

One of the hardest parts of being a parent is having to discipline your child. No child is perfect and misbehavior is inevitable, but it is so frustrating!

Try to look at this responsibility in a new way. Punishments are unavoidable, but view it as an opportunity to teach your child how to behave. Also, try to understand why your child is behaving that way in the first place. When children misbehave, they are telling you, in the only way they know how, that they are feeling discouraged, frustrated or angry. Put yourself in your child's shoes. Is he intentionally trying to act up, or just being curious? Think of times that your child has misbehaved, and look at what else is going on at the time. Are you busy on the phone or making dinner? Is your focus on a sibling or another adult? How long has it been since your child had your focus? Sometimes, when you stop and look at the big picture, it is easier to understand your child. Perhaps a slight change on your part can improve your child's focus as well!

Positive Attention

Many times, children act out because they want attention. That may not make sense to us because they are getting in trouble, but they crave attention at this age regardless of the kind. Make sure that you are praising your child for what she does well. Show her that she will receive attention for good behavior. Also, make sure that you are on the same page as your spouse when it comes to family rules. Mixed messages will only confuse your child and make it harder on everyone.

Parenting is hard work and some days go much more smoothly than others. Make a plan for when those bad days happen and stick with it. Provide a consistent environment for your child. It will help him to understand what is expected of him and what the consequences are if he misbehaves.

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Discipline



Be consistent

Consistency truly is key when it comes to discipline, and it is crucial for preschoolers. Little ones may need to hear something thirty times (sometimes more) before it starts to sink in! As hard as it is, you have to be firm on what you expect from your child. Decide what behavior you will allow (or not allow) and stick with it. Don't send mixed signals! Don't fail to set limits because you don't like to see your child frustrated. Giving in to demands just encourages children to pitch a fit the next time they don't get their way. There has to be a balance. We all need limits. The younger a child is, the more defined those limits should be. You are the one who must teach them what is acceptable and what is not. The world would be a very scary place if there were no limits.

Redirection

Preschoolers are very curious by nature. We want our children to explore and discover the world, but they have to be safe. They also have a fairly short attention span. Make sure you take away temptations to misbehave. Remove them from the area. Redirect them to a new activity and/or location. Offer them something to do that will not result in bad behavior.

Be on the same page

Make sure that everyone who is responsible for your child is on the same page as far as behavior and what is okay. If there are different rules at home than there are at grandma's house, it will be very easy for misbehaving to occur. Be a model for your

child's behavior. Show your kids what you want them to do. If they are playing too rough, show them how to play nice. Make it very clear what you expect from them. This way there is no question whether or not they understand. You must be involved in raising your children. They aren't just going to automatically know how to behave.

Consequences

There, of course, will be times that consequences are necessary. This is where parents use different techniques like warnings, time outs, or withholding privileges or treats. Different consequences will work differently on each child. You may have to discover what is effective for your child. Whatever you do, don't discipline your child out of anger. Count to ten and cool off before you act. An important tip is to praise good behavior. Acting out is a sure-fire way to get attention. Praising children when they are doing well lets them know that they don't just get attention by misbehaving. Show them that good behavior will also get them the attention that they crave.

Discipline is not about what we are doing to our kids, but rather what we are doing for them. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Give them the training they need. Make it easy for your child to do the right thing!

Deciding how to discipline your child is something that is up to every parent. However, it is also very important to learn why kids misbehave and how we can make the most out of a trying and hard situation. When dealing with preschoolers, it may be beneficial to look at discipline as an opportunity for teaching, rather than a source of punishment. Most of the time, kids aren't trying to be malicious; they are just being kids, and they don't think the same way adults do. Things that may make sense to us can be a foreign concept to them. Sometimes parents can overreact out of anger and frustration and not see the behavior for what it is...your child just being a child. You've just caught them coloring on the wall. To you, it's a horrible mess and you don't understand why they would do that. To a two-year-old, it is a masterpiece that they worked so hard on after they found some crayons! It is up to us to teach them what kind of behaviors are acceptable and which are not.

The most important thing to remember when approaching discipline is to be consistent. Decide which behavior you will allow and stick with it. These limits will be different for each family. What works for your friends, what they allow their children to do, may not be right for your family. As a parent, it is your job to set limits for your child. Everyone, regardless of age, needs limits. The younger the child, the more defined the limits need to be. Limits, within reason, provide security. Don't look at it as a restriction, but as a way to protect your curious child.