

# Ellen White's Approach To Discipline

1 *"It means much to train up children that have not had proper*  
2 *discipline. But I have proved the matter; it can be done. I thank the*  
3 *Lord that I have had success, perfect success, in this line of work."*—  
4 *Ellen White, Manuscript 62, 1911*

## 5 *Introduction*

6 In collecting and reading—sometimes scanning—hundreds of  
7 articles, chapters and manuscripts on raising children by Mrs. White, I  
8 have been surprised to learn that she not only raised her own  
9 children—in some cases with help as a result of ministry needs, but  
10 also raised other children who came to her, (1) “adopting” some of  
11 them—taking children into her home, but not in a legal sense; and (2)  
12 taking other children who were entrusted to her by parents who  
13 needed help raising their children. I also discovered that her approach  
14 was extremely positive, used a gentle—she strongly discourages  
15 “poundings” for example, loving, prayer-oriented approach, and  
16 brought, in her words, “perfect success.” This compilation of quotes is  
17 made up of quotes found here and there in her writings, where she  
18 described how she worked with various situations. In reading through  
19 this document, one person commented, quoting roughly, “I know  
20 better how to put into practice what I have read in *Adventist Home*.” I  
21 believe you will find studying this document very helpful.—Dan  
22 Augsburg, Path2Prayer Ministries

## 23 *An Introductory Experience*

24 “We took the transfer car to Omaha. We enjoyed our breakfast very  
25 much. There came into the depot a woman about forty years old,  
26 followed by a large flock of children. One boy about ten years old  
27 went out on the platform. This mother went after him and came  
28 dragging him in, he resisting at every step. She pushed him with

29 violence into the seat, bringing his head with considerable force  
30 against the back of the seat, really hurting the lad. Then came screech  
31 after screech, equaled only by the screaming engine. This mother  
32 threatened him, but to no purpose. He was in for a regular war cry.  
33 When he became tired out, then he lowered his voice to the  
34 monotonous long-drawn-out drawling cry just for the purpose of being  
35 persevering and revengeful. Here the mother, I judge, was as much to  
36 blame as her boy. The boy was stubborn; she was passionate. {20MR  
37 291.3}

38 “I conversed some with the mother. She stated the boy [had] refused to  
39 come in and threw himself full length on the platform. She then took  
40 him by force and brought him in. Said she, “Oh, if I only had him  
41 alone in some place, I would pound him well for his behavior,” I said,  
42 “That would not change his inward feelings. Violence would only  
43 raise his combativeness and make him still worse. I think the more  
44 calm the mother can keep at such times, however provoking be the  
45 conduct of her children, she maintains her dignity and influence as a  
46 mother.” She assented that it might be so. {20MR 291.4} ...

47 “It was plain to be seen the mother was fretful, impatient, harsh, and  
48 severe. What wonder, then, that the children should be unsubmitive  
49 and insubordinate. These children, eleven in number, and the husband,  
50 showed they felt the mother's power that permitted no liberty of will.  
51 She would jerk one, fret at another, twitch about another, and answer  
52 her husband's questions with a firm vim. {20MR 292.2}

53 “This mother's mode of government set my mind on a study. She  
54 forced them to self-assertion in various improper ways, showing the  
55 mother's management was a sorry failure. There were eleven bright,  
56 active children. If the mother had the machinery oiled with patience  
57 and self-command, as every mother should have, if she had possessed  
58 the right spirit, she would not have aroused the combative spirit of her  
59 ten-year-old boy. All this mother seemed to know of government was  
60 that of brute force. She was threatening, intimidating. Her youngest  
61 children seemed to have a fear to stir; others looked hard and defiant.  
62 Some looked ashamed and distressed. I longed to preach a sermon to  
63 that mother. {20MR 292.3}

## 64 *Counsel on Discipline*

### 65 *It Means Much To Train Up A Child*

66 “I have been instructed to bear a message to our people. I have a  
67 message to give to fathers and mothers. I have written some few

68 things, but I am not relieved of the great burden upon me. I am to  
69 charge all who are acting a part as Christians, You are educating your  
70 children even in their early child life. Do not allow any hasty, harsh  
71 speeches to come from your lips to your children. Fathers, mothers,  
72 never strike a child with a rod if you can avoid this. Do not reprove  
73 your children before others, but take them to a retired place and talk  
74 with them and pray with them in a private way. Let there be no  
75 scolding or harsh words, and not a particle of twitching, jerking, and  
76 shaking them. Tell them you are grieved because their wrong course of  
77 action grieves the Holy Spirit. {Ms62-1911}

78 “If they show that their hearts are softened, take the very best course  
79 to deepen the impression. They may show stubbornness and refuse to  
80 repent, but I have seldom found this the case. Do all possible on your  
81 part to have them feel that they have grieved the Holy Spirit. Have  
82 them kneel down in a retired place and pray for them. And if your own  
83 heart expresses its sorrow in tears, you will touch the hearts of your  
84 erring ones. If you weep in your sorrow for their mistakes and sins, as  
85 your own tears of sorrow flow from your eyes, their hearts will be  
86 broken and sensitive. They will express their grief. {Ms62-1911}

87 “Scolding will not reform but harden the hearts of your children.  
88 Never strike a blow in anger. Leave them to consider, and they will, if  
89 their hearts are not hardened by hasty speech and words of censure, if  
90 you leave them alone after committing them to the Lord in prayer,  
91 asking the Lord to soften their hearts. {Ms62-1911}

92 “I have taken children to bring up, clothed them and fed them and  
93 schooled them. I explained to them that I was willing to take them and  
94 would give them every advantage possible, that I would care for them,  
95 clothe them, teach them to obey all my orders and to love and serve  
96 the Lord, that they might have a home in the city of God. Then I have  
97 said, Bear in mind that the Lord Jesus will help you if you will act  
98 your part. It would be a great grief to me to give pain to your flesh at  
99 any time. But because of your stubborn will, we cannot allow you to  
100 grieve the Lord Jesus by your own works. And we cannot allow evil  
101 works to go uncorrected. I could not present them to the Lord Jesus  
102 Christ without weeping. After a season of prayer, they would cling to  
103 me with confession and weeping, and I had gained a decided victory. I  
104 have clothed and educated and schooled quite a number of children,  
105 although I was traveling. {Ms62-1911}

106 “It means much to train up children that have not had proper  
107 discipline. But I have proved the matter; it can be done. I thank the  
108 Lord that I have had success, perfect success, in this line of work.”

## 110 I Have Taken Child After Child

111 "When I have seen children mismanaged I have said, Give them to  
112 me. And I have taken child after child, and I tried to fashion them after  
113 Christ's order. I never found it did much good to pound them.

114 {Ms77-1910.16}

115 "Once I thought I would have to punish the child, but I took her in the  
116 room with me, and I said, We will pray. After I had prayed, I asked her  
117 if she would like to say a few words to the Lord. I told her that it was  
118 the first time that I had brought anything in my hand with which to  
119 correct her, and that I did not want to use it this time. I said, Can you  
120 just ask the Lord to forgive you for what you have done? The lips  
121 were opened, and the moment the lips were opened the heart was  
122 broken, and there she wept and wept. Could I have struck a blow to  
123 that child? I told her, I am so thankful that I did not have to correct  
124 you. It hurts me worse than it does you. If you will try to do right, we  
125 will take you out in the fields where you can pick the flowers, and we  
126 will kneel down there and pray all together." {Ms77-1910.17}

## 127 I Have Taken Children Into My Home

128 "... Let not passionate words escape from our lips, fathers and  
129 mothers. No; your children are to learn from you what you have  
130 learned from Christ, and if you get impatient and shake them and  
131 make them angry, and they cannot see the beauty of holiness in you.  
132 But father and mother can go away and offer prayer for their children  
133 that God may grant that they shall not perish with the wicked.

134 {Ms71-1911.17} I understand this business; I have taken children  
135 right into my home. I have prayed with those who had known nothing  
136 but the rod over them. I do not know that I ever had to strike them but  
137 once, and that was after repeatedly telling them what the right was.  
138 Most always they would submit, and throw their arms around my  
139 neck, and with tears confess their wrong. We must not let our children  
140 go. We must keep hold of them by living faith in a living God; and if  
141 we do this, let me tell you the future. The gates of the city of God will  
142 be thrown back upon their glittering hinges, and the nations that have  
143 kept the truth will enter in, and the crown of gold will be placed upon  
144 the brows of your children. The golden harp will be placed in their  
145 hands, and there will go forth music and rejoicing and triumph in the  
146 city of our God. But it must be as overcomers." {Ms71-1911.18}

147 The Children Said, “Ask the Lord To Forgive Me”

148 “I used to say to my children, as they were leaving home in the  
149 morning: “Now, children, you are going out for the day’s work.  
150 Remember that you are to guard your tongue. Speak not one word that  
151 will provoke a wrong act. If you fail, then when we meet at family  
152 worship during the evening hour, we shall talk the matter over and  
153 make it right with God. You see, children, kind words never cause you  
154 any pain and sorrow. Speak kindly, tenderly to one another, and see  
155 what a refreshing, what a blessing, comes to your own heart. But if  
156 you begin to contend one with another, then passions arise, and you  
157 have to strive with all your might to retain control over yourself. Be  
158 brave, be true.” – {1SAT 374.2}

159 “And at eventide, when the children would gather together before  
160 going to bed, we would talk over the happenings of the day. Possibly  
161 during the day one of the children had said, “Mother, someone has  
162 done thus and so to me.” I had replied that when we all came together  
163 in the evening we could talk it over. When evening came, they had all  
164 had time for reflection, and they did not feel inclined to bring charges  
165 against one another. They would say, “Mother, I have done thus and  
166 so,” and the tears would start from their eyes, as they would add, “I  
167 feel as if I would like to have you ask the Lord to forgive me. I believe  
168 He will.” And then we would bow in prayer and confess the sins of the  
169 day, and pray for forgiveness. After confessing their wrongdoings,  
170 these little fellows would soon fall asleep.” – {1SAT 375.1}

171 I Would Not Do As I Knew Many Were Doing

172 “We want the salvation of God to come into our families. No scolding;  
173 no fretting. I made up my mind I would not have that, at any rate, in  
174 my house. When the children disobeyed, I would take them and talk  
175 with them. I would tell them I would not do as I knew many were  
176 doing, lay the rod upon them, or the rattan, but I would tell them:  
177 Now, you have done a wrong thing. You have grieved the Spirit of  
178 God. You have grieved Christ who gave His life for you. I have taken  
179 you and adopted you as my children, and if you will come into right  
180 order, I will help you in every way possible. My husband was an  
181 invalid, and so we would take them out to ride in our carriage, and we  
182 would take our dinner, perhaps, out in the grove, and we would make  
183 it as pleasant for them as we could. {Ms82-1912}

184 “But then I told them, You have done a wrong thing, and now what are  
185 you going to do about it? I am going to let this go until the evening,

186 and I do not want you to go to bed with this sin upon you. I would  
187 make them see that they had done wrong, and they must repent of that  
188 wrong. And here, said I, is the whip. I never want to strike you a blow.  
189 I never want to do it. And I am not going to use it on you now, because  
190 you are all stirred up in yourself, and it would not be much account.  
191 But you go to evening, and then we will talk matters over. And when it  
192 come to the evening, as we would talk matters over, and they had the  
193 whole day to think of it, they said, We did do wrong. I would find that  
194 they would make their confession, and in that way I was molding their  
195 character so that I did not have to strike them a blow. They were boys,  
196 and rude and rough, but they saw I did nothing in passion.

197 {Ms82-1912}

198 “Now, said I, the evening is come and I am going to pray with you. I  
199 knelt down, and I prayed with them. I asked the Lord that their hearts  
200 might be subdued, and they be converted. Well, before I would get  
201 through they would come right to me, and put their arms around me,  
202 and say, Forgive us; we won’t do it again, we won’t do it again.

203 {Ms82-1912}

204 “Well, this is the way. Instead of giving them a hurried blow that made  
205 them ten times worse, it was to have them melted down. If I could get  
206 an apple it was a strange thing, for there were scarcely any around. I  
207 would always purchase them, and I would put one under their bowl at  
208 the table. Well, they knew that I cared for them, and this is the way we  
209 tried to manage them.” {Ms82-1912}

## 210 I Never Lost My Temper With The Children

211 "Fathers and mothers, never quarrel with your children or provoke  
212 them to anger. Train them to obey you to the letter. I know by  
213 experience that this can be done without provocation. I have taken  
214 charge of children that were said to be incorrigible, and at the close of  
215 the year I have told them that I should not ask them to obey me any  
216 better in the year to come than they had obeyed me during the past  
217 year. In dealing with them, never would I allow them to gain an  
218 advantage over me by causing me to lose my temper. I knew that the  
219 enemy wanted me to become angry when the children disobeyed; but I  
220 would always say to them: “Children, I shall leave you now to think  
221 over your course of action. In your excited, angry state of mind you  
222 are not prepared to see things in the right light. Tonight before you  
223 sleep we will talk the matter over together.” Thus I gave them  
224 opportunity for calm reflection. When night came and we met together  
225 for worship, they were ready to break down and cry like babies. They

226 would ask my forgiveness, and then we would kneel and ask God's  
227 forgiveness." {Ms57-1902.39}

## 228 I Held Out Inducements To Them

229 "I have adopted children in order that they might be trained in right  
230 lines. Instead of punishing them when they did wrong, I would hold  
231 out inducements to them to do right. One was in the habit of throwing  
232 herself on the floor if she could not have her own way. I said to her, "If  
233 you will not lose your temper once today, your Uncle White and I will  
234 take you in the carriage, and we will have a happy day in the country.  
235 But if you throw yourself on the floor once, you will forfeit your right  
236 to the pleasure." I worked in this way for these children, and now I  
237 feel thankful that I had the privilege of doing this work."  
238 {Ms95-1909.11} Manuscript 95, 1909.

## 239 Discussion Questions

- 240 1. What was Ellen White's approach to discipline? (17-40)
- 241 2. What was her success with her approach? (55)
- 242 3. What can a hurried blow do? (148) What was better? (150)
- 243 4. Why is it important not to lose our tempers when we work with our  
244 children? (161)
- 245 5. What were some of the inducements she used? (150, 174)

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