the behavior, then their children are more available to their parents' loving regulation because they feel loved and understood.

Parents will say that common "disciplinary" responses work because they stop unwanted behavior. But these measures only work because we are bigger and stronger than they are. It teaches that "might makes right" which isn't a healthy message to be giving children about how to interact. Children disciplined with these common measures feel doubly bad about themselves because something went wrong and also because they know that you are unhappy with them. And since all children copy the way they are treated, they will learn to treat themselves and others the same way.

So rather than discipline, use loving regulation instead. It preserves your relationship with your children and helps them learn how to make healthy choices. Moreover, it helps children grow up to be happy and successful adults who make healthy and constructive choices when we aren't around all the time to guide them. This is the long-term goal that all parents have for their children.

What does loving regulation look like? An example from the book, *Smart Love*, goes like this. "To illustrate, a three-year-old insisted on wearing sneakers instead of boots on a snowy day. His father simply said, 'OK, but then you won't be able to stomp around in the snow. If you want to walk in the snow drifts, you need to wear boots so your feet stay dry and warm.' The little boy considered this for a moment and then agreed to put his boots on. If his son had continued to insist on wearing his sneakers, the father would have brought the boy's boots along in case the boy discovered that playing in the snow was more important to him than wearing sneakers. The father's objective was to make sure that his son didn't go out in the snow inappropriately dressed; it was not to teach the boy that he would be sorry if he didn't make the right choice."

What is the meaning behind the child's wish not to put on boots? A toddler can't understand that snow plus sneakers equals cold feet. He is at an age when he "wants what he

wants when he wants it," so he feels invincible and doesn't like his wishes interfered with. So being diplomatic and "going under the radar" can be helpful with children this age. Again, as written in the book, *Smart Love*, "The Smart Love guideline is that your child will better accept your occasional need to interfere with her wishes if you honor her requests whenever possible. When you can't grant a particular wish, showing your child that you will help her find an alternative emphasizes that you want her to make her own choices and to have fun. *Smart Love* is not permissiveness. A permissive parent would let the child climb through the snow in sneakers because the parent is uncomfortable with his child's unhappiness over putting on the boots."

When families begin using loving regulation, the rewards are great. Children are happier and parenting is so much less stressful and more enjoyable. To learn more about how to use loving regulation, visit www.smartlovefamily.org for a current schedule of parent education seminars and publications and resources.

Loving Regulation: Smart Love in Action

Remembering the word SMART when responding to your child.

Stay positive

Model kindness

Acknowledge feelings

Regulate behavior

Time-in together

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for three to six year olds, and parent and child programs for children six weeks to 36 months. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism®. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society), parent training and support programs, and publications. © 2019 Smart Love Family Services is an Illinois-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.