Principles of Child Guidance

Golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This is the basis of democratic living. It implies that individuals are equal in terms of human worth and dignity.

Mutual respect is the key to improving relationships between parents and children. Parents and children are not the same; adults are more knowledgeable and experienced. However, children are equal to parents in terms of worth and dignity. Parents and children are entitled to the respect of each other and self-determination within the limits of the situation. In a relationship characterized by mutual respect, no one takes advantage of the other; neither parents nor children are tyrants or slaves.

Encouragement implies faith in children as they are, not as parents would like them to be. Children misbehave only when they are discouraged and believe they cannot succeed by useful means. Children need encouragement just as plants need water. Parents can encourage children by focusing on their assets and strengths.

Be responsible for your own behavior and feelings. Parents must accept responsibility for improving the situation other than making futile attempts to make children behave. Instead of ruling children, parents can create an atmosphere in which guiding and helping children is possible.

Natural consequences allow children to learn from the physical reality or situation rather than parental authority. The consequences of the situation can often exert the necessary pressure to stimulate useful motivations. Only in moments of real danger is it necessary to protect children from the natural consequences of their own disturbing behavior.

Logical consequences allow children to learn from the reality of the social world. Parents can intervene with consequences that both the parents and children can see as logically related to misbehavior and as respectful and reasonable. Through logical consequences children are offered choices and are encouraged to make responsible decisions rather than being forced to submit.

Punishment is outdated. Children consider punishment as license to punish others or to retaliate against their parents. Encouragement and natural and logical consequences can be more effective methods of child discipline.

Action is more effective than words in times of conflict. Children tend to become "parent-deaf" and act only when raised voices imply some impending action, and then respond only momentarily. Usually children know very well what is expected of them. Talking should be restricted to friendly conversations and not used as a means of discipline. Action is often more effective than talking, scolding, or threatening.
**Withdrawing from struggles** with children can be effective counteraction. Parents can physically remove themselves without it being surrender. Removal is most effective when children demand undue attention or try to involve parents in power contests. Children get no satisfaction from being annoying if nobody pays attention, and tantrums do not work without an audience.

**Withdraw from the struggle, not from the child.** Although talking and interaction in moments of conflict with children are ineffective, friendly conversations and pleasant contacts at other times are essential. Have fun and play together. The less attention children get when they are disturbing, the more cooperative the relationship may become.

**Resist interfering** in children's fights. By allowing children to resolve their own conflicts, they learn to get along better. Many fights are provoked to get parents involved to act as referees and judges. Parents can best help children with social skills at times when they are not fighting.

**Take time for training.** Parents need to teach children useful skills and values. This training should be done when neither parents nor children are upset. Taking time for training will eventually save time; untrained children demand much of their parents' time.

**Resist doing for children what they can do for themselves.** Dependent children are demanding children. Parents must be keen observers of their children and be careful not to underestimate their children's abilities. Children become confident and responsible when offered opportunities and encouraged to be contributing members of the family and community.

**Children's behavior has purpose.** Their basic purpose is to find their place in the social group, such as the family. Well-adjusted children have found their way toward social acceptance by understanding the requirements of the group or social situation and making useful contributions to it. Misbehaving children are still trying, in mistaken ways, to gain social status.

**Children are** keen observers of situations and act in ways that work for them. Although their behavior may look illogical to others, it makes sense to them in that it is consistent with their interpretation of how to find a place in the family.