

GROUNDING AS A METHOD OF DISCIPLINE

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Clayton Cook

University of Washington

Grounding is a disciplinary method that strikes terror into the hearts of parents. Why? Because once children are grounded the torment of those who grounded them becomes their central goal in life. If you think about how grounding is typically used, this problem makes perfect sense. What else would you expect a child who has been instructed to stay in the house for weeks or months to do? With no possibility of escape except for the passage of time, they are left with the job of convincing their parents what a terrible mistake they have made. This is done by making everyone in the house as miserable as possible. And this is why much of a typical grounding sentence is suspended midway through the sentence, which only serves to strengthen the child's tantrums, defiance, or complaining. Fortunately, there is a better way. In fact, there is a grounding method that not only can be used to teach your child the consequences of breaking rules (inappropriate behavior) but also provides your child with an opportunity to learn how to do various jobs around your home—with minimal wear and tear for you.

The following instructions describe how to use grounding:

1. Sit down with your child at a pleasant time and develop a list of at least 10 (20 would be better) jobs that need to be done regularly around the house. The individual jobs should be approximately equal in difficulty and amount of time required to complete. Be sure your child is physically capable of doing each job. Examples of jobs are washing kitchen floor, cleaning bathroom, sweeping out garage, raking front yard, vacuuming living room and dining room.
2. Each job should be written on a separate index card with a detailed description of what is required to complete the job correctly. (For example: Wash kitchen floor. The floor should be swept clean first. Remove all moveable pieces of furniture. Fill a bucket with warm soapy water; wash the floor with a clean rag, squeezed dry. Dry the floor with a clean, dry rag; replace the furniture that was moved). Other examples:
 - a. Every bathtub is a potential job
 - b. Every shower is a potential job
 - c. Every toilet is a potential job
 - d. Every window he/she can reach
 - e. Clean grout with a toothbrush (mark off a segment—for example 2 square feet)
 - f. Every wheel on your car is a potential job
 - g. Each of the bumpers is a potential job
 - h. There are certainly jobs in the basement if you have one
 - i. There are certainly jobs in the garage
 - j. Every carpeted room could be vacuumed.
 - k. Every length of baseboard could be “tooth brush” cleaned.

- i. NOTE: THESE JOBS ARE NOT DONE UNTIL YOU SAY THEY ARE DONE. SO SAY YOU ARE GOING TO CHECK. IF THE JOB IS NOT DONE WELL—POINT OUT WHAT YOU NEED DONE. DON'T ARGUE—JUST MENTION IT.
3. Explain to your child that when he/she has broken a rule (for example, not returning home from school on time or fighting with brother), one or more job cards will be assigned. The child will randomly select the assigned number of cards from the prewritten job cards. Until the assigned number of jobs described on the cards is completed correctly, the child will be grounded.
4. Being grounded means:
 - a. Attending school
 - b. Performing required chores
 - c. Following house rules
 - d. Staying in own room unless eating meals, doing homework, working on chores, or attending school
 - e. No television
 - f. No telephone calls (in or out)
 - g. No record player, radio, etc.
 - h. No video games or other games or toys
 - i. No bike riding
 - j. No friends over or going to friends' houses
 - k. No snacks
 - l. No outside social activities (for example, movies, going out to dinner)

In more general terms, grounding your child means cutting off their access to fun for a while. I know that can sound cruel—but the time away from fun is largely determined by them. That is, all they need to do is complete their jobs and freedom is theirs (within the boundaries and rules of your home). If you are concerned they may be getting off too lightly, increase the number of jobs until you and your spouse are satisfied.

5. Please note that grounding does not mean:
 - a. Nagging
 - b. Going over the rules (this should be done in advance)
 - c. Criticisms
 - d. Warnings (e.g., “if you don’t do your jobs you won’t be going out this weekend”)
 - e. Zingers when grounding is over (“now don’t you feel stupid”). When it’s over, it’s over.

Also bear in mind emergencies may come up. These would be situations where it just makes sense to let your child out of the house even though the jobs are not yet done. The rule of thumb is that the family should not suffer as much as the grounded child. If there is a family outing that would have to be missed in order to meet the requirements for

grounding—by all means go and take you know who. Then resume grounding when you return. It might help to have a babysitter available on short notice in such cases.