

Positive Discipline: A Guide for Parents



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

Children's
Hospitals and Clinics
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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Discipline	5
Discipline Is Teaching	
Babies (Birth to 18 months).....	9
Development and Discipline	
Gaining Confidence as a Parent	
When Babies Cry	
Helping Children Sleep	
Toddlers (18 months to 3 years)	17
Development and Discipline	
Getting Into Everything	
When Toddlers Should Not Touch	
Tantrums	
They Think They're in Charge	
Biting	
Toilet Teaching	
Sharing	
Preferring One Parent	
Making a Mess	
They Can't Sit Still	
Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)	31
Development and Discipline	
Bedtime Battles	
The Picky Eater	
Power Struggles	
Wetting the Bed	
Whining	
Grade School (5 to 9 years).....	41
Development and Discipline	
When Kids Break Rules	
Lying	
Sibling Battles	
Bad Language	
Talking Back	
About Spanking	48
Anger.....	52
Time Out	54
Resources for Parents.....	57
Credits	58

Dear Parents:

Being a parent is the most important job you will ever have! Parenting will affect not only your child, but also you as a person. Parenting comes with many rewards and challenges. You have the opportunity to influence the type of person your child becomes, receive many smiles and hugs and kisses, laugh often, play, and watch your child grow and develop. You also often will wonder if you said and did the right thing, or could have done things better.

Parents love their children and want the best for them. However, children don't come with directions and don't always respond or behave the way you want them to. Sometimes, just when you think you have figured things out, your child moves into a new stage of development and what worked before doesn't work anymore. The new stage brings you new joys and challenges.

Positive Discipline: A Guide for Parents gives you information and tools to help with common parenting experiences you may have from the time your child is an infant through the early grade school years.

The strategies in this booklet promote positive development in children and positive parent-child relationships. We do not recommend spanking. Spanking does not promote positive development

and can lead to other problems. Children who are guided by methods other than spanking generally have better mental health, feel better about themselves, and are less stressed. Good health is what we are trying to achieve. There are many strategies other than spanking that promote positive development, and help a child learn self-control, what is expected, and how to behave appropriately.

There are many other resources in your community and neighborhood to help you with positive discipline—your child’s doctor and teacher, the public health nurse, the Cooperative Extension office, and the early childhood and family educator through the public school to name a few.

Parenting is a learned experience. People get their ideas on how to parent from how they were raised, books, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, television, workshops, doctors and other family professionals, friends, and family members. As a parent, your job is to sift through this information and find strategies and supports that will work best for you and your child. The goal is to become the best parent you can be.

Enjoy parenthood!

Discipline

Discipline Is Teaching

The word discipline comes from a Latin word that means “to teach.” As a parent, you are a teacher. The way you discipline your children will help them learn.

Nurturing your child

Nurturing is where you need to put most of your effort. Children learn best when they know they are loved and supported. Here are some ideas:

- Love your children, no matter what they do.
- Listen to your children.
- When they are being good, tell them.
- Expect the best from your children.
- Make sure they are safe—physically and emotionally.
- Be a good role model.

Guiding your child

Children need you to help them understand what kinds of behaviors you expect from them and what rules you expect them to follow. They also need help from you to manage their feelings, understand responsibility, and learn how to control themselves. Your child needs to know what will happen if rules are broken. Here are some ideas:

- Help your child learn to solve problems.
- Show your child how to do things.

Discipline is teaching

Discipline helps children understand what you expect, how to behave, and what happens when they misbehave. Discipline helps children be in control of their own behavior.



- Take your child away from situations your child can't handle.
- Help your child learn how to calm down.
- Prepare your child for difficult situations.
- Say "yes" when you can and "no" when you need to.
- Give your child a chance to do it the right way.

Responding to your child's misbehavior

When children misbehave, there is usually a reason. They may be tired, hungry, frustrated, seeking attention, or wanting control. If you can figure out what is causing the misbehavior, you will have more success responding to the misbehavior and preventing the behavior in the future. For example, if you observe your seven-year old always having meltdowns when getting home from school, then you need to think about what might be causing the meltdowns. Perhaps your child is tired and hungry at the end of the day, or something was frustrating at school. Talk to the teachers to see how school is going. Try to have a nutritious snack and provide some quiet time reading or playing a game to help your child make the transition from school to home.

Other strategies to consider:

- Take away a privilege and give the child a chore to do.
- Firmly tell your child that what he or she did was not appropriate.
- If something is damaged, expect the child to fix it, make a new one, or help pay for a new one.
- Use a "time out."
- Let children safely experience the consequences of their actions.

PARENT QUESTION

What does “consequence” mean?

A consequence is a result of something a person does. When children misbehave, parents need to respond in a way that helps them learn about the effects of their behavior and how to plan differently for the next time.

Consequences should give a child the chance to be forgiven. A consequence is more effective than pain, fear, shame, or humiliation. Parents must decide whether to respond with a logical or a natural consequence. An example of a logical consequence: a child colors on the wall—the child helps clean the wall. An example of a natural consequence: a child refuses to eat dinner—the child will be hungry later.

Babies

Birth to 18 months



Development and Discipline

Infants come into the world ready to learn and grow.

- Babies learn through all their senses. They often use their mouths to explore objects around them.
- Babies learn to talk by listening and responding to the people in their lives.
- Babies use crying to tell you something is bothering them.
- Babies need to be loved, safe, and secure.

Parents must understand that babies are exploring their world and learning how others respond to them. Babies do not misbehave on purpose—they are simply curious!

PARENT QUESTION

What should I know about discipline for my baby?

- Give your baby lots of love. Remember, you can't spoil a child with too much love.
- Never spank or shake your baby.
- Move your baby when he or she gets into things that are not okay.
- Put unsafe things out of your baby's reach.
- If your infant wants something not good for babies, offer something that is okay.
- Try to have a regular routine to your baby's day, especially for eating and sleeping.
- When you get tired or things become too much for you, find a way to take a break.

Gaining Confidence as a Parent

It will take time to feel comfortable with your new baby. You and your baby need to know each other. Every baby is different. It takes time to learn your baby's eating, sleeping, and attention needs. Keep your days as simple as possible. Try to talk regularly with a friend, family member, or another adult who cares. If you're feeling really low, unsure, or frustrated, call your baby's doctor, or call one of the numbers listed at the back of this booklet.

"I felt pretty good about being a parent while I was in the hospital with my newborn, but once I got home, I lost my confidence."



"Sometimes it seems like all my baby does is cry. If I pick my baby up, will I spoil my baby?"

PARENT QUESTION

What is "attachment?"

Attachment is the strong feeling parents and children have for each other. Most children who develop strong and secure attachments with their parents and other important adults in their lives grow up to be confident and caring.

When Babies Cry

Crying is your baby's way of talking to you. Your baby will cry because of:

- Hunger
- Tiredness
- Illness
- Loneliness
- Wet diaper
- Being overwhelmed with people
- Stomach gas
- Being too hot or too cold
- Needing your love and attention

PARENT TIP

You cannot spoil a baby. A baby often cries less when picked up and comforted. You cannot hold and comfort a baby too much. Your baby is learning to trust you and that you will be there when needed. With practice you'll get to know what your baby's cries are telling you.



"There are times when my baby cries really hard. And when the cries go on for a long time, it can make me really tense and frustrated."

When a baby cries and cries, you need to do your best to stay calm. First, try to figure out why your baby is crying.

- Try "swaddling" your baby by wrapping your baby snugly in a blanket and holding your baby close.

Take a few minutes to relax. Put your baby in a safe place, like a crib with the side up. Then go someplace in the house where you can't hear the crying, until you feel calmer.

- Put your baby in a stroller and go for a walk.
- Take your baby for a ride in the car.
- Try "wearing" your baby in a sling or baby carrier. Your body motion and heartbeat can feel calming to a baby.
- Try rocking your baby or singing softly.
- Call a friend.

Often, when you can figure out the problem and what will help, crying will stop.

Even though you may feel like shaking or spanking your baby, this is **never** okay. Babies' bodies are very fragile. Shaking or spanking can hurt your baby badly and even cause death.



Is my baby sleeping through the night YET?

"Everybody asks me if my baby is sleeping through the night. I feel like something is wrong when I say 'no.'"

PARENT QUESTION

What is "colic" and what can I do?

No one knows what causes colic. Colic usually starts when babies are three weeks old and may continue until they are three months old. Most babies outgrow colic. Babies with colic cry loudly, and often cry at the same time each day. When your baby is crying like this, try to stay calm. Try some of the ideas given in this booklet to comfort your baby. Take a break, call a friend, talk to your baby's doctor, or call one of the numbers listed at the back of this book.

Helping Children Sleep

Newborns:

Most newborns do not sleep through the night. Some babies don't sleep through the night consistently until they are six to nine months old. Your newborn baby may need to be fed, changed, and comforted often. Enjoy this quiet time with your new baby. Your baby is not trying to make your life difficult.

At 3 months:

Babies are able to entertain themselves by gazing at toys over the crib or listening to rattles. They are able to expand time between feedings to three or four hours and extend night sleep for longer periods. To help your baby sleep longer periods at night:

- Make sure your baby is getting enough to eat during the day.
- Try to increase the last feeding before bed.

Keep middle-of-the-night attention short. Just feed your baby or change the diaper if it is soiled or very wet.

PARENT QUESTION

Will feeding my baby cereal at bedtime encourage sleeping through the night?

No. Most babies cannot digest cereal until they are four to six months old.

PARENT TIP

Back to sleep

Putting babies to sleep on their backs reduces the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Make sure the mattress is firm and fits the crib tightly. Remove quilts, pillows, and soft toys from the crib. Use a sleeper instead of covering your baby with a blanket. Do not place your baby on a waterbed, sofa, soft mattress, pillow, or other soft surface to sleep.

At 7-8 months:

At seven to eight months, babies have begun to soothe themselves when they are distressed and settle themselves when they are tired. However, they will continue to work on these accomplishments. If they are never allowed to soothe or settle themselves on their own, they likely will become dependent upon others to get to sleep.

Help your baby find a way to get comfortable and fall back to sleep without your help. You might want to try one of the following.

- Stand by your baby's crib. You don't need to pick up your baby.
- Gently pat your baby.
- Talk to your baby. The sound of your voice will let your baby know everything is okay and it's time to sleep.
- Have a bedtime routine including having a quiet bath, reading a picture book, dimming the lights, rocking, or singing.
- Give hugs and kisses as a major part of the bedtime routine.

If you need more ideas, call your child's doctor or call one of the numbers at the back of this booklet.

PARENT TIP

Stranger anxiety

When they are seven to eight months old, many babies start to go through a period where they only want to be around people they know well. Understand your baby's need to be with trusted people. Give your baby time to get used to new people—let your child feel in control. Do not force your baby to be held by someone who is not welcomed by the baby. Show your baby that you are a safe haven by understanding the baby's fears.

Toddlers

18 months to 3 years



Development and Discipline

Toddlers are becoming independent and learning about the world they live in.

- Toddlers need to explore, run, climb, taste, and touch. They may get upset when you try to stop them.
- Toddlers know what they want and will tell you. They can get frustrated when you don't understand their words.
- Toddlers watch what others do and copy them. They will do what they see you, other family members, and characters from television or movies do.
- Toddlers have minds of their own, but they need you to help them when they get frustrated and to protect them from danger.
- Disciplining toddlers means gradually teaching them to control their impulses to touch, taste, jump, run, and climb.

PARENT QUESTION

What works to discipline my toddler?

- Give your toddler lots of love.
- Find things to say “yes” to.
- Let your child know you’re pleased with good behavior.
- Never spank or shake your toddler.
- Put unsafe things out of your child’s reach.
- When toddlers want something they can’t have, sympathize with their disappointment or frustration and interest them in something they can have.
- Try to have a regular routine to your day.
- Parents need to be present at all times to serve as “brakes” for exploring toddlers.
- When you get tired or things become too much for you, give yourself a break from parenting.
- Ask yourself whether your child is misbehaving, or just trying to learn something.
- If you have made a “bad call” about your child’s behavior, admit your mistake and apologize.
- Act the way you want your child to act. If you yell, so will your child.
- Make sure you have your child’s attention; be specific and direct when you ask your child to do something.
- Be realistic about what your toddler can do independently.

“Now that my baby is on the move, how do I teach him not to touch everything?”



Getting Into Everything

Toddlers need you to be with them at all times. You've probably noticed toddlers get into everything. It is the job of toddlers to explore their world. This is how children learn.

Here are some ways to make your home a safe place for your child:

- Put breakable or unsafe items, including electric cords, out of your child's reach.
- Use safety covers on electric outlets.
- Put safety locks on cupboards and drawers.
- Use safety gates on stairs and rooms that aren't safe.
- Push chairs under tables.
- When you take something unsafe away, you can expect your child to be upset. Try offering a safe toy to divert attention.

PARENT QUESTION

Why childproof?

- It's important to make sure that anywhere toddlers go is safe. Toddlers need to explore everything around them. They will touch, taste, roll, poke, and examine all they can see. This is how toddlers learn. Help them explore safely by putting things they shouldn't have out of reach. You can begin teaching older toddlers not to touch certain things.

So what about television?

- Toddlers need to actively explore their environment in order to grow and develop. Children under the age of two years should not spend time watching television. Television is a passive activity. TV does not engage children in an active process of learning, moving, or playing with others. TV is a powerful attraction and parents need to work hard to limit TV time. Find other activities to do with your child such as reading, art projects, or playing outside.



*"When my child
heads for the hot
stove, I yell
'No, no, no!'"*

When Toddlers Should Not Touch

Children are curious and want to see what work you are doing at the stove. Instead of slapping hands or yelling, pull your child away and say “No, the stove is hot and will hurt you.”. Children learn when you tell them over and over that things are unsafe.

While you wait for learning to take place:

- Remove the child from the unsafe place or item.
- Try to interest the child in something else, such as plastic bowls, pan lids, or wooden spoons.

Have a safe place for your toddler to play while you’re in the kitchen.

PARENT TIP

“Me do it!”

If you have a toddler, you’ve heard this a lot. Usually, “me do it” isn’t a problem unless you’re in a hurry. Encourage your child to be independent. Give chances to put on clothes, brush teeth, and climb into car seats. You will need to allow extra time while your child learns to do these tasks, but the more tries, the sooner your child will be able to do these things and save you time later.

Tantrums

Tantrums usually result when a child is tired, hungry, angry, or frustrated. Your toddler may clench her fists, shut her eyes, and scream. He may kick, throwing himself to the floor, and make a real scene.

Try to prevent tantrums from happening. Make sure your child gets enough sleep. Avoid taking your child someplace when the child is hungry or tired. If you don't have a choice, bring along healthy snacks, books, favorite toys, or crayons and paper to keep your child from becoming bored and upset.

Why are tantrums so common at this age?

- Toddlers are curious. They don't understand why they can't always touch, taste, and explore everything around them.
- Toddlers usually can't tell you in words what they want. This can make them angry.
- When toddlers are hungry, tired, hot, uncomfortable, or want attention, they often react with strong emotions.

Tantrums are normal. Let your child have the tantrum, as long as she is safe and no one else is being hurt. Let your child know you understand he is upset.

- When you are at home, stay calm and ignore the tantrum.
- When you are in a public place, stay calm and remove the child. Go to a quiet place until your child can calm down.
- Some children have trouble calming down. Hold your child gently, talk softly, and explain that everything will be okay.

No matter where you are, the tantrum will end sooner if you respond calmly.

When a child has a tantrum in a public place, you may be tempted to avoid a scene by giving your child what he or she wants. When parents do this, children learn that they can get what they want if they kick and scream enough, and you will have more tantrums in the future.

PARENT TIP

Try distraction

A way to guide a small child's behavior is to direct the child's interest somewhere else. If your child wants something you don't want the child to have, give a safe toy to play with. If your child moves toward an open stairway, take your child to a different part of the room.

They Think They're in Charge!

By age two, children start to know they can do some things on their own. They are excited about their new skills and want to use them! Here are some ways to help you and your toddler practice new skills:

- Give choices when you can. Ask, "Do you want to ride in the shopping cart today or do you want to walk?"
- Plan extra time so your child can do things independently. This will result in less stress for you and your child.
- Allow child to get in the car seat alone. Ask if help is needed.
- Stick to important rules. Then your child will be safe and know what to expect. For example, children have to ride in the car seat; it isn't a choice.

PARENT TIP

Avoid power struggles – no one wins

Your toddler is trying to test out new skills and wants control. Parents are in a hurry and also want control. Parents need to have patience with toddlers and create ways for them to have control so they can learn about themselves and how they influence their surroundings. However, there are times when you need to say "no" for your child's safety such as, "You have to hold my hand when we cross the street."

"My sweet little baby has turned into a bossy child, refusing to do anything I say. The reply to 'Please sit in the shopping cart (or car seat).' is always 'No!'"

*"I don't know
what to do.
The other day
my toddler bit
another child."*

Biting!

It is very common for toddlers to bite, kick, and hit other children. Toddlers get excited and overstimulated and biting can be the result. When parents react excitedly, a child may learn to use biting to get attention.

Here are some ways to prevent biting:

- Watch your child and look for signs of over stimulation. Remove your child from the situation and help the child calm down.
- Toddlers get angry and frustrated when they are hungry and tired. If this happens often, try to change the child's eating and sleeping schedule, or keep your child away from other children during these times.
- Comfort the child who has been bitten.
- Talk with others who take care of your child about other ideas and suggestions.
- Try to learn what prompted the biting. Young children have few skills to solve problems with other children.

If your child bites, tell the child firmly that biting isn't okay and take your child away from the other children. Help your child to think about how the other child feels and to consider ways to say "sorry." Never bite your child back. This does not teach a child to stop biting and it may make the biting worse.

Toilet Teaching

You can encourage toilet teaching, but don't rush it. Often parents are ready for toilet teaching before their child is. Your child may be ready to start toilet teaching when:

- Your child tells you, "I need to go to the bathroom."
- Your child tells you about a wet or soiled diaper.

Most children do not understand their "need to go" until they are three years old. A two-year-old may start toilet teaching, but may not be fully trained until age three or even older. Do not punish or shame a child for wetting or soiling diapers or underwear. Doing so can make the child feel bad about something that cannot be controlled, and may make toilet teaching take longer.

PARENT TIP

Staying dry

- Usually around age two, a child can start to learn about toileting.
- By age three-and-a-half many, but not all, children are able to stay dry while awake.
- By age five many, but not all, children stay dry at nap time and through the night.

"I worry that I should be doing more to help toilet train my child."

"I am so tired of trying to get my two-year-old to share."

"My child won't allow anyone but me to help."

Sharing

Sharing is not something most two-year-olds understand. Your child won't begin to understand sharing until three or four years of age. The more you push sharing at age two, the more your child may refuse and the more frustrated you may become. Here's what you can do:

- Praise your child for sharing.
- Show how to share by sharing some of your things with your child.
- When children are playing together, make sure there are plenty of toys for all the children to use.

Your child will begin to catch on that sharing is a good thing.

Preferring One Parent

It is normal for toddlers to go through a stage when they prefer one parent over the other parent. However, a parent may find it stressful to be the only one allowed to do things for the child, such as put on shoes, get food, or get ready for bed. Try not to make it a big issue or take this behavior personally. Continue with both parents interacting positively with the child and with the help of the "preferred" parent, the behavior will soon change.



Making a Mess

Toddlers need constant supervision. Toddlers want to touch, taste, see, and explore everything. This is how toddlers learn about their world. Try to keep messy items out of reach. Give toddlers safe places to explore.

- Toddlers don't make messes to make you angry. They make messes because they are learning how things work.
- Don't ignore the mess your child made. This is the perfect chance to teach about cleaning up messes. Show your child how to help you clean up.

PARENT TIP

Keeping track of your toddler

It's important to always know where your toddlers are and what they are doing. A toddler's job is to explore. Your job is to make sure your child is safe. Keep a constant eye on your toddler and put things you don't want your child to have out of reach.

"The other day my 2 1/2-year-old poured chocolate syrup all over the living room carpet. I was so angry and I didn't know what to do!"

"Why can't my two-year-old ever sit still and be quiet?"

My Toddler Can't Sit Still

Toddlers aren't supposed to sit still or be quiet for very long! Your toddler is curious, needs to move, and loves to run and jump! Toddlers enjoy talking, sometimes loudly, to you and others.

There are times when you do need your child to sit still and be quiet. Here are some things you can try:

- Bring small toys or picture books to give your child something okay to do.
- Bring a snack that isn't too messy, such as crackers, fruit, or cheese.
- Give your child as much attention as you can.
- Point out objects in the room to divert your child's interest.
- Play patty cake or other games.
- Make sure there is active time before your child must sit still.
- In some situations, you and your child can move to a place where you won't disturb others.

If you have other questions about your child's development at this age, talk to your child's doctor or call one of the numbers at the back of this booklet.



Preschool

3 to 5 years

Development and Discipline

Preschool-age children live in the present. They are excited about everything they can do and what they know. Usually they like being with other children, pretending, and trying to do what adults and older siblings do. At the same time, they want to be your baby.

- Preschoolers may insist on doing things for themselves, even when they don't know how.
- Preschoolers will test the rules and argue about rules they don't agree with.
- Preschoolers have great imaginations! They tell creative stories and may be afraid of the dark, animals, monsters, and more.
- Preschoolers enjoy being in charge and telling others what to do.
- Preschoolers watch you closely. Your actions teach them far more than your words.
- Preschoolers want to please you.
- Preschoolers need your love.

PARENT QUESTION

What are the best ways to discipline my preschooler?

- Give your child lots of love.
- Put unsafe things out of your child's reach.
- Try to have a regular routine to your day.
- Ask yourself: Is my child misbehaving or just trying to learn something?
- Act the way you want your child to act.
- Be specific and direct when you ask your child to do something.
- Be realistic about what your child can do.
- Spend time with your child; especially play time where your child gets to be in charge.
- Catch your child being good, and let your child know you noticed.
- Prepare your child for occasions that may be upsetting.
- When your child is having a difficult time, help your child take a break or a "time out."
- Explain the rules and what will happen if the rules are broken.
- Be consistent. Follow through with what you say.

PARENT TIP

Be prepared for difficult situations

If you dread taking your preschooler to the clinic, grocery store, or other places where your child might misbehave, here are some things to try:

- Before you go, talk to your child about the behavior you expect. For example, say “You must stay in the grocery cart, and not ask for things in the store.”.
- Try not to take your child places when you know your child will be tired or hungry.
- Bring along snacks and toys.
- If your child has trouble when you’re in the store or clinic, give a reminder about the rules. Ask your child to say what the rules are.
- Let your preschooler know how proud you are when you see good behavior.

“Bedtime is so stressful at my house. By the time I get my children to bed, I’m too tired to do anything else.”

Bedtime Battles

One of the best things you can do for yourself and your child is to set a bedtime routine.

- Decide what time your child should go to bed.
- Start your routine about 30 minutes to an hour before bedtime.
- The child’s routine may include a bath, a light snack, brushing teeth, and story time. This is not a good time to start playful wrestling or action games.
- Try to stick to your routine every night.

PARENT TIP

Is your child afraid of the dark?

Talk with your children about their fears. Children's fears are real. Do not make fun of them or say they aren't real. Place a night light or small lamp in the room, or leave a hallway light on until your child falls asleep. Some children feel more secure with a special blanket or stuffed animal. Helping your child learn to deal with fear of the dark also may help your child deal with other fears.

If you are trying a bedtime routine for the first time, you can expect it won't work perfectly until the habits are firmly set.

- Your child may keep coming out of the room. Be firm and gently lead your child back to bed. You may need to do this several times.
- Most children go through a stage where they are afraid of the dark. Understand that your child's fear is real, provide comfort, and find ways to overcome it.
- Use a night light or small lamp, or leave a light on in the hallway.
- Some children need more time to fall asleep. Allow your child to look at a book, or talk to stuffed animals.
- Your child needs to get comfortable enough to fall asleep. This may be different for every child. Try to find ways to help your child relax. Have your child breathe slowly, sing a quiet song, or hold a stuffed animal.
- Sometimes shortening the afternoon nap or making sure a child doesn't nap in the late afternoon will help your child to be ready for sleep at bedtime.



"No matter how much I try, my four-year-old won't eat most of the things I put on the plate. I don't want to cook two different meals."

The Picky Eater

To avoid picky eating and to create pleasant mealtimes, keep in mind that a parent's job is to provide a variety of healthy food choices and a child's job is to choose what and how much to eat. Make family meals a time for family talk, not for punishment or pressure.

- Offer your child a variety of healthy foods that are colorful and have different textures.
- If your child doesn't like a new food, put a small amount on the plate. Ask your child to try one or two bites. Don't force eating.
- Don't insist children eat everything on their plates. This can lead to unhealthy eating behaviors.
- Some children don't like different foods mixed together. Your child may be willing to eat a serving of rice and a serving of corn, but won't eat them mixed together.
- Some children may say they are too full to eat much of their meal, but they will have plenty of room for dessert. To avoid using dessert as a reward, but rather as the last part of a meal, let your child know that it is okay to leave the table if he or she is done eating. Explain that dessert comes when everyone is ready. Or make sure dessert is a healthy food. Choices could be: a sliced apple with peanut butter or yogurt with granola.
- Remember, tastes change. One day your child will surprise you and like the food refused before.

PARENT TIP

Helping in the kitchen

Your preschool child is at a good age to start helping in the kitchen. Let your child help plan and fix meals. Preschoolers love to stir and mix things in a bowl. They can help clean and set the table (for example, place napkins and plastic cups on the table). Help your children learn to choose from a variety of healthy foods. They will learn a lot, and feel their choices are important.

PARENT QUESTION

What kind of snacks are healthy?

Instead of soda pop, mix equal parts 100% fruit juice and sparkling water. Instead of candy, offer your child small carrots, celery and peanut butter, banana chunks, apple slices, raisins, or cut grapes. Instead of chips, give cheese or crackers. For a cool treat, freeze 100% fruit juice in a paper cup with a straw in the middle to make a popsicle.

Here are some more ideas:

- Be realistic about how much food you or your child puts on the plate. Children do not need adult-size helpings of food.
- A child's taste buds are much more sensitive than yours. Children typically do not like strong-tasting foods, such as onions, or foods that are not a familiar color or texture.
- Serving foods warm versus hot brings out flavor the best and is safest for your child's sensitive tongue and skin.

- It is normal for children to be hungry one day and eat very little the next.
- Children have smaller stomachs than adults. They need less food at one time, and need to eat more often during the day.
- Help your child get needed nutrients by providing healthy snacks throughout the day. Offer your child water throughout the day instead of always offering milk, fruit juices, or other beverages.
- If you are concerned about your child's eating, talk to your child's doctor.

PARENT TIP

Dinner time messes

Your child is learning how to use utensils, drink from a cup, and sit during mealtime. You can keep some mealtime accidents from happening. Use child-size cups, utensils, and plates. Use lids on cups and bowls or plates with high sides. Booster seats help children sit at a better height for eating. Make sure the booster seat is strapped to the chair, so it doesn't slip.

Power Struggles

Anger and frustration are often a parent's first response when a child refuses to do something. When you get angry, so will your child. First, ask yourself if it's an important struggle. If it's not, then let it go your child's way. If it is important, walk away until your child calms down. Then, proceed with your request. If your child argues, walk away again. Make it clear that there is not a choice and you will have to give a consequence if your child doesn't change the behavior. To avoid power struggles in the first place, offer your child a choice. At bath time, rather than ask, "Are you ready for your bath?," say, "It's bath time. Do you want bubbles or plain water?"

Use simple words when you talk to your child. Be direct and specific about what you want done. Instead of saying, "Clean up this mess.," say, "I want you to pick up your blocks and put them in the toy box."

Sometimes it is better to act than to talk. You've asked your child several times to sit and eat dinner, but your child continues to dance around the kitchen. Stop talking and calmly remove the child's plate from the table. If the child wants to eat, your child can have the food back when sitting down on the chair ready to eat. In most cases, the child will return to sit down and eat.

Sometimes your child does annoying things to get your attention. If you don't react, chances are the behavior will stop. Save your energy for the bigger issues.

*"I say 'no,'
my child says
'yes.' Why does
everything have
to be such a
battle?"*

"I thought my child would have stopped wetting the bed by now!"

PARENT TIP

Understanding your child's feelings

When your child gets frustrated, angry, or sad, tell your child you understand. Say "I can see you're upset.". Sometimes that's all it takes to make your child feel better or calmer. Acknowledging feelings doesn't mean you are "giving in" or approving of the behavior. It helps identify the emotion.

PARENT QUESTION

What is "time out?"

Time out means taking a child away from a frustrating or stressful situation to help calm both the child and the parent. This shows children that it is okay to take a time out when you need it. See the section on "Time Out" at the back of this booklet for how to use this strategy.

Wetting the Bed

Most children are able to stay dry through the night by the time they begin kindergarten or soon after. If, by six years of age, your child doesn't stay dry continuously throughout the night, visit with your doctor. However, a child may occasionally wet the bed later due to stress. If your child is upset about wetting the bed, let your child know that growing bigger and older will help to correct the problem. Don't make a big deal of it.

In the meantime:

- Limit beverages after the evening meal.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine because they stimulate urination.
- Use disposable underwear.

- Use a waterproof mattress pad or have your child sleep on a towel that can be removed if it is wet.
- Make sure your child uses the bathroom right before bed.

Waking your child in the middle of the night for a trip to the bathroom may cause more stress than it's worth. If you are still concerned, talk to your child's doctor.

Whining

Some children whine when they want something, others whine when they are tired, hungry, or stressed. Here are some things you can do:

- When your child starts to complain and whine because something is wanted that can't be had, give a hug and say you understand the feelings of sadness or anger. Tell the child, "When you whine, no one wants to listen.". Suggest or show ways of talking that will be taken more seriously. You may need to repeat this more than once.
- If the whining continues, stay calm and leave the scene.
- It is important to not give in to whining, pouting, tantrums, hitting, or other negative behaviors. If children get what they want when they behave this way, they will continue to behave negatively.

PARENT TIP

Catch your child being good

Tell children what you like about their good behavior. Say, "I like it when you talk quietly when I am on the phone.". Praise and encouragement work very well in helping your child understand what you expect.

"What can I do with my five-year-old? All he does is whine."

Grade School

5 to 9 years



Development and Discipline

Grade school children are learning about the real world, interacting with new people and ideas, and rapidly becoming more independent.

- Being the center of attention is very important to children of this age.
- Friends are becoming important to early grade school children. They need to learn to talk with others, to understand other children's feelings, and what it means to be a friend.
- Parents continue to be very important. Your child needs you to help with the transition from home to school, and to make rules and see they are followed. Children need parents' support to try new things, and to show how to solve problems. They need parents to listen to their concerns.

PARENT QUESTION

What are the best ways to discipline my grade school child?

- Love your child, no matter what your child does.
- Be a good role model.
- Keep a regular schedule.
- Be clear about what you expect your child to do and how to do it.
- Show your child you are interested in what he or she is doing.
- Try to see your child's point of view.
- Use stories to help make your point.
- Be willing to review the rules as your child grows. Make changes when needed to accommodate your child's growing independence and abilities.
- Take away a privilege for misbehaving, or add an extra household task.
- Set up a system so your child can earn privileges.
- Expect children to help fix or pay for things they break.
- Be consistent. Follow through with what you say.
- When your child is having a difficult time, help your child take a break ("time out").
- Tell your child specifically what behavior you are disappointed with, as well as what behaviors you are proud of.

PARENT TIP

Help your children improve their ABCs by helping them get their Zs

Did you know that most grade school students need 10 hours of sleep each night? Children who are well rested are better able to pay attention in school and are more ready to learn.

When Kids Break Rules

Children go through stages when they test the rules. Your child may feel some of the old rules have become too childish.

"I don't get it. My son used to follow the rules, but now it seems like he tries to break every one of them."

- Stay calm and in control. Review the rule and why you have it. Decide if it still fits or if your child has outgrown the rule. Think about why your child might have broken the rule and if he or she knows the rule.
- If you decide to change a rule, talk with your child about how the rule should change and what will happen if the rule is broken.
- Discuss with your child about why you have the rule.
- When your child breaks a rule, don't ignore it. Respond as soon as possible. Make sure your response teaches your child why the rule is important and how to behave better in the future.

PARENT TIP

What can I do when my child breaks a rule?

Rules keep us safe, show us a way to act, and help us get along with others. When your child breaks a rule, you need to respond in a way that lets your child see why the rule is important to follow. One good way to do this is to use a consequence. For example, you have a rule that no one watches television until homework is done. Your child watches a video before doing schoolwork. The consequence for breaking the rule is no television watching for a day. When you have stated this clearly, be sure to follow through.

Lying

Children lie because they are afraid to face what they have done. They may think they will be punished, feel they've been trapped, or just think it is easier to lie. Children also go through stages where lying is more common.

- Make it clear you know your child is lying.
- Tell your child that you don't like to hear lying.
- Try to avoid putting your child in a situation where there is temptation to lie again to cover up the first lie.
- Make sure that the adults in your home do not lie. Children are more likely to do what you do than do what you say.
- Make it clear to your child that lying isn't acceptable. Praise your child for telling the truth in a difficult situation.
- Let your child know that even though you are disappointed in the behavior, you love him.

"The other day my daughter lied about taking some money out of my dresser. When I asked her about it she said it was an accident."

"I'm about ready to pull my hair out! Why can't my children get along?"

Sibling Battles

Grade school children are at the age where getting along with brothers and sisters can be difficult. You want your children to get along. You want them to appreciate and respect each other. You want peace in your house.

- If siblings are fighting, be calm and determine if anyone is hurt or if there are dangerous objects involved. If there aren't any, tell your children they need to work it out.
- Fights often occur over property and personal space. Have clear rules about what things in the house are to be shared, and what things are private. It's up to the owner to decide to share private things.
- Try not to compare your children. Treat each child as an individual.
- Give each child a chance to have your undivided attention.
- Ask your children to come up with ideas about how to get along better. However, you are the one who decides which of their ideas make sense.

Everyone in the house needs to be treated with respect and should feel safe.

PARENT TIP

Dealing with sibling rivalry

Sibling rivalry is one way children learn how to deal with conflict. If possible, let children work out the problem on their own. Step in only when the children can't seem to work things out and the conflict might get out of hand.

Bad Language

Your child will probably pick up some bad language at school or from the media. Sometimes children start using bad language to fit in.

- Let your child know that swearing or crude language is not okay at your house. Make it clear that you expect your child to obey this rule in school as well.
- Pay attention to your own language. If you swear your child will copy you.
- Never wash children's mouths out with soap or any other nasty tasting item. That behavior is disrespectful of children and teaches that parents can do bad things to children.

PARENT TIP

Find a better word

There have probably been times in your life when you stubbed a toe or hit your thumb with a hammer. Your first response may have been a "bad" word. Children have similar experiences. Help your child come up with better words to use.

"I know my child picks up a lot of bad language at school. I don't want those words used at home."

"My child has gone way beyond 'sassy.' I refuse to have a child in my house who talks back all the time!"

Talking Back

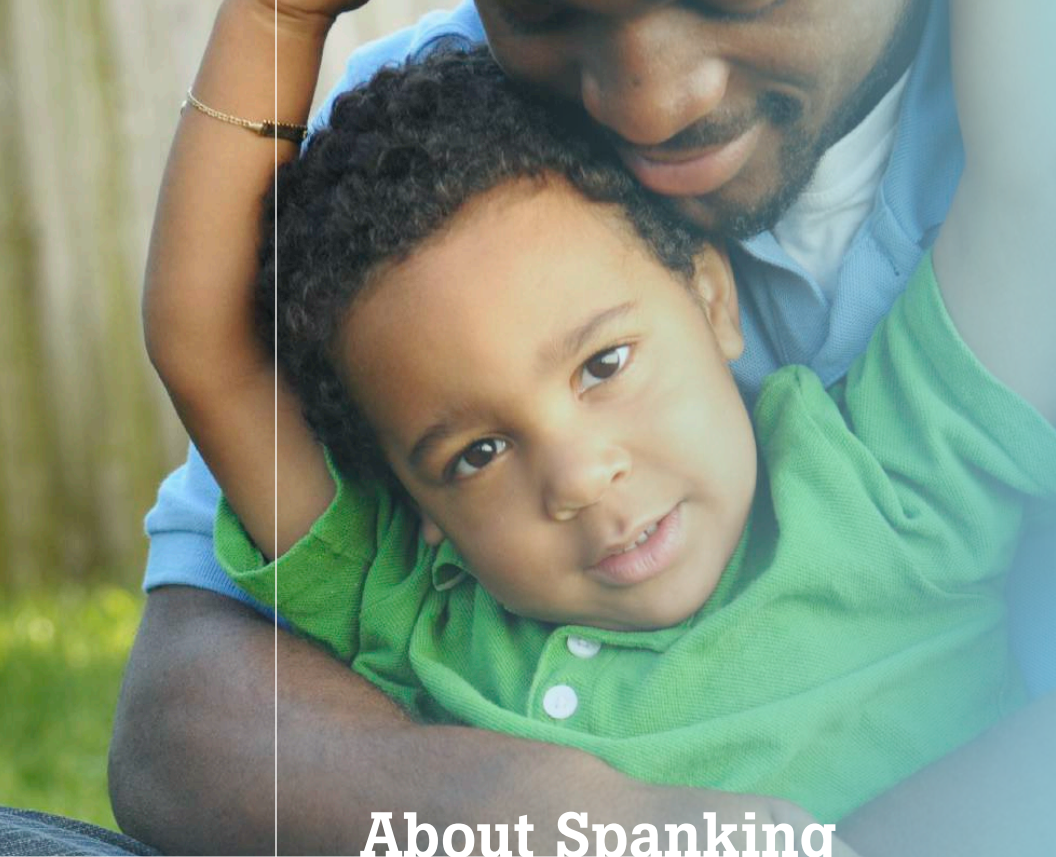
It is easy to get angry when your child doesn't show respect. You can help your child learn to not talk back and what respect means by the way you respond.

- Tell your child that you want to listen, but you will not listen until both of you have a chance to calm down.
- Apologize if you get angry and shout. This way you are teaching your child what respectful behavior is.
- When you are both calm, tell your child clearly what specific words or tone of voice you thought was disrespectful. Tell your child how this makes you feel. Tell your child what you expect in the future.
- Give your child a chance to try again. Hopefully, your child will have learned from your example and will apologize, but an apology should not be forced.

PARENT TIP

It's okay to apologize to your child

Tell your child, "I really lost my temper earlier. I'm sorry that I made you feel bad. I wasn't being respectful." None of us is perfect. This helps children learn to apologize to you and to others in their life.



About Spanking

Discipline is teaching. It is forward-looking and respectful. ***Spanking is not discipline.*** It is punishment.

Punishment is backward-looking and is not respectful to a child. Spanking shows a child that parents are bigger than they are and violence is the way to settle issues. A spanked child focuses on feeling hurt and angry and not on learning what was done that was wrong. What are some reasons parents give for spanking?

“Spanking works for me.”

Spanking gets your child’s attention and it stops the misbehavior—only at that moment. Spanking doesn’t teach children what you expect of them, or how to behave in the future. It also doesn’t teach children how to behave when their parents aren’t there to see that the rules are followed. Spanking does not create positive feelings and can discredit the parent as a model and teacher.

“If you don’t spank a child, he will be spoiled.”

Spanking does not keep children from becoming spoiled. Children who are spoiled have learned to get what they want with tears and tantrums. Parents who spoil their children often do too much for them, instead of helping them learn to do things for themselves. The best way to keep children from being spoiled is to give them love and set limits along with clear rules about behavior.

PARENT TIP

Your emotional bank account

Think of parenting as an emotional bank account with your child. Every positive thing you do—hugging, praising, encouraging, teaching a skill, and enforcing a rule—is a deposit in this account. Every negative thing you do—yelling, spanking, shaming—is a withdrawal from this account. You need to make many more deposits than withdrawals to have a good relationship with your child.

“I try not to spank, but there are times when nothing else works.”

Often parents can only think of one thing to do when a child misbehaves: spank. Parents usually spank when they are angry or frustrated. The good news is there are many other ways you can learn to respond to your child's behavior. Parents who begin using other ways to discipline their children generally find out they work better than spanking.

“Spanking is part of my culture.”

Spanking may be acceptable in particular cultures, but that does not mean that it is a good way to teach children desired behavior and how to control themselves.

“I was spanked and turned out okay.”

Most adults who were spanked as children do grow up to be okay. However, this is not because they were spanked. It is because their families also used other forms of discipline that were positive. We know from research that being spanked as a child can lead to problems such as depression, domestic violence, and chemical abuse. Most adults say they recall the times they were spanked.

PARENT TIP

Spanking has long-term effects

When you spank your child, your child learns that hitting is the way to solve problems. Your child may continue to hit others throughout life, even when taking care of elderly parents!



Anger

When your child makes you angry

Nearly every parent knows how angry you can become when a child doesn't behave. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Remember, it is your child's behavior that makes you angry, not your child.
- Spanking and other punishments will not teach your child self-control and what to do instead.
- Be sure your child is capable of doing what you expect.

PARENT TIP

We all have really stressful days

Sometimes parents may react to a child's annoying behavior in a negative way because they are tired, stressed, or angry at someone or something else. If this happens often parents need to find ways to get more sleep, eat better, or talk to a friend or professional who can help think of ways to deal with anger and children's behavior.

Four steps to control your anger

1. **Stop!**—Take a moment to cool off. Wait until you are calm before you discipline your child.
2. **Look and Listen**—What is the problem? What has caused your child to misbehave? Do you know for sure that your child did misbehave? Is your child's behavior normal for the age of your child?
3. **Think**—What do you want your child to learn? What can you do to help your child learn self-control? How do you expect your child to behave?
4. **Act**—Carry out your decision.

PARENT TIP

Ideas to help you calm down

- Count to ten very slowly. Think about the counting, or something that makes you happy, instead of your child's behavior.
- Put your hands in your pockets. This will help you from using them to threaten or hit your child.
- Close your eyes. Take a deep breath, and let it out slowly. Pretend you are releasing steam from your body.
- Get away from the situation. Go to another room or take a walk. (Do this only if it is okay for your child to be alone or if there is someone to watch your child.)
- Talk about the problem with your partner, a friend, or a relative.
- If you want support as a parent contact Circle of Parents, a program of Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota at 1-800-CHILDREN, 1-800-621-6322, or www.pcamn.org.



Time Out

More about “time out”

- “Time out” is often used when a child misbehaves. “Time out” works for both parents and children, because it helps everyone calm down.
- Do not use “time out” too often.
- “Time out” should never be used with children under the age of 3 years.
- Parents need to be calm, but firm, when they put a child in “time out.”

PARENT TIP

What is “time out?”

“Time out” means taking a child away from a frustrating or stressful situation to help the child calm down. “Time out” gives both children and parents a chance to calm down.

How to use “time out”:

- Find a “time out” spot that is comfortable and safe. It should be away from other activities and away from where your child was misbehaving.
- If your child tries to leave “time out” before getting calm, gently return the child and say, “You can return to play when you are calm and ready to behave.”
- When your child is calm, talk about why the “time out” was needed and what you expect in the future. If your child hurt another child, ask how the other child may feel. Give your child a chance to comfort the other child and offer an apology. Plan how to keep the child in control in the future. If something was knocked over, have the child pick it up. This gives your child a chance to correct the behavior.
- Be sure to praise your child when the behavior calms down and the child returns to activities without problems.

More ideas:

- Some parents choose to use a timer. Give one minute of “time out” for each year of your child’s age. For example, if your child is four years old, the “time out” would be four minutes.
- As children get older, try having them leave “time out” when they are ready. This helps a child to know when they have calmed down.
- It is okay to let your child read a book or work on a puzzle while in “time out.” Pick toys or books that help your child calm down.
- Encourage children to take a “time out” on their own when they feel the need to calm down or take a break.

PARENT TIP

Using “time out!”

“Time out” can be used to prevent misbehavior. Ask your child to take a time out as a way to calm down before a situation gets out of control. “Time out” can also be used when a child misbehaves. It gives everyone a chance to cool down. After “time out” is over, you can discuss the problem behavior with your child.

Resources for Parents

Community resources

Remember that your child's health care providers are a primary source of information about healthy parenting. Talk to them about your child's health and wellness. Your child's behavior may be a symptom of other concerns that your provider should be informed of.

Call the Parent Warmline at (612)-813-6336 with questions about your child's behavior or development. The Warmline is a free person-to-person telephone consultation service of Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota. It is staffed by professionally trained volunteers who will return your call with practical advice, encouragement, and help in connecting with other community resources. Children's Hospitals and Clinics website: www.childrensmn.org.

Visit the University of Minnesota Extension parenting website at www.parenting.umn.edu for information about practices that foster parent-child communication, nurturing and respectful discipline practices, strong parent-child relationships, and parenting skills.

Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE) offers group education and support to parents of young children in Minnesota. Look in the telephone directory for the phone number of the program in your local school district.

More resources for parents

Brazelton, T. Berry, MD and Joshua Sparrow, MD. (2003). *Discipline: The Brazelton Way*. Perseus Publishing: Jackson, TN.

Butler, S., & Kratz, D. (1999). *The Field Guide to Parenting: Comprehensive Handbook of Great Ideas, Advice, Tips and Solutions for Parenting Children Ages One to Five*. Chandler House Press: Worcester, MA.

Steinberg, Laurence (2005). *The Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting*. Simon & Schuster: New York, NY.

Minnesota Parents Know website. Minnesota Department of Education. www.MNParentsKnow.info.

Credits

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For more information on parenting, visit www.parenting.umn.edu or www.childremsmn.org.

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Positive Discipline: A Guide for Parents was developed in conjunction with Children's Hospitals and Clinics and University of Minnesota Extension. This easy-to-read booklet looks at the common parenting challenges for children, birth through early elementary years. It gives parents ways to address behavior using positive discipline techniques that really work.