Discipline: Hurtful or Helpful

What are some of the reasons for misbehavior?

1. The child does not understand the limits or the rules or the reasons for them.
2. The child does not know a better way to do what he wants or to get what he wants.
3. The child is bored or tired or looking for attention.
4. The child is not at ease. He is hurt or unhappy on the inside.

There are many poor methods of discipline, as follows: (Their effect is more hurtful than helpful, because they increase a child’s bad feelings and do not suggest a way or offer any help for changing his behavior).

1. Saying or doing anything to a child that shames him.
2. Threatening a child or making him fearful.
3. Inconsistent or unfair consequences. Unfair punishment produces smoldering anger rather than helping a child learn the consequences of breaking the limits.

Good discipline:

1. Is helpful, not hurtful. It is loving, not punitive. It increases a child’s understanding and diminishes his bad feelings.
2. Considers the child’s intentions as well as his actions.
3. Remembers that a child needs love most when he is most unlovable.
4. Helps a child accept responsibility for his behavior.

Two questions:

1. Will the discipline help the child to handle this situation or a similar one with more skill, more satisfaction, more acceptability the next time?
2. Will this experience of discipline strengthen the relationship between the child and the adult? Will it increase his confidence in himself and his trust in me? Will he want to have me help him with his difficulties the next time and the next? Does it open doors to more significant lives together or close doors?

Adapted from Phoebe M. Anderson