



Healthy Conscience, part 1 of 2—

# Helping Children Develop a Healthy Conscience

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**B**y the time your children become adults, they'll be grateful for many of the things you're doing for them today. But don't expect much gratitude before then. Parenting and teaching are delayed-gratification tasks. Remember, your experience is similar to that of every other parent and teacher. Keep doing your best to "train up [every child in your care] in the way he [she] should go" (Proverbs 22:6).

There are no perfect children because there are no perfect parents. Get out from under that burden. There's no way you can make them perfect, anyway. All you have to be is "good enough." You do that by modeling a relationship with Christ that brings more peace than confusion, more pleasure than disappointment to your life.

Your first priority as parents and teachers is to create a thirst in your children for the things of God—a thirst that will encourage them to follow you into healthy Christianity. Your children will watch you more closely than anyone else. They will be checking whether you practice what you preach. The life you model for them will speak louder than anything you say.

As your children see how your relationship with Christ gets you through hard times, they will not forget those lessons. As they see you finding



pleasure in reading your Bible and praying, through good times and bad, they will begin to realize that this spiritual discipline is a major source of your strength.

## A Healthy Conscience

One thing that will help your children toward responsible adulthood is a healthy conscience. This is developed over

a child's first 18–20 years, as life controls are gradually transferred from an external source (the parents and teachers) to an internal source (the growing child's own moral-management skills).

God has provided each of us a conscience, but our family and cultural environment determines the nature and content of that conscience. We learn what is right and what is wrong in our national culture, in our denominational Christian culture, and in our family culture.

## Punishment Vs. Discipline

Among the first tools we use to help our children toward a healthy conscience are punishment and discipline.

Punishment is control from the outside; it teaches the child what not to do. If he touches the electrical outlet on the wall, he'll be punished. If she hits her brother or sister, or breaks one of their toys, she'll be punished. Running into the street or inappropriate language are all things that should bring punishment to children when the behavior is repeated after a reasonable warning.

Punishment applies a meas-

ured amount of pain to the child. This pain is less than the pain that would be experienced if the behavior were not stopped. Never punish a child because you are angry and out of con-

trol. This is not what you want to model for them. Consistent and controlled punishment—suitable to the seriousness of an offense and administered by an in-control parent or teacher—is the

goal. Punishment teaches the child what *not* to do.

*(Part 2 continues the discussion on punishment vs. discipline.)*

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### Questions For Further Study—

1. What should be a parent's and a teacher's first priority?
2. How can you as a children's ministry leader help shape a child's conscience?
3. What is the difference between punishment and discipline?