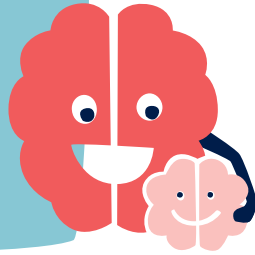


# The 3 E's of Effective Discipline

by Dr Justin Coulson



## Parent Resource

This resource has been developed in collaboration with parenting expert, Dr Justin Coulson.

Parenting during times of challenge - whether it's an emotional outburst, anxiety about a big transition, or resistance to change - can feel overwhelming. But what if discipline wasn't about punishment or control? What if it was about teaching, guiding, and helping your child navigate their emotions and actions in a supportive way?

This is where the 3 E's of Effective Discipline come in: Explore, Explain, and Empower. These steps are designed to help you connect with your child's emotional world, set clear boundaries, and foster problem-solving skills. Together, they provide a practical framework for building resilience, strengthening your bond, and equipping your child to face life's challenges.

Here's how it works:

### 1 Explore

This step is about understanding your child's emotions and perspective. It begins with empathy and curiosity, creating a safe space for your child to share their feelings.

**Why it matters:** Exploration helps calm the emotional brain, allowing children to reconnect with their thinking brain.

**How to do it:**

- Approach calmly, with "soft eyes" and an open demeanour.
- Use statements like, "It looks like you're having a hard day," or "Tell me more about what's bothering you."
- Remember, you're not a therapist; your role is to parent with understanding, not to delve too deeply.



### 2 Explain

Once you understand your child's feelings, clearly communicate the situation while maintaining empathy.

**Why it matters:** This step sets boundaries while validating emotions, helping your child feel seen and heard without false promises.

**How to do it:**

- Use phrases like, "Wouldn't it be great if...?" or "Don't you just wish...?" to acknowledge their wishes while gently reinforcing reality.
- For example, "I know you wish we didn't have to move. I feel the same way sometimes. But we have a new house and job waiting for us, and this change is important for our family."
- Keep it concise, as children may tune out if you talk too long.



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## 3 Empower

This step shifts the focus to problem-solving, encouraging your child to take ownership of how they handle the situation.

**Why it matters:** Empowerment helps children build resilience and a sense of control.

**How to do it:**

- Ask open-ended questions like, “What do you think we can do to make this easier?” or “How can I support you through this?”
- Provide choices when appropriate: “Would it help if we talked now, or would you prefer some space to think first?”
- If your child is too overwhelmed to engage, give them time and revisit the conversation later. Use a comforting metaphor, like emotions being trains passing through a tunnel - they always come out on the other side.



## Putting It All Together

- Example:** Your Year 6 child is anxious about starting high school.
- Explore:** “It seems like you’re really worried about going to a new school. What’s on your mind?”
- Explain:** “I know it’s scary to leave your friends. I wish we could stay in the same school forever, but high school is the next step, and we’re here to help you with it.”
- Empower:** “What do you think would make this transition easier? Should we visit the school together or meet some new classmates beforehand?”

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*A special thanks to Dr Justin Coulson for his collaboration on these resources. Dr Justin Coulson is one of Australia’s most trusted parenting experts, co-hosting Channel 9’s Parental Guidance and founding Happy Families. With a PhD in psychology, he brings deep insight into family dynamics to Gotcha4Life, supporting programs that enhance Mental Fitness and strengthen connections in schools and communities. Learn more at [happyfamilies.com.au](http://happyfamilies.com.au)*

*Please note: This resource has been developed in collaboration with Dr Justin Coulson and is intended for general information purposes only. It’s not a substitute for professional advice. Gotcha4Life does not offer counselling or crisis support.*

*If you have concerns about your child’s wellbeing, please speak with your GP or a qualified health professional. You can also explore a range of free, trusted supports and information at [gotcha4life.org/help-resources](http://gotcha4life.org/help-resources). For direct support, Kids Helpline offers free, confidential counselling for young people aged 5 to 25. Call 1800 55 1800 or visit [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au).*

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## Explore

Exploration helps calm the emotional brain, allowing children to reconnect with their thinking brain.

## Explain

This step sets boundaries while validating emotions, helping your child feel seen and heard without false promises.

## Empower

Empowerment helps children build resilience and a sense of control.



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## Explore

**"It looks like you're having a hard day."**

or

**"Tell me more about what's bothering you."**



## Explain

**"Wouldn't it be great if...?"**

or

**"Don't you just wish...?"**

or

**"I know you wish we didn't have to move. I feel the same way sometimes. But we have a new house and job waiting for us, and this change is important for our family."**



## Empower

**"What do you think we can do to make this easier?"**

or

**"How can I support you through this?"**

or

**"Would it help if we talked now, or would you prefer some space to think first?"**

## EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

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Balancing emotions, understanding, and solutions.