**Discipline for Broken Things**

**Ken Canfield, Ph.D.**

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Accidents happen. But who pays for the broken stereo? There are many tough questions for parents to wrestle with.

Jerry and his wife left their normally responsible 10- and 11-year-old home alone for about an hour. But this time, the kids started roughhousing and ended up breaking an expensive piece of stereo equipment that would cost hundreds of dollars to fix.

Jerry and his wife reacted by taking away all the kids' privileges, then told them they'd pray and think about it some more. That's when Jerry wrote to us.

Jerry and his wife did something commendable: It's okay to tell the kids you need more time to think and pray about something.

Now, every dad and mom know their own kids the best, so the best solution is to work together as a couple. These are general principles.

For starters, *discipline works best as teaching rather than punishment*. That's difficult when a child has broken something, but taking away all privileges seems to lean more toward punishment then teaching. Ask yourself: what is my child learning through my response?

Remember: accidents happen. Sometimes they cost a few dollars, and sometimes a few thousand. But they're still accidents. That doesn't mean you let the kids off the hook, but consider responding with some negative consequences and also some positive learning experiences.

One good questions to ask is, how do you teach them responsibility through this? It seems a little much to force ten-year-olds to work for three years to raise $800. That isn't a lesson, it's an unfair burden that will weigh on you and them for a long time. A better solution might be to come up with a more reasonable amount that they can "earn" to help fix the stereo-by working odd jobs around the house or wherever they can to come up with the money.

Whatever approach you take, dad, it's important that they see themselves as more important than any stuff you may own. I endorse discipline and punishment. But all the while, you must reinforce your unconditional love and acceptance of them as your children in good times and bad.