

## Behaviour management

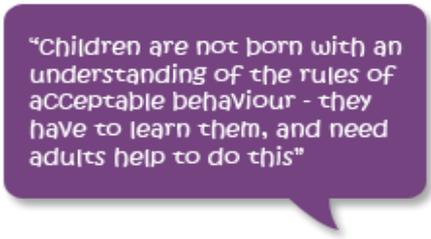
Being a parent is extremely rewarding and enjoyable, but it can also be demanding, frustrating and exhausting. There is no right way to be a parent and everyone has to develop their own way of dealing with behaviour issues.

All children misbehave at times. It is perfectly natural for them to want more independence and to make their own choices and decisions as they grow and develop.

Children need limits and simple rules for their own safety and to get along with others and to be able to follow instructions and requests. It is important to deal with problems firmly and decisively when your child is young, rather than leaving the problem unchecked.

### Some common problems you may have faced with your child include:

- Ignoring instructions
- Defiance or refusing to do as they are told
- Answering back
- Doing the opposite of what you say
- Running away when you say to do something
- Complaining or whining
- Demanding things
- Being slow to respond
- Tantrums
- Aggression

A purple speech bubble with a white border containing a quote in white text.

"Children are not born with an understanding of the rules of acceptable behaviour - they have to learn them, and need adults help to do this"

### Why do children misbehave?

Children behave in a way that we like or don't like for a reason. It is more likely to happen if it gets children what they want or gets them out of doing something they don't want to do.

We can accidentally encourage misbehaviour by giving children extra attention when they don't do as they are told. This may be reasoning, discussing, arguing, nagging or negotiating.

We can fall into the trap of repeating instructions over and over again, shouting and even getting angry. Children will continue to do things that get attention, even negative attention.

On the other hand, sometimes children don't get enough attention when they are behaving well. **We call this positive praise.** If children get no encouragement for following instructions and doing as they are told, they may become less co-operative. They can learn that the only way to get attention or to get a reaction is to misbehave.

## Giving praise

With children, praise works wonders. They need to know when we like what they are doing. It isn't enough just to tell them when we don't like the way they behave. Children feel pleasure and pride if they feel their efforts are noticed and it helps them to remember what is wanted.



There are 2 types of praise:

**Praise for doing** – telling your child that you have noticed what they are doing and that you like it. If we acknowledge children's efforts, they are more likely to have another go and more likely to succeed.

**Praise for being** – this tells someone that we value them just for being who they are, their own qualities, personality etc.

### Steps to giving praise effectively

1. Give your child all of your attention
2. Move close to your child
3. Looked pleased and share their pleasure
4. Be specific; describe what you like
5. Seek eye contact
6. Mean it – be sincere and let it show in a warm tone of voice
7. Touch your child gently
8. Give pride to the child, "You deserve to feel proud of yourself."



### Ways we can praise and encourage children

Examples of what you might say	Examples of what you might do
"Well done you have sat nicely at lunch"	Give a pat on the head/back
"Thanks for all your help with tidying up"	Put an arm around your child's shoulder
"Ready for nursery already? Well done on getting your shoes on"	Give a high five or thumbs up
"I've been looking forward to you coming home"	Smile
	Give stickers
	Choose a favourite game together

## Boundaries and setting limits

There are four main types of boundaries that children are likely to meet

### Constricting

Where there are lots of rules and regulation, often backed up with severe punishments. If we use this method, children can become rebellious and uncooperative, or go to the other extreme and become timid, waiting to be told what to do and reluctant to try things for fear of making mistakes

### Absent

No limits, anything goes. Too much freedom can be scary as not having enough. If there are no boundaries, children can feel that nobody cares about them and they may behave in extreme or dangerous ways in an attempt to get someone to take charge.

### Inconsistent

Often a mixture of constricting and absent. Strict one day and indulgent the next day. This leads to children feeling confused and insecure and they can also learn to be manipulative. If the adults aren't clear about what they expect, children can't learn what behaviour is ok – a lot of challenging behaviour can be linked to this.

### Clear, consistent

Safe, fair limits with clear expectations, stability with plenty of room to explore and grow.

## Strategies

There are a number of ways you can manage difficult behaviour, that will help your child deal with frustration and learn to accept limits.

### Establish clear ground rules

A few basic house rules (4 or 5) can help. Rules should tell your child what to do, rather than what not to do. E.g. "walk in the house" is better than "Don't run." Try to involve your child in deciding the family rules.

#### Rules should be:

- No more than 4 or 5
- Should be fair
- Should be easy to follow
- Should be enforceable
- Should be positively stated



Once the ground rules are agreed, of course it is natural that your child will occasionally forget a basic house rule. To deal with this you will firstly gain your child's attention, telling your child the problem, explaining briefly why it is a problem and describing or getting your child to suggest the correct behaviour.

## Rewards and penalties

Once you have established the ground rules, we need to know how we can reinforce them in a fair and positive way.

Children naturally want to please us, but sometimes children need reminders. Behaviour charts are a good way to change a behaviour, learn a new skill or complete a task. They can be used for a few weeks and then phased out. You can use stamps, stars, happy faces, stickers etc. on a chart to show your child that you like what they

have done and you can recognise their efforts. This can help children feel rewarded about good behaviour and trying hard and makes them feel good about themselves.

You can back up the behaviour charts by having a certain number of stamps or stickers to earn a reward. Some of the best rewards involve activities which involve spending time together, rather than monetary rewards. Behaviour charts are a short term approach and will need to be gradually phased out with the rewards less predictable. When you stop using the chart and giving rewards, you must ensure that you continue to give praise to your child for behaving well.



So what do you do if despite using positive praise, ground rules and reward charts your child still shows unwanted behaviour?

### Using planned ignoring for minor problems

Planned ignoring means to deliberately pay no attention to your child when a minor behavioural problem happens. It is particularly good to use when your child seems to be misbehaving just to get a reaction or some attention, such as whining, making faces, using a silly voice or a rude noise. If these minor problems are ignored, children soon learn that they will no longer get a reaction when they behave this way. When you ignore a behaviour, don't look or talk to your child. Your child may behave worse at first to try to get your attention. Just keep ignoring them. If you need to, turn and walk away. Try to stay calm and make sure your body language stays calm too. Keep ignoring them as long as the problem behaviour goes on. As soon as the behaviour stops and your child behaves well, praise them and give them your attention. Don't ignore more severe problems such as if your child hurts someone or breaks things.

### Choices and consequences

If after you have given clear and calm instructions, your child still chooses to misbehave, it is time to put in consequences.

Logical consequences are best used for mild problem behaviour that doesn't occur too often. If your child does not follow a rule or clear instruction, then choose a consequence that fits the situation. Take away the activity or toy that is at the centre of the problem. Consequences work best if they are brief - 5 to 30 minutes is usually long enough the first time a problem happens.

Act as soon as the problem happens. Ignore any complaining and don't argue with your child. State why you are taking away the toy or activity, e.g. "You are not sharing the puzzle, I'm putting it away for 5 minutes." Or "You are still arguing over the television, so it's going to stay off for 10 minutes."

Remember to keep to the agreement and then the time is up, return the activity so your child can practice how to do the right thing. To prevent the same thing happening again, try to help your child to solve the problem, such as helping them to decide who will have the first turn. If the problem happens again after giving the activity back to your child, follow it up by removing the activity for a longer period, such as the rest of the day.



It is helpful for children gradually to learn to make choices, and to discover what happens as a result of the choices they make, and what the consequences are.

The choices we give children could range from deciding between eating an apple or an orange.



We need to strike a balance between giving no choice and giving too much. If we say to a 3 year old, “What would you like for tea?” they will probably say, “I don’t know.....” as the choice is too wide. If you have several children and ask the question, they will probably give different answers. Used well, giving choices and consequences keep you in charge, whilst giving your child some power too. It gives a positive approach to discipline and can reduce arguments and confrontation quite dramatically.

For this to work successfully there are a number of steps to consider:

1. Be clear and specific about the positive and negative choice of behaviour and the positive and negative consequences that will follow.
2. Relate the consequence to the behaviour
3. Choose consequences that mean something to your child
4. Don’t use threats, a threatening manner or ultimatums.

#### Giving choices and consequences (example)

.....(child’s name) you have a choice

“You can either ..... (positive behaviour choice)”

“Or you can ..... (negative behaviour choice)”

“If you choose ..... (positive behaviour choice)”

“Then..... (positive consequence)”

“If you choose..... (negative behaviour)”

“Then ..... (negative consequence)”

“It’s up to you, it’s your choice.”



#### Using quiet time for misbehaviour

Quiet time is a short and effective way to help children to learn acceptable behaviour. When a child misbehaves or does not follow an instruction, quiet time involves them having to sit quietly on the edge of the activity for a short time. Quiet time is usually in the same room where the problem happened. When your child is in quiet time, do not give them any attention. Once your child has been quiet for the set time, let them come back to the activity.

So to recap, when your child shows unwanted behaviour, follow these steps:

1. **Tell your child what to do**  
Move close to your child, get their attention and tell them exactly what to do. Praise your child if they do as you have asked.
2. **Follow up your instruction with quiet time**  
If the unwanted behaviour continues, tell your child what they have done wrong and the consequence. Ignore any complaining and don’t argue with them.

3. **Remind your child of the rules**

As you put your child into quiet time, remind them they must be quiet for a set time and then they can rejoin the activity. If your child does not sit quietly in quiet time, take them to time out.

4. **After quiet time**

When quiet time is over, don't talk about it. Bring your child back and help them find something to do or repeat your original instruction if you had asked your child to do something. Praise your child for behaving well as soon as possible after quiet time.

### **Time out for serious misbehaviour**

Time out is a positive strategy to follow up quiet time if a child doesn't sit quietly or from more serious problems such as fighting or hurting others. It is an extremely effective way of helping children to learn self-control and acceptable behaviour. Time out works like quiet time, except your child is moved away from everyone else for a short time. The area you use for time out is important. Get the area ready for when you need to use it. Make sure the area is safe and remove anything dangerous or breakable. The area should not have interesting things to do, so don't use your child's bedroom.



When you put your child in time out, do not give them any attention, even if they call out. Once your child has been quiet for the set time, let them come out. Short periods of time out are more effective than longer ones, with recommendations of 1 minute of quiet for 2 year olds, 2 minutes for 3-5 year olds and a maximum of 5 minutes for children aged between 5-10 years.

### **So to recap:**

1. Tell your child what to do. Tell them to stop doing..... Praise them if they do as you ask
2. Back up your instruction with consequence, "you have not done as I asked, so you will go to time out now."
3. Remind your child of the rules, as you are putting them into time out. Remind them they must be quiet for a set time before they will be allowed to come out. Use something visual like an egg timer, so they can visually see when the time is over.
4. Ignore misbehaviour in time out. Your child may continue to tantrum, kick, scream or call out. If you pay attention to this behaviour, time out will not work. Your child is more likely to misbehave next time and will not learn to calm themselves down. You must be prepared to see it through and stick to the time out rules. Don't talk to your child or give them any attention until they have been quiet for the set time.
5. After time out, don't talk about it. Help your child find something to do. Watch for your child behaving well and praise them as soon as you can. If the problem happens again, repeat the time out routine.