



Guiding Children's Behavior

Part 1: Concepts to Help Your Child Learn to Behave



KEY CONCEPTS

- 1** Be **PATIENT** and remind yourself that your child will need time and many opportunities to learn and practice what you are trying to teach them.
- 2** When teaching, be **FIRM AND WARM** with your child so that she knows that you want her to pay attention and that you are teaching her, not scolding her.
- 3** Give your child 10-15 minutes of special time each day with you to help your child be more willing to cooperate during the day. Play with your child and ask them to help you around the house to teach them how to “give and take” and cooperate during games and activities.
- 4** To teach your child to be independent, your child needs to learn how to be “in charge” or “in control” of a situation. So, you can “share control” with your child by letting them have a chance to practice being “in control” (for example, play a game the way your child wants to play, let them stir food their way first).
- 5** Be **CONSISTENT**—this means “not giving in” once you have said “no” to a request. Also, try to have the same rules in different places (home, daycare, store, playground).
- 6** When teaching rules, you should make sure you have your child's attention **BEFORE** teaching/showing them the rules. Get your child's attention by:
 - Asking them to look at you and listen, get on their eye level
 - Using simple language to explain rules, but do NOT argue with your child
 - Asking them to say “yes” or “no” to see if they understand rules
 - Thanking them for listening
- 7** Also, you can explain why rules / information are important for your child to learn. Explaining **WHY** helps your child to learn and understand, and often improves cooperation.
- 8** Teach rules and make requests in a **SENSITIVE** way. Do not yell or teach using a harsh voice that might scare your child. Make learning fun and show you care about your child by explaining rules calmly and sensitively.
- 9** Sometimes your child will become angry or throw a temper tantrum because he/she does not understand or does not want to follow the rules. Remember, young children are not able to control their feelings like a mature adult. When children “fall apart” or tantrum, don't take it personally. They are learning about how to handle their emotions. Try to understand their struggle.
- 10** When your child becomes upset, let your child know that you understand **BUT** follow through with your request, or with setting a limit. It is ok to give your child some “space” to let out his/her difficult emotions.



TIPS FOR GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

The best way to deal with temper tantrums is to avoid them in the first place, whenever possible. Here are some strategies that may help:

- **Make sure your child isn't acting up simply because he or she isn't getting enough attention.** Although this is hard to imagine, to a child, negative attention (a parent's response to a tantrum) is better than no attention at all. Many studies show that any attention, including negative attention, results in an increase in that behavior! Try to establish a habit of catching your child being good ("time in"), which means rewarding your little one with attention for positive behavior. Even just commenting on what they're doing whenever children aren't having a tantrum can help increase those positive behaviors.
- **Try to give children some control over little things.** This may fulfill the need for independence and ward off tantrums. Offer minor choices such as "Do you want orange juice or apple juice?" or "Do you want to brush your teeth before or after taking a bath?" This way, you aren't asking "Do you want to brush your teeth now?" — which inevitably will be answered, "no."
- **Keep off-limits objects out of sight and out of reach to make struggles less likely to develop over them.** Obviously, this isn't always possible, especially outside of the home where the environment can't be controlled.
- **Distract your child.** Take advantage of your little one's short attention span by offering a replacement for the coveted object or beginning a new activity to replace the frustrating or forbidden one. Or simply change the environment. Take your child outside or inside or move to a different room.
- **Set the stage for success when kids are playing or trying to master a new task.** Offer age-appropriate toys and games. Also, start with something simple before moving on to more challenging tasks.
- **Consider the request carefully when your child wants something.** Is it outrageous? Maybe it isn't. Choose your battles; accommodate when you can.
- **Know your child's limits.** If you know your child is tired, it's not the best time to go grocery shopping or try to squeeze in one more errand.