

## Guiding the Behavior of Young Children

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Guiding the behavior of young children involves establishing mutual respect and expecting cooperation. Effective discipline is positive and child focused. It encourages self-control and appropriate behavior. Through effective discipline, children can learn to make positive choices, learn problem-solving skills, and learn values of respect and responsibility.

There are several common-sense strategies for effectively guiding the behavior of young children.

### **Always focus on the behavior**

It is not children that we want to change. Rather, it is the inappropriate behavior that we want to change. We want to support appropriate behavior. Calling attention to inappropriate behavior lets the child know that the actions are not acceptable, but that the child is still loved. Do not forget to also focus on appropriate behavior. Praise and reinforcement let children know which behaviors are appropriate and acceptable.

### **Have a clear set of rules and routines**

Rules that are fair and consistently enforced, along with familiar routines, help children know what to expect and to understand their limits. Children should be told, in words they understand, the reasons for each rule.

### **Be consistent**

Be clear in stating the expectations and consequences of children's behavior. Set guidelines and limits and stick to them.

### **Concentrate on shaping positive behavior**

Let the child know that you expect positive behavior. Use positive communication with children to help them solve problems. Use gentle reminders about expectations for the child's behavior.

### **Structure the environment to support appropriate behavior**

Children are naturally curious. Adults need to "child proof" the environment to allow children to explore without "getting into trouble." Consistent routines also help children know what is expected of them.

### **Allow children to make acceptable choices**

Give children the responsibility for their behavior whenever possible. Allow the child to make acceptable choices by offering only choices you can live with.

### **Allow children to experience logical consequences**

Remind children of limits and consequences in positive ways. When misbehavior occurs, deal with the behavior quickly in a firm, assertive manner. Use time-out as a last resort to help the child regain control of his behavior.

### **Observe children and anticipate problems**

Supervise children carefully. Head off inappropriate behavior by redirecting the child to another activity or area.

## Ignore misbehavior when appropriate

Try to focus the child's attention elsewhere. Do not give the child any feedback. However, be sure to give attention to positive behavior.

## Interrupt or stop behavior that is harmful or unfair

Use assertive intervention to stop harmful behavior. This may include physically removing the child from the situation, when needed, to protect a child or the environment.

## Treat children with “unconditional positive regard”

Children deserve love and respect, even when they misbehave. Controlling behavior is a learning process for children. Adults can teach children appropriate behavior by calling attention to positive behavior, rewarding children with hugs and kisses, and setting and enforcing clear consistent limits. Let children know we do not approve of inappropriate behavior, but we always approve of and love them.

## How do you guide children's behavior?

1. Keep a one-day record of the positive behavior guidance strategies you use. How many of these are you using?
  - Explain the rule and the reason.
  - Allow children appropriate choices regarding their behavior.
  - Be firm and consistent.

- Allow children to experience the logical consequences of their actions.
- Ignore some behaviors.
- Praise children for appropriate behavior.
- Hug your children.

2. How many times during the day do you:

- Give in to inappropriate behavior?
- Use time-out?
- Not follow through with stated consequences?

3. Pick one positive discipline technique that you do not currently use and try it for several weeks with a child. Keep notes on how it works for you and the child.

## If You Want To Know More

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Dinkmeyer, D., McKay, G., and Dinkmeyer, J. *Parenting Young Children*. Circle Pines, MN: AGS, 1989.

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