

Why Won't You Behave?

When children misbehave, there is always a reason. When there is a need for discipline, your first thought should be “Why did my child do that?” Sometimes children misbehave because they:

want (and need) attention
are curious and need to explore
are acting typical for their age
may be bored and need a change
may be tired, sick, or just not feeling well

don't understand the “rules”
have short or selective memories (forgetful)
rebel against restrictions, boundaries, & limits

are angry and want revenge
are copying behavior they see in others
want to see what they can get away with
are overwhelmed with stress
get punished unfairly and too often
are influenced by their peers
are influenced by the media, technology
have many lessons to learn

The environment we create for our children has a lot to do with how our children act. There are many things we can do as parents to help our children behave:

childproof your home (remove temptations)
offer rewards & praise for good behavior
give your child choices
set a good example

stay calm, be patient with their mistakes
be as positive as you can be
make changes in your child's life slowly
be someone they can come and talk to
set reasonable & fair rules for their misbehavior

know something about child development
use humor, be able to laugh
be prepared, think ahead to stop problems
look for the cause of your child's behavior
give reasonable warnings, follow through
give more positive attention
choose your battles carefully
limit your limits (say “yes”when you can)
give yourself time to respond to requests

There are five steps to discipline that help a child to learn to discipline himself. We usually just call this “talking and explaining”. The four steps are . . .

- #1. Tell your child what you don't want him to do (stop, don't, no, etc)
- #2. Tell your child why you don't want him to do it (because . . .)
- #3. Tell your child what he can do instead (but you can do this . . .)
- #4. Tell your child why he is allowed to do this (because)
- #5. Tell your child what the consequence is if he repeats the misbehavior

For example, “No, don't hit the cat, because you'll hurt her and she might scratch you. Pet the cat nicely, like this, because she likes this. If you hit her again, you will go in time out.”

Remember . . . **discipline is teaching and training children** . . . which means that children need to learn that all of their behaviors have either good or bad consequences. Obviously, we want children to

stop repeating the bad behavior (therefore bad consequences) and to repeat the good behavior (good consequences).

Your goal as a parent is to help your children discipline themselves. You have control over a lot of things they do when they are five years old, but not when they are 15! Eventually, it is up to them to control themselves. Eventually it will be their job to stop and think:

“If I do _____, then _____ might happen.
If I don’t want _____ to happen, I better not do _____.”

The message children need to get is: “I am responsible for what I choose to do and for what happens to me and others as a result of my decisions and actions.” To behave or misbehave is a choice. Children need to learn they have the choice to “be good”.

It is important that we teach our children that they have within themselves the capacity to solve problems. Learning how to discipline yourself means learning how to solve life’s problems. We can’t have everything and we can’t do everything. It’s best if our children learn this early.

Physical punishment is not discipline - - it does not teach children how to change their behavior, it only teaches them:

1. That they are bad kids.
2. That if you are bigger (or an adult) you can hit.
3. They only have to pay for their behavior if they get caught.
4. A quick spanking is all it takes to pay for their behavior.
5. They need to figure out a better way to get away with something so they don’t get caught the next time (this creates sneaky behavior and lying).

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