

## Effective Discipline

| Child's Behavior               | Your Responses   |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
|                                | <i>Effective</i>   | <i>Constructive</i>  |
| <b>Temper tantrum</b>          | Walk away.   | Discuss the incident when child is calm.   |
| <b>Overexcitement</b>          | Distract with another activity.  | Talk about his behavior when he's calm.  |
| <b>Hitting or biting</b>       | Immediately remove him from situation or in anticipation of this behavior. | Discuss consequences of his actions (pain, damage, bad feelings) to himself and others. Try time out after brief one-word response.    |
| <b>Not paying attention</b>    | Establish eye contact to hold his attention.                               | Lower your expectations (ask him to listen to a story for 3 minutes instead of 10; don't insist he sit through a full church service). |
| <b>Refuses to pick up toys</b> | Don't let him play until he does his job.                                  | Show him how to do the task and help him with it; praise him when he finishes.   |

# BEHAVIOR

## Discipline

Having a toddler is a humbling experience. Before your child was born, or even when she was a baby, it was easy for you to watch someone else's toddler throwing a temper tantrum and say, "*My child will never do that.*" Now you realize there are times when *any* child acts up unexpectedly. You can guide your child and teach her what's right, and that will work most of the time. But you can't force her to act exactly as you want. So face the facts: There are bound to be times when the unruly child everyone is staring at is yours!

At this age your toddler has a limited idea of what "good" and "bad" mean, and she does not fully understand the concept of rules or warnings. You may say "if you pull the cat's tail, she'll bite you," but it may make no sense to her at all. Even "Be nice to kitty" may not be clear to her. So whether she's running into the street or turning her face away from Grandma's kiss, she's not deliberately behaving badly, nor do her actions mean that you've failed as a parent. She's simply acting on the impulses of the moment. It will take years of firm but gentle guidance before she fully understands what you expect from her and has the self-control to meet those expectations.

Many people think of discipline as punishment. While punishment may be part of it, a much more important aspect of discipline is love. Affection and caring form the core of your relationship with your child, and they play a powerful role in shaping her behavior. Your love and respect will teach her to care about others as well as herself. Your own daily example of honesty, dedication, and trust will teach her to become honest, hardworking, and trustworthy herself. Also, the control you show in helping her to learn right from wrong will serve as a model for the self-discipline she develops later on. In short, if you want her to behave well, you need to act that way toward her.

If you were keeping a running tally, you'd want displays of affection to greatly outnumber punishments and criticisms. Even a quick hug or kiss, or a bit of good-natured roughhousing, will reassure your child that you love her. And on a day when your toddler is getting into everything and you find yourself being especially snappy with her, make sure you go out of your way when she *does* behave well to give her a hug and tell her she's doing a good job. Especially during this second year, pleasing you is very important to your toddler, so praise and attention are powerful rewards that can motivate her to obey the reasonable rules you set for her.

It's important to have realistic expectations for your child's behavior. They should reflect her own temperament and personality, not your fantasies. She may be much more active and inquisitive than you would like her to be, but insisting that she spend long stretches in the playpen or confined in her high-chair will only make her more resistant and frustrated.

Even if your toddler *is* a "model" child, she still has to learn what you expect. No matter how obvious it may seem to you, she won't automatically know that

it's wrong to eat dirt or run into the street or pull her friend's hair. And telling her once won't get the message across. She'll have to learn by trial and error (often, several errors) before she understands the rule.

One other important reminder. If you load too much on your child at this early age, you'll be frustrated, and she'll be hurt and bewildered. So make things easier for both of you by establishing some priorities and then building your list of rules gradually. Give precedence to limits that keep her safe, as well as to prohibitions against hitting, biting, and kicking. Once she masters these rules, you can then turn your attention to nuisance behavior such as screaming in public, throwing food, writing on the wall, and removing her clothing at unexpected moments. Plan to save the finer points of polite social behavior for the next few years. It's too much to ask an eighteen-month-old to be nice when Grandma's kissing her at a time she'd rather be outside playing.

At this age, since your toddler can't understand everything that you say, it's also only fair to eliminate as many temptations as possible. She needs freedom to explore. Cluttering your home with "no-nos" will deprive her of this freedom and create more restrictions than she can possibly absorb. It also will frustrate her. So while you can't get rid of the oven, you can lock away the china and place your houseplants out of reach.

To prevent further unwanted behavior, pay extra attention to your toddler when she's tired, hungry, sick, or in an unfamiliar setting—in other words, when she's most likely to be stressed. Also try to keep your own daily routine as flexible as possible so she doesn't feel extra pressure. If the two of you are at the grocery store during her nap time, don't be surprised if she acts up.

Despite all your attempts at prevention, your toddler will sometimes violate one or more of your top ten rules. When that happens, alert her with your facial expression and the displeased sound of your voice. Then move her to a different place. Sometimes this will be enough, but just as often, other measures may still be required. It's best to decide upon these responses now, while your toddler is young. Otherwise, when she becomes naturally more mischievous in the next few years, you may be more prone to lose your temper and do something you'll regret.

Here's an important pact to make with yourself. *Never* resort to punishments that physically or emotionally hurt your child. While you need to let her know that she's done something wrong, this doesn't mean you have to inflict pain. Spanking, slapping, beating, and screaming at children of any age does far more harm than good. Here are some of the main reasons why this is true:

1. Even if it stops the child from misbehaving at the moment, it also teaches her that it's okay to hit and yell when she's upset or angry. Think of the mother busily whacking her child as she yells at her: "I told you not to hit!" It's absurd, isn't it? But it's also tragically common, and has an equally tragic result: Children who are hit often become hitters themselves.

2. Physical punishment can harm your child. If a little spank doesn't work, many parents will slap even harder as they become angrier and more frustrated.

3. Physical punishment makes the child angry at the parent. So instead of developing self-discipline, the youngster is much more likely to try to get back at the parent by continuing to misbehave, but without getting caught.

4. Physical punishment gives a child a very extreme form of attention. Although it's unpleasant—even painful—it tells the child that she's gotten through to her parent. If the mother or father is usually too busy or preoccupied to pay much attention to her, this type of punishment may actually promote bad behavior.

So if spanking and yelling are wrong, what approach should you take? As difficult as it may be, the best way to deal with your misbehaving toddler is to isolate her briefly. No attention. No toys. No fun. This strategy, known as "timeout," works like this:

1. You've told your toddler not to open the oven door, but she persists.
2. Without raising your voice, again say firmly, "No. Don't open the oven door," and pick her up with her back toward you.
3. Put her in her playpen and empty it of everything else. Then leave the room.
4. Wait a minute or two, or until her crying subsides, before returning to her.

The keys to this form of discipline—or to any other, for that matter—are consistency and calmness. As hard as it may be, try to respond immediately every time your child breaks an *important* rule, but don't let your irritation get the better of you. If you're like most parents, you won't succeed 100 percent of the time, but an occasional slip-up won't make much difference. Just try to be as consistent as you can.

When you do feel yourself losing your temper, take a few deep breaths, count to ten, and if possible, get someone else to watch your child while you leave the room. Remind yourself that you are older and should be wiser than your toddler. You *know* that at her age she's not deliberately trying to annoy or embarrass you, so keep your own ego out of it. In the end, the more self-discipline you exercise, the more effective you'll be at disciplining your child.

## *Preventing Temper Tantrums*

**W**hen it comes to discipline, you have several distinct advantages over your child. First of all, because you *know* that there will inevitably be conflicts between you (you can probably even predict which issues are likely to spark them), you can plan your strategy in advance to prevent friction as much as possible.

Use the following guidelines to help you minimize your child's temper tantrums, both in number and in intensity. Make sure everyone who takes care of her understands and follows these policies consistently.

1. When you ask your toddler to do something, use a friendly tone of voice and phrase your request like an invitation instead of a command. It also helps to say "please" and "thank you."
2. Don't overreact when she says no. For quite some time, she may automatically say no to *any* request or instruction. She'll even say no to ice cream and cake at this stage! What she really means is something like "I'd like to be in control here, so I'll say no until I think it through or until I see if you're serious." Instead of jumping on her, answer her hidden challenge by repeating your request calmly and clearly. Don't punish her for saying no.
3. Choose your battles carefully. She won't throw a temper tantrum unless you push her first, so don't push unless there's something worth fighting for. For example, keeping her safely buckled into her car seat while the automobile is moving is a priority item. Making sure she eats her peas before her applesauce is not. So while she's saying no to everything all day long, you should be saying no only the few times a day when it's absolutely necessary.
4. Don't offer choices where none exist, and don't make deals. Issues like bathing, bedtime, and staying out of the street are non-negotiable. She doesn't deserve an extra cookie or trip to the park for cooperating with these rules. Bribery will only teach her to break the rule whenever you forget to give her the agreed-upon reward.
5. *Do* offer limited choices whenever possible. Let her decide which pajamas to wear, which story to read, which toys to play with. If you encourage her independence in these areas, she'll be much more likely to comply when it counts.
6. Avoid situations that you know will trigger a tantrum. If she always makes a scene in the grocery store, arrange to leave her with a sitter the next few times you go shopping. If one of her playmates

always seems to get her keyed up and irritable, separate the children for a few days or weeks and see if the dynamics improve when they're older.

**7.** Reward her good behavior with plenty of praise and attention. Even if you just sit with her while she looks at her books, your companionship shows her you approve of this quiet activity.

**8.** Keep your sense of humor. While it's not a good idea to laugh at your toddler as she kicks and screams (that just plays to her performance), it can be very therapeutic to laugh and talk about it with friends or older family members when she's out of earshot.

## ***Some Golden Rules of Preschool Discipline***

**W**hether you're a strict disciplinarian or use a more easygoing approach, the following guidelines should help you shape a strategy of discipline that ultimately will benefit both you and your child.

**1.** Always encourage and reward good behavior, as well as punishing the bad. Whenever you have a choice, take the positive route. For example, let's say your two-year-old is moving toward the stove; you should try to distract him with a safe activity instead of waiting for him to get into trouble. And when you notice that he has independently chosen to do something acceptable instead of misbehaving, congratulate him on making the right decision. By showing that you're proud of him, you'll make him feel good about himself and encourage him to behave the same way in the future.

**2.** Map out rules that help your child learn to control his impulsiveness and behave well socially without impairing his drive for independence. If your rules are overly restrictive, he may be afraid to explore on his own or try out new skills.

**3.** Always keep your child's developmental level in mind when you set limits, and don't expect more than he's capable of achieving. For example, a two- or three-year-old can't control the impulse to touch things that attract him, so it's unrealistic for you to expect him not to touch displays at the grocery or toy store.

**4.** Set the punishment to your child's developmental level. For example, if you decide to send your toddler to his room for misbehaving, don't keep him there for more than about five minutes; any longer, and he'll forget why he's there. If you prefer to reason with him, keep the discussion simple and practical. Never use hypothetical statements such as "How would you like it if I did that to you?" No preschooler can understand this kind of reasoning.

**5.** Don't change the rules or the punishments at random. That will only confuse your child. As he grows older you naturally will expect more mature behavior, but when you change the rules at that time, tell him why. For example, you may tolerate his pulling on your clothes to get your attention when he's two, but by the time he's four you may want him to find more grown-up ways of approaching you. Once you make the decision to change a rule, explain it to him before you start to enforce it.

**6.** Make sure that all the adults in the house and other caregivers agree to and understand the limits and punishments used to discipline your child. If one parent says something is okay and the other

forbids it, the child is bound to be confused. Eventually he'll figure out that he can get his way by playing one adult against the other, which will make your lives miserable now and in the future. You can prevent this game-playing by presenting a united front.

**7.** Remember that you are a key role model for your child. The more evenhanded and controlled your behavior, the more likely your child will be to pattern himself after you. If, on the other hand, you hit or spank him every time he breaks a rule, you're teaching him that it's okay to solve problems through violence.



## *Extinction*

**E**xtinction is a disciplinary technique that is most effective with two- and three-year-olds, though it may continue to be useful into the school years. The idea is to *systematically* ignore the child whenever he breaks a certain rule. As you might guess, this method should be used for misbehavior that's annoying or undesirable but not dangerous or destructive; the latter needs the more direct, immediate approach already discussed.

Here's how "extinction" works:

1. Define exactly what your child is doing wrong. Does he scream for attention in public? Does he cling to you when you're trying to do something else? Be very specific about the behavior and the circumstances in which it occurs.
2. Keep track of how often your child does this, and what you do in response. Do you try to pacify him? Do you stop what you're doing to pay attention to him? If so, you're unwittingly encouraging him to keep misbehaving over and over.
3. Keep recording the frequency of his misbehavior as you begin to ignore it. Remember, the key is consistency. Even if every person in the grocery store is glaring at you, do *not* show your child that you hear him screaming. Just keep doing what you're doing. At first, he'll probably act out more intensely and more frequently to test your will, but eventually he'll realize that you mean business.
4. When your child acts properly in a situation where he usually misbehaves, be sure to compliment him. If, instead of screaming when you refuse to buy him a candy bar, he talks to you in a normal voice, praise him for acting so grown up.
5. If you manage to extinguish the misbehavior for a while and then it reappears, start the process over again. It probably won't take as long the second time.

## Discipline

By age four your preschooler will have her unpredictable emotional responses somewhat under control, but still won't be able to manage her feelings of defiance. Thus, at this age, she may openly disobey family rules, talk back, or even swear at you. She'll often behave badly just to annoy you. As irritating and embarrassing as this behavior may be, it's rarely a sign of emotional illness and usually disappears by school age if you take a relaxed approach to it.

This doesn't mean letting your child control or intimidate you. Believe it or not, even *she* doesn't want that. On the contrary, she expects you to restrain her when she gets too far out of line, just as she assumes you'll protect her when she does something dangerous. So you must teach her what is acceptable behavior and what isn't. The only way she'll learn to set her own limits later is by having you set reasonable limits for her now.

In deciding what limits to set, keep in mind that many of the strategies you used when she was younger are also suitable now. It's still important to reward good behavior more often than punishing bad, and to avoid physical punishments. And it's still essential to deal with misbehavior promptly and fairly, not waiting so long that your child forgets why she's being disciplined.

At this age her misconduct tends to be more conscious than it once was. As a toddler your child acted out of curiosity, trying to find and test her limits; now that she's a preschooler her misbehavior may be less innocent. A three-year-old whose mother is pregnant or whose parents are separated, for example, may react by doing something that she well knows is forbidden. She may not understand the emotions that are driving her to break the rules, but she certainly realizes that she is breaking them.

To discourage such behavior, help your child learn to express her emotions through words instead of violent or obnoxious actions. The mother whose daughter hits her might say, "Stop it! You are very angry. Please tell me why." If she refuses to stop, a "timeout" may be necessary.

Sometimes your child won't be able to explain her anger, and it will be up to you to help her. This can be a real test of skill and patience, but is well worth it. Usually, the problem will be fairly obvious if you examine the situation from her viewpoint. The pregnant mother described above, for example, can suggest, "You're angry about the baby, aren't you?" This approach is most successful if you encourage your child to talk about her problems and feelings on an ongoing basis.

## *Timeout*

**A**lthough you can't ignore dangerous or destructive behavior, you can call a timeout. This technique is most successful with three- and four-year-olds, who generally know when they've done something seriously wrong and understand that this is why they're being punished.

Here's how the timeout works:

1. Define the behavior you want to stop, and keep track of how frequently it occurs. Punishment of any kind should be used only when your child is *intentionally* doing something he knows is forbidden.
2. Warn him that if he continues to do this, he'll be punished.
3. Identify a timeout area, preferably a room that's empty of toys, television, or other attractions—in other words, one that's as boring as possible for the child. If such a room isn't available, use a chair facing the wall in a hall or unoccupied room.
4. When the child does something he knows will result in timeout, send him immediately to the area you have selected and tell him how long he has to stay there. Five minutes is usually sufficient. Place a timer or a clock within view so he can keep track of the time.
5. If he cries or screams, reset the timer for another five minutes. If he leaves the timeout area, return him there and reset the timer.
6. Use a timeout each and every time he violates this particular rule. Also, any time you notice that he's observing the rule, congratulate him for behaving so well.