discipline

FOR

YOUNG CHILDREN

Why Children Misbehave

LESSON 3

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Lesson 3 Why Children Misbehave

Children misbehave for many reasons. Once you understand why a child is misbehaving, it is easier to know what to do about it. Ask yourself, "Why is he acting this way? What is he trying to gain by misbehaving?"

Children Misbehave When They Don't Feel Well

CHILDREN NEED GOOD HEALTH

Children need plenty of sleep and rest, healthy foods, exercise, and fresh air every day. When they don't get them, they don't feel well. When they don't feel well, they are hard to get along with, just like you and me.

A tired child is a cranky child.
A hungry child is an irritable child.
A sleepy child is a fussy child.
A sick child is a cross child.
An inactive child is a grouchy child.

A healthy child is ready to learn the behavior you expect of him.

Children Misbehave Because They Lack Knowledge And Experience

CHILDREN NEED TIME TO GROW AND LEARN

A wise man once said, "Accept the childishness of children." Children are not little adults. They make mistakes in behavior just as they make mistakes in learning to count or to make a cake. Mistakes and misbehavior are normal childhood experiences, a part of growing up.

Children lack the experience and knowledge which adults have. Mother may say, "You know better than that," when Troy picks all her petunias. But two-year-old Troy does not know better than that. Many acts that parents call "bad" are simply mistakes and call for explanations. We need to be patient, to realize how much children have to learn.
**Children Misbehave When They Feel Rejected**

**CHILDREN NEED TO FEEL ACCEPTED**

When a child knows that you accept him, just as he is, it is possible for him to grow, change, and behave in an acceptable way. A child who feels accepted is likely to accept discipline, but a child who feels rejected is likely to misbehave and to resent his parents.

Remember! You can accept a child as a loved and valued person without necessarily accepting his behavior. For example you can accept Terry as a loved child, but you do not accept his behavior when he wipes his muddy hands on the wall. Terry needs to know that he is accepted no matter what he does. It is his action that is disliked--just as we hate sin but love the sinner.

A child feels accepted when parents take time to listen to his thoughts and feelings. He feels accepted when he is not compared with another child in the family or neighborhood. Being accepted as a worthy human being and an important member of the family gives a child feelings of belonging. He is more likely to behave well when he feels accepted.

**Children Misbehave When They Are Upset**

**CHILDREN NEED SECURITY**

Children are upset by change. When there is a new baby in the family, or mother is sick, or the family moves to a new neighborhood, the child may misbehave. He feels insecure when routines are upset and he needs to be reassured at such times.

Children need attention and the security it brings. Give your child extra attention when he needs it--and you will find that there are fewer times when he gets attention by misbehaving.

**Children Misbehave When They Are Discouraged**

**CHILDREN NEED ENCOURAGEMENT, APPROVAL, AND KIND WORDS**

Sometimes parents forget to let children know that they approve what the children are doing. When a child gets approval for what he does, it makes him feel good and he will be likely to do it again to get another "good feeling."

A child who does not get approval and praise may think that the only way to get attention is to misbehave. He may misbehave because he feels discouraged.
To prevent misbehavior, be generous with approval and praise. One authority advises that you need to give a child approval or praise five times for every time you criticize him. Mother was quick to criticize Ryan when he tracked mud on the kitchen floor, but she forgot to thank him for taking out the garbage, to comment on the fact that he hung his coat up, and to tell him he did a good job of putting away his toys.

Approval and praise must be honest. Children know when they have not done a good job. Also, praise and approval should be about what the child had done, not the child. For example, say "You did a good job of picking up your toys," not "You're a good boy," or "My goodness! You buttoned your sweater all by yourself," instead of "Goodness sake! You're such a smart girl!"

When what the child does, such as picking up toys or buttoning his sweater, is praised, the child feels like a capable person. He gains self-esteem.

Here are some ways to show approval:

"Thank you for helping me wash the dishes."

"Great! You remembered to hang up your coat."

"You really are doing better. Keep up the good work."

"That really makes me feel good."

Kind words help children to behave well, but scoldings make them resentful and sullen. Try saying, "Please pick up your toys," instead of "Get those things picked up right now!"
Children react to kind words and scolding words just like adults. How would you feel if your husband said, "Doris, get those dishes washed right now!" Wouldn't you rather hear, "Let's wash the dishes and then go for a walk"?

Sometimes it helps to listen to other parents talk to their children.

Which one of the answers (A or B) will help the child behave better and also help him feel that he is an able, worthwhile person?

This Is What Happened: Would You Say This? This?
Mary broke a glass when she was drying dishes. "Don't be so clumsy!" "That is easy to do. Next time hold the glass this way."
Four-year-old Susie wet her panties and started to cry. "You're a bad girl. You're too big to do that." "It's OK. Sometimes we forget to go to the bathroom. You can go change."

Children Misbehave When They Lack Confidence

Children need feelings of confidence

A child needs to think that he is able to do things, that he is a capable person. A child who is confident of his abilities is willing to try new things. He will approach school and other situations with confidence.

Some misbehavior is caused by feelings of inadequacy. A child who thinks, "I can't do anything," may cover up his lack of confidence in himself by bragging, boasting, and fighting.

Do they sound as if they love their child? Ask yourself, "Would a stranger know that I love my child by the things I say and the words I use?" Children react to approval, encouragement, and kind words like a flower to the sun. They turn toward the source of warmth and they blossom.
Situation

Peter spills the garbage he's emptying.

Johnny cries in frustration.

Willie cries because he can't get a wagon wheel on his trike.

Belittling

"Can't you ever do anything right?"

"If you'd just listen to me, that wouldn't happen."

"I told you it wouldn't work."

Helpful

"That's a hard job. Next time carry it this way and then it won't spill."

"You need to go slowly and do this first and then it will work."

"Let's see if we can figure it out."

Children Misbehave When They Feel Unloved

Wise discipline is based on a loving relationship. Children want to please the people they love. Without a loving relationship, they have no reason to want to learn to behave in an acceptable way—unless to avoid punishment.

A child may misbehave if he feels unloved. It is not enough that a parent love the child, it is necessary that the child know he is loved. Parents need to give children signs of love they can understand, like "warm fuzzies."

"Warm fuzzies" are pats, hugs, smiles, and kind words—whatever makes a child feel good and shows that you love him. If a child feels loved, he is more likely to behave well and to be a delight to have around. If a child doesn't feel loved, he thinks, "I'm no good; nobody loves me; I can't do anything right." And that is the way he behaves.

CHILDREN NEED LOVE

You love your child, but does he know it?

Love is not love unless you show it.
WHY CHILDREN MISBEHAVE

To Discipline Effectively,
Think About These Things:

1. There is usually a reason for children's misbehavior. We can deal with misbehavior better if we try to understand what is causing it.

2. If children misbehave for health reasons—fatigue, lack of vigorous physical activity, etc.—try changing the child's routine so that he develops good health habits.

3. If we expect children to behave like adults, we are doomed to disappointment. Love them like they are, noisy, dirty hands and all. Realize that they are children for a very short time.

4. If your child's misbehavior results from a lack of confidence, try using more encouraging words rather than "put-downs."

5. Separate the child's behavior from him as a person. Let him know that he is accepted even when his behavior is not acceptable.

6. Children need extra attention when they are upset by change.

7. Children react to encouragement, approval, and kind words just like adults. They will keep up behavior which brings kind words.

8. Children who feel loved will want to act the way their parents expect them to act.
SEE HOW MUCH YOU HAVE LEARNED!

1. A "warm fuzzy" is a caterpillar warmed by the sun.  

   True  False

2. Children will be more likely to repeat behavior which has been rewarded with kind words.  

   True  False

3. A healthy child who feels well is easier to get along with than a child who doesn't feel well.  

   True  False

4. It takes children a long time--many years--to learn to behave like we want them to.  

   True  False

5. Parents don't love children when they misbehave.  

   True  False

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE---


PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. Place a check every time you give your child one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Week</th>
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<th>Second Week</th>
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<th>Third Week</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
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<td>A hug</td>
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<td>A kiss</td>
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<td>A smile</td>
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<td>The magic words,</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I love you&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time to play</td>
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<td>&quot;Please&quot;</td>
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</table>

2. List other things you did which showed your child that you love him, such as cooking something he liked or reading him a story.

3. Review your child's health routines.

   Is he getting enough sleep?  (Or is he staying up too late watching TV?)  
   Yes  No

   Does he need a rest time during the day?  (He may need a quiet time alone after lunch if he doesn't take a nap).  
   Yes  No

   Does he get an annual check-up from the doctor?  
   Yes  No

   Does he get enough exercise?  (Active play out-of-doors every day is a "must").  
   Yes  No

   Does he eat healthy foods?  (Perhaps he dulls his appetite with junk food between meals!)  
   Yes  No

4. Try to go one week without criticizing your child.  Try to make all corrections in a positive way, using a calm tone of voice.
A RECORD OF MY DISCIPLINE PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTS*

Complete one week after studying Lesson 3.
Check the blanks that apply to you.

1. The way I usually discipline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yell and scream</th>
<th>Isolate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain reasons calmly</td>
<td>Spank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove privileges</td>
<td>Let the child suffer the consequences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shame my child</td>
<td>Threaten, but don't follow through</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show disapproval</td>
<td>Distract</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignore misbehavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scold</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. During the past week, I:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acted calmly</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>About the same</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acted firmly and kindly</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Used kind words, not unkind words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Let the child learn from the consequences</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. The atmosphere in our home has changed to one of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friendliness</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>About the same</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
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<td>Understanding</td>
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<td>Confusion</td>
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<td>Fun</td>
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<td>Hostility</td>
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<td>Tension</td>
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</table>
