



Changing Children's Services
West Lothian

Tips & Hints When Dealing With Your Child's Behaviour

A Guide For Parents



JW
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Isn't it amazing how much information new parents are given about their baby? There are leaflets on illnesses, breastfeeding, inoculations and so on. But, how many times have you heard a parent say 'I wish they came with a manual!?' This leaflet is designed to give some very general tips on how to cope with the range of behaviours your children may display over the coming years. It isn't a manual, but it may give you some ideas on how to handle normal behaviours that most children demonstrate as they grow up.

Whilst you may not need this leaflet immediately, it won't be long until your baby becomes a toddler and you may find this advice reassuring and helpful. If you read it now, you will be better prepared to use it when the time comes. It is also worth remembering that your Health Visitor can advise you on how to cope with your child's behaviour and will have other leaflets on behaviour.

Try To...

Stay in control:

- Remember you are the adult. It is up to you to decide what is allowed and what the rules of the house should be.
- Have only one set of rules in the house and do not get dragged into arguing or negotiating about them. Once you have decided the rule, stick to it and make sure everybody keeps to the same rules, e.g. mother, father, grandparents and so on.
- Have sensible expectations of your child. Don't expect them to be perfect.
- Be confident and believe in what you are doing. By giving your child clear rules and limits, you help them to behave well.

Use praise:

- Praise good behaviour as often as possible.
- Make sure you take time to notice good behaviour. Do not take good behaviour for granted. Notice your children being good and praise immediately. Don't wait for perfect behaviour.
- Praise your child in front of other people.
- Give praise that tells your child exactly what they did well, e.g. 'I am very proud of you, when you share your toys with your brother'.

Use commands sensibly:

- Give commands firmly and calmly, only one at a time.
- Give 'do' commands rather than 'stop' commands, e.g. 'sit down and play with your puzzle', rather than 'stop running around'.
- Make commands clear, short and to the point.

Have sensible rules and limits:

- Do not make rules for EVERYTHING, just the most important behaviours.
- Limits and rules should be fair and suitable to the child's age, e.g. do not expect children to do chores without being reminded, your 4 year old to wash dishes, or your 8 year old to look after their younger brother for more than 20 minutes.
- Use warnings and reminders. If you want your child to stop playing and get ready for bed, start to prepare them in advance. Tell them they have 10 minutes to finish playing before you will ask them to stop.

Stick to your limits and boundaries:

- If you have made a rule, make sure you stick to it.
- Stick to the same rules every day and every time, regardless of how you feel.

- Be prepared for the fact that every child will test his/her parents, to see if they will give in.
- Praise, praise, praise and praise again. As soon as your child starts to comply, give them praise.

Learn how to ignore minor misbehaviours:

- Behaviours which are good to ignore include: backchat, gestures, sulking, making noises/faces, spitting, swearing, nail biting and hurtful comments. They may even become worse if you pay them attention, e.g. shouting.
- Be aware of when your child is about to act up and be ready to ignore them.
- Avoid eye contact with your child when you are ignoring them.
- Do not talk to or hug your children when they are misbehaving, even if they try very hard to get your attention.
- Be prepared that their tantrums, or other behaviour, may get worse at first, as they try to get you to pay attention to them.
- Do not give attention back to the child until he/she has completely stopped the behaviour.
- Once the behaviour has stopped, immediately give attention to the child.

Think ahead and try to stop situations getting worse:

- Anticipate and avoid problems before they occur.
- Ignore minor misbehaviours.
- Avoid things getting out of control. You cannot reason with a very upset or angry child. Wait until you have both calmed down and then discuss the behaviour.
- 'Catch' your own temper and go away for 5 minutes if you are about to say or do something you might regret.

Make your child feel special:

- Remember it is important to spend time playing every day with your child on games he/she chooses.
- Remember your child is not a little adult! They have a lot still to learn about what is expected of them. We all make mistakes.
- Once misbehaviour has stopped and been dealt with, forget it. Do not keep bringing it up.

Mistakes To Avoid

- Do not expect perfection.
- Do not ignore children who are behaving well, e.g. playing quietly.
- Do not give attention to misbehaviour.
- Do not give unnecessary commands or constantly nag your child about their behaviour.
- Do not threaten a child with a punishment unless you are prepared to carry it out.
- Avoid arguing with your child. Ignore backchat, cheek or attempts to argue about rules and commands.
- Do not retaliate. If your child says 'I hate you', do not be tempted to say the same back. If your child hits out, do not hit back.
- Research tells us that smacking and retaliation are NOT helpful. They make a child become angrier and frightened of you. The child may even think that hitting is OK and learn to express anger in this way.
- Do not give praise and criticism at the same time, e.g. do not say 'well done, BUT WHY CAN'T YOU DO IT ALL THE TIME' or 'You were good today, but you were awful yesterday'.

The Importance of Play

Play is one of the most important areas of a child's development. There is nothing wasteful or unimportant about play. Play helps your child develop physically, learn about the world they live in, learn to express emotions, develop conversation skills, develop creativity and learn how to be sociable. In addition, by playing with you and their friends, they will learn how to deal with arguments, work out solutions to problems and develop their language skills.

So you can see, play has a very big part in developing a child's social, emotional and thinking skills. But, adults often think that children just 'know' how to play and parents 'know' how to play with their children. Some parents find it hard to let the child play without telling them how to do it or feeling they have to set rules on the play. This leaflet gives some tips and hints on how to make playing with your child more enjoyable and help them learn all the skills mentioned above.

Some Common Problems

- Making children play like adults and telling them how to do it.
- 'Going too fast' and not giving the child enough time to play or repeat games.
- Expecting too much of the child.
- Not paying attention to the child when he/she is playing, e.g. doing chores rather than playing together.
- Getting into arguments while playing, often when you expect the child to play a certain way.
- Children having tantrums when it is time to stop playing.

Things To Do

- Follow children's lead. Tell them that this is THEIR special time with you and they can decide how to use it.
- Watch them carefully and sit close to them (hugs and kisses can make the play more enjoyable).

- Give the child time and let them repeat a game if they want to.
- Be appreciative and praise them for their play.
- Ignore mistakes and minor misbehaviours during the play.
- Copy what your child is doing.
- Be flexible. Allow your child to change the games as he/she chooses.
- Although it is good to encourage children to play with toys aimed at their age, there are some times that letting them play with 'younger' toys will be helpful. This is particularly true when your child is upset or worried. At these times, he/she may get a lot of comfort from playing at a younger level.
- Use warnings and reminders when playtime is about to finish. If you want your child to stop playing and get ready for bed, start to prepare them in advance. Tell them you have 10 minutes to finish playing before you will ask them to stop.

What to avoid:

- Don't give commands and orders.
- Don't change what your child is doing.
- You don't have to try to teach your child anything. He/she is already learning while you are playing together.
- Don't go too fast.
- Don't expect your child to be like an adult and play by all the rules like you would.

Toys:

Parents are under a lot of pressure to buy the 'right' expensive 'educational' toys. You don't have to do this. Here are some ideas about what makes a good toy.

- Toys do not need to be expensive.
- They do have to be safe, e.g. not easily broken or no small pieces for young children.

- Toys don't have to have a set purpose. Simply toys, which can be played with in lots of different ways are best.
- Toys should be easily handled by the child, so smaller children should have simpler toys.
- You can help your child make very exciting toys using everyday household materials, e.g. you could use cardboard
- box houses, uncooked pasta jewellery, toilet paper flowers and paper masks. Let your imagination go wild!
- When you buy toys, they should be aimed

Play is fun:

Play should be enjoyable for both parents and children. If you let your children be the leader in the games and you be the follower, they will be learning very important skills without you even noticing. Through playing with you, your child will feel understood and supported. When they do, their everyday behaviour will also improve. Play is one of the most important parts of their life and is like their 'work'. It is also wonderful that it is so much fun!

Finally...

Bringing up children is a big task and takes a lot of effort. Children do not 'know' how to behave. They need to be taught and shown good examples by the important adults in their lives. Research tells us that children who are brought up being praised by parents who remain calm and show them a good example, will generally be better behaved. If you stay calm, make sure you, and everybody involved with your child, deal with him or her in the same way, you are on the road to a happy home!

