

#AskDrV: Is it EVER okay to discipline someone else's child?

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SUMMARY

Dr. Vanessa Lapointe addresses a parent's concern about disciplining a friend's child during playdates. She emphasizes the importance of building a relationship with the child to effectively guide their behavior without causing resentment or conflict.

- *Establish a relationship with the child to create a context for guidance.*
- *Set clear ground rules to help the child understand expectations in your home.*
- *Find common interests to connect with the child and foster a sense of belonging.*
- *Involve one of the child's parents during playdates to facilitate connection.*
- *Cater to the child's likes and interests to create a positive environment.*
- *Maintain a presence during play to provide gentle guidance and encouragement.*
- *Focus on maintaining connection rather than using consequences or shaming.*
- *Reflect on personal feelings when the child is rude, recognizing that it may stem from internal triggers rather than the child's behavior.*

I'm dr. Vanessa Lapointe I'm a registered psychologist parenting educator and mom to two growing boys and this is ask dr. B this week's question comes to us from McKenzie and it goes like this dear dr. Vanessa is it ever okay to discipline a child who isn't yours my son has a friend who is lovely about 50% of the time the rest of the time I feel as though he's quite rough with my son's things and often encourages him to

make decisions that can result in things getting wrecked I also struggle with the way he talks to me I know that he's just a little boy but he can be quite rude when speaking to adults I don't want to cross a line but I also don't want to end up disliking this little boy simply because I haven't said anything to him about his behavior is it appropriate to gently correct him when he's at our house or is this a faux pas thank you so

much McKenzie so I think you're right McKenzie in taking a bit of a pause to consider how to best approach this situation what we know for sure from the science of child development is that the number one thing that children need in order to be able to rest in to the care of the adults who are in charge of them is relationship it is through relationship that you create the context from which to guide lead and direct that

child's growth and development so your number one concern if this child is presenting sort of in challenging ways when you're near home it's really how do you best come alongside this child in order to get him on side you see kids come wired with an instant instinct to resist the influence of people to whom they are not well

attached or people with whom they do not have a deeply rooted kind of relationship and if you think about that logically it makes a

lot of sense you do not want your children to do the bidding of strangers you want your children only to the bidding of people who are in their inner circle because it is those people that they can trust to have their best interests at heart and so what do you think about how do you develop a relationship with this boy um maybe consider a few things first of all you might want to establish some ground rules right out of the gates just

allowing him to know where the limits are and to know kind of how things work in your home so that he can kind of feel like there is somebody indeed who is in charge and is kind of watching over things and then just use some of the basic principles of social psychology so things like birds of a feather flock together can you find any common ground with this boy do you have interests in common are there foods that you like do you dress

the same do you have the same favorite color what other kinds of seams these things can you identify with him so that he can feel connected to you through your similarities or the things that you have in common you might also think about having one of his parents stay in your home well the playdate is happening because children often connect with new adults through their existing connections more swiftly and more deeply and so he might fall into a relationship

with you a little bit more quickly if he sees that you were well connected to one or more of his parents and then you might think about how do you cater to his likes and dislikes so now this kid is in your home and he's having a play with your boy and you're wanting to make sure that you've got this foundation of relationship working for you can you cater to some of those things that he loves can you feel him start that he

really gets down with can you suggest activities or games that you know that he really likes so really working to cater to the things that you know float his boat and then really make sure that you are kind of present either by setting up activities and games that you can be part of as an adult so it becomes a playdate that includes you allowing you to develop that relationship with him or that you are present on the

periphery of those activities so that you can kind of chime in with little comments like great throw or that's a super cool Lego robot you're building or whatever it is all of this working to establish that foundation of relationship so that you have context from which to operate as a big person in this little boy's world so that you can start to kind of come alongside him and show them the ropes show them the way that we go so that we all get along and

this all works out in a way that has everybody happy once you've got that relationship working for you then you are in a position to kind of step in and take that lead kind of place of being the big person and showing him how you're gonna go and this does not ever involve consequences and it doesn't ever involve ruptures and relationships so you want to make sure that everything is about maintaining connection and really being focused on him as a little human

being who's just trying to find his way in the world so well you're not using consequences it doesn't mean that you're inactive or not ever stepping in if that's what's required you can certainly step in and put a guideline in place establish a boundary change an activity if it's not working out but you just don't do so from a place of making the child wrong or indeed from a place of shaming the child rather you step in as a person who's in

charge who has realized that this isn't really working out the way that we need for it to work out and so we're gonna do something a little bit differently you take it on as the big person who's responsible for ensuring that everything goes the way that everybody needs it to go for it to work out well and so you step in rather than just kind of giving in or giving up you might also want to think about how can you set up some

structure and routine around all of this so that it's working keep those playdates short so that they end while everybody's still having fun and while everybody still has sort of coping reserves in their tank so to speak so that they can have their best foot coming forward you might want to make sure that you're only putting out toys and activities that you know can handle some rough and tumble play especially in the early days so that it works out a

little bit better for everybody that things aren't getting broken and you might maybe just offer some gentle reminders about words that you do and do not use in your home so this boy has an idea of where the boundaries are what the expectations are what the norms are what the limits are that you are hoping he will be able to rise to the occasion and meet the final thing that I would like to suggest you Mackenzie is to

think about when this little boy is rude to you what could have you walking down the path of feeling like you don't like him and although it might be kind of a controversial thing to say your experience of not liking him actually has nothing to do with him you see in him being rude to you he's actually kind of lit you up a little bit and triggered you and that's a story that you have going on on the inside of you that you

bristle let that react to that he's just a little boy trying to find his way and when you can set your compassionate heart on that rather than having your heart getting all tripped up and he's being brewed to you and how dare he be that way then you are going to find that you're going to have much more success in developing a relationship with him and being able to become that compassionate guiding influence kind of big person in his life

so really check in with yourself around that McKenzie and try to make sense from the inside of you of where that reaction is coming from and it might be really interesting to see what you'll find with all of that so there you have it McKenzie and remember you've got this you