

# Behavior Management at Home



## Things that spark undesirable behavior:

- **Assuming expectations are understood:** Don't assume kids know what is expected of them — spell it out! Demands change from situation to situation and when children are unsure of what they are supposed to be doing, they're more likely to misbehave.
- **Calling things out from a distance:** Be sure to tell children important instructions face-to-face. Things yelled from a distance are less likely to be remembered and understood.
- **Transitioning without warning:** Transitions can be hard for kids, especially in the middle of something they are enjoying. Having warning gives children the chance to find a good stopping place for an activity and makes the transition less fraught.
- **Asking rapid-fire questions, or giving a series of instructions:** Delivering a series of questions or instructions at children limits the likelihood that they will hear, answer questions, remember the tasks, and do what they've been instructed to do.

## Things to bolster good behavior:



- **Be aware of the situation:** Consider and manage environmental and emotional factors — hunger, fatigue, anxiety or distractions can all make it much more difficult for children to rein in their behavior.
- **Adjust the environment:** When it's homework time, for instance, remove distractions like video screens and toys, provide a snacks, establish an organized place for kids to work and make sure to schedule some breaks — attention isn't infinite.
- **Make expectations clear:** You'll get better cooperation if both you and your child are clear on what's expected. Sit down with him and present the information verbally. Even if he "should" know what is expected, clarifying expectations at the outset of a task helps head off misunderstandings down the line.
- **Provide countdowns for transitions:** Whenever possible, prepare children for an upcoming transition. Let them know when there are, say, 10 minutes remaining before they must come to dinner or start their homework. Then, remind them, when there are say, 2 minutes, left. Just as important as issuing the countdown is actually making the transition at the stated time.
- **Let kids have a choice:** As kids grow up, it's important they have a say in their own scheduling. Giving a structured choice — "Do you want to take a shower after dinner or before?" — can help them feel empowered and encourage them to become more self-regulating.

## Consequences to AVOID

- **Giving negative attention:** Children value attention from the important adults in their life so much that any attention — positive or negative — is better than none. Negative attention, such as raising your voice or spanking — actually increases bad behavior over time. Also, responding to behaviors with criticism or yelling adversely affects children's self-esteem.

- **Delayed consequences:** The most effective consequences are immediate. Every moment that passes after a behavior, your child is less likely to link her behavior to the consequence. It becomes punishing for the sake of punishing, and it's much less likely to actually change the behavior.
- **Disproportionate consequences:** Parents understandably get very frustrated. At times, they may be so frustrated that they overreact. A huge consequence can be demoralizing for children and they may give up even trying to behave.
- **Positive consequences:** When a child dawdles instead of putting on his shoes or picking up his blocks and, in frustration, you do it for him, you're increasing the likelihood that he will dawdle again next time.

### **Consequences that are EFFECTIVE:**

- **Positive attention for positive behaviors:** Giving your child positive reinforcement for being good helps maintain the ongoing good behavior. Positive attention enhances the quality of the relationship, improves self-esteem, and feels good for everyone involved. Positive attention to brave behavior can also help attenuate anxiety, and help kids become more receptive to instructions and limit-setting.
- **Ignoring actively:** This should be used ONLY with minor misbehaviors — NOT aggression and NOT very destructive behavior. Active ignoring involves the deliberate withdrawal of attention when a child starts to misbehave — as you ignore, you wait for positive behavior to resume. You want to give positive attention as soon as the desired behavior starts. By withholding your attention until you get positive behavior you are teaching your child what behavior gets you to engage.
- **Reward menus:** Rewards are a tangible way to give children positive feedback for desired behaviors. A reward is something a child earns, an acknowledgement that she's doing something that's difficult for her. Rewards are most effective as motivators when the child can choose from a variety of things: extra time on the iPad, a special treat, etc. This offers the child agency and reduces the possibility of a reward losing its appeal over time. Rewards should be linked to specific behaviors and always delivered consistently.
- **Time outs:** Time outs are one of the most effective consequences parents can use but also one of the hardest to do correctly.
- **Be clear:** Establish which behaviors will result in time outs. When a child exhibits that behavior, make sure the corresponding time out is relatively brief and immediately follows a negative behavior.
- **Be consistent:** Randomly administering time outs when you're feeling frustrated undermines the system and makes it harder for the child to connect behaviors with consequences.
- **Set rules and follow them:** During a time out, there should be no talking to the child until you are ending the time out. Time out should end only once the child has been calm and quiet briefly so they learn to associate the end of time out with this desired behavior.
- **Return to the task:** If time out was issued for not complying with a task, once it ends the child should be instructed to complete the original task. This way, kids won't begin to see time outs as an escape strategy.