

"Please put away your toys now and come to dinner", you say to your child. A few minutes later, your child still refuses to stop playing with his toys. He begins to throw a tantrum when you try to stop him.

Sounds familiar? As parents, we have to deal with misbehaviour from children from time to time. How do we encourage good behaviour in children, and how do we discourage bad behaviour? How can we discipline our children effectively?



Tips for disciplining a child:

Give clear instructions and explain expectations/consequences

- Give clear instructions in a calm voice. Tell a child what he should do and **not** what he should not do (e.g. try "Say it softly", instead of "Don't shout!").
- Show a young child how to behave properly by explaining and showing how it should be done (e.g. "Put your toys into the box carefully like this..." and demonstrate).
- Give the child some preparation time before he has to carry out the instruction (e.g. "You have 10 minutes to play before dinner time. When time's up, can you put your toys aside and have your dinner?").
- If your child tries to bargain for more play time, you can give in a little.
- Discuss what will happen if he misbehaves (e.g. "If both of you don't stop arguing over which television programme to watch, the TV will be switched off for 15 minutes").

Reward and encourage good behaviour

- When a child behaves well, reward him immediately to reinforce the positive behaviour.
- Praise, smile, give a pat on the back or hug him. Give small treats occasionally but make it clear that material rewards will not be given every time.

- Do not tell a child upfront that rewards will be given for good behaviour (e.g. "If you are a good boy, I will buy you ice-cream.")

Ignore minor misbehaviour or use distraction for younger children

- Ignore minor attention-seeking negative behaviour (e.g. temper tantrums, whining). The child will usually give up after a while. **Be prepared to withhold attention until the child stops crying.**
- A younger child might whine or cry to attract attention. Try distracting him by pointing to something interesting (e.g. when the child starts to cry, say "look at that pretty bird!"). Teach him to ask nicely instead of whining.

Deal with bad behaviour

- Withdraw privileges if the child misbehaves (e.g. if a child plays roughly with his toys, remove the toy for 5-10 minutes; if a child refuses to eat his dinner because he wants to watch cartoons, switch off the TV).
- Impose responsibilities, especially for older children (e.g. if a child throws a tantrum and creates a mess, ask him to clean up the mess).

Use "Quiet Time" for more serious misbehaviour (children aged 2-10 years)

- Use "quiet time" to stop a child from misbehaving. Ensure that this method is used for children who are old enough to understand its purpose.
- Explain to the child that "quiet time" is a period for him to reflect on bad behaviour. Tell the child why his misbehaviour was unacceptable. Point out the correct behaviour expected.
- Let the child stay in a safe, isolated and boring place at home for a short while (**1 minute for every year of the child, up to a maximum of 5 minutes**). The child is to keep quiet and is not allowed to join in any activity. Never use a cupboard or storeroom for "quiet time".
- If the child refuses to stay in the room or leaves the chair he is supposed to be on during "quiet time", bring him back. You may even need to shut the door till he quiets down or behaves.
- After "quiet time", talk to the child to ensure that he has understood your explanation. Reassure the child that he is loved.

Scold when appropriate

- Focus on the action and not on the child.
- Maintain eye contact, and tell the child clearly why he is scolded and how he should change.
- Reconcile with the child and let him know that he is loved.
- Do not scold your child in public. Bring him to a quiet place and talk about the unacceptable behaviour. Alternatively, say that you are bringing him home because of the misbehaviour.

Getting Things Done

Small children love to play and try out new things. Before you do your own work, give them something interesting to occupy their time.

Say Yes, instead of No

Your child may ask you to play with him when you are busy. Instead of saying "No", say "Yes. As soon as I finish my work". Ask him to play quietly on his own for now.

Your Reaction to his Behaviour makes a Difference

Always show approval when your child behaves well. Let your child know that you love him, it's their behaviour you don't like.

Match discipline with behaviour

Match the type of discipline with the child's behaviour. Choose a method that is suitable for the age and maturity of the child.

Work with Your Spouse/ Care-giver

Work as a team with your spouse/ parents/ parents-in-law and be consistent in your disciplining. If you disagree on certain aspects of disciplining, discuss it in private.

Give Small Choices

If your child rejects your choice and wants other options, give him small choices (e.g. "Do you want the carrots or the peas?" "Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the green shirt?")

