



Positive Discipline for Preschoolers

Parents want to help their children become responsible, caring and well-behaved.

Children, especially young children, want "to be good." But sometimes children have trouble doing what their parents want because they are curious and easily distracted.

Children often do things without thinking. It is natural for children to be this way. Young children see the world differently than their parents. It is a confusing place with lots to learn.

Parents can use the ideas of positive discipline to help children:

- learn to co-operate and follow rules.
- accept "No" in a way that keeps them feeling loved, competent and good about themselves.
- develop self-discipline after some time and practice.

There is not one idea that works every time or with every child. Some ideas encourage good behaviour and some ideas help children learn from their mistakes.

How to encourage good behaviour

1. Play with your child.

- Spend 15 to 30 minutes every day having fun with your child. It will bring you closer together and make your love for each other stronger. When you play together, you give your child positive attention. That makes your child feel more like cooperating.
- Let your child lead the play. This could be a time for collecting rocks, looking at a butterfly, reading a story.



2. Praise your child: "catch them being good".

- Pay attention to children when they are doing what you want. For example, say things like "I like it when you wash your hands before supper." "Good job putting away your toys."
 - Give a hug or smile at the same time you praise your child.
 - When you give children honest praise right after they do something, it helps them feel better about themselves. For example, "You are really trying hard at that."



3. Understand how your child's personality affects how your child behaves.

- A shy child will not immediately run and play in a new place or with new children. This child may need to sit with Mom or Dad for awhile before playing.
- An active child needs to move and explore. It is not fair to expect this child to stay still for more than a few moments.



4. Know what is fair to expect of your child's age and stage of development.

- If you know what children usually do at a certain stage, it helps you to know what your child can and cannot do.
- Young children don't understand time. They are more likely to cooperate if you give a warning of a change. For example, "Soon it will be time to clean up for lunch."

5. Make places child-friendly so your child can behave well.

- Plan ahead; make a space in which your child can play happily. For example, make sure you have toys for your child when you're out visiting.
- Keep messy toys like felt pens and play dough in a special area.
- Make your home safe for the child who likes to explore. If there are things you don't want your child to touch, put them away or up high.

6. Help children feel good by treating them with respect.

- Talk to your child in an encouraging, positive way.
- Look at your child while you speak and make sure your child looks back. It is important to make eye contact.
- Use short sentences and simple words. This helps your child understand what you're saying. A young child is confused by a long explanation.

- Listen carefully and help your child to talk about feelings.

For example, "You feel sad when Susan can't come to play." "You feel mad that Gurjeet took your ball."

A hug from you will often help your child handle the ups and downs of strong feelings.



7. Be a positive example for your children.

- Children learn by watching us and listening to what we say. For example, children will show their feelings the way we show our feelings. If we shout, they will shout. If we hit, they will hit. If we count to 10 and relax before we deal with a problem, they will do the same.

8. Make a few simple rules.

- If you put your demands into rules, children will often accept and follow them.
- Rules help children learn to live with others at home and in the community.
- Young children can handle only a few rules.
- Rules are made by adults and are not changed because children argue. Rules should be clear, fair and consistent. For example, "The rule is, toys away before story time." or "The rule is, no hitting."

It is hard work to be a parent. You need to give yourself time away. Maybe a friend will share baby-sitting so that you can have a few hours by yourself. If you take care of yourself, you will be able to cope better with your child.



How to respond to unwanted behaviour

1. Give your child an alternative.

- Often the problem is not *what* they are doing, but *where* or *how* they are doing it.
- Tell your child what to do instead. For example, "We draw on paper, not on the walls. Let's go find some paper and sit at the table and draw."

2. Ignore unwanted behaviour when possible.

- Our attention is powerful and can increase wanted or unwanted behaviour
- If your child is doing something you don't like, but is not hurting anyone or anything, try to ignore it. Usually your child will stop. For example, mother says "I don't listen to whiny voices. When you use your normal voice, I will listen." Then Mom turns away.
- Sometimes children will increase the behaviour for a short time until they learn that you will no longer respond in the usual way.



3. Give the child information and reasons.

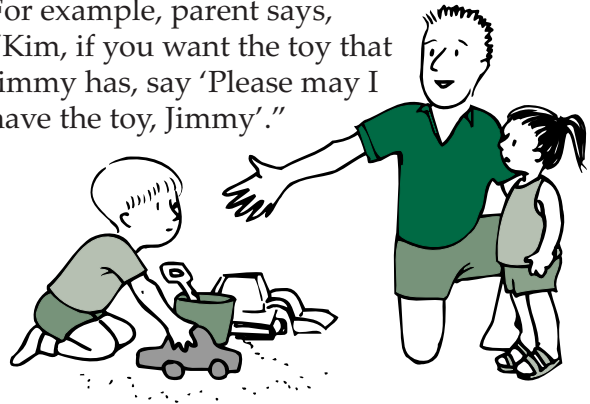
- For example, "We don't tear books. Books are special. We turn the pages slowly."

4. Let your child experience the consequences of their behaviour.

- Children can learn cause and effect.
- You need to explain consequences to your child in a calm, firm voice *before* the behaviour.
- The consequence must make sense and be related to the behaviour. It needs to be something the parent agrees with.
- It is most important that the consequence is consistent and happens every time the behaviour happens.
- For example, "If you two can't share the toy, I will have to take it away." or "You need to hold my hand when we cross the street, or I will have to carry you."

5. Show children how you want them to behave.

- For example, parent says, "Kim, if you want the toy that Jimmy has, say 'Please may I have the toy, Jimmy'."



6. Use humor or make-believe at difficult times.

- For example if your child doesn't want to go to bed, you could say, "You be a lion and I'll be a tiger. The tiger is going to race the lion up the stairs and into bed."

7. Take children away from a situation when they are having trouble controlling their behaviour.

- Give your child time to calm down. For example, "Jenny, I see that you are very angry at April. Hitting is not allowed. Come and sit on the step for a few minutes. When you are calm and ready to play together, come and join April and me."



8. Encourage your child to take part in problem-solving.

- Talk about the problem with your child and ask for ideas on how to solve it. For example, "Jack and Cheng, you have a problem here. You want to play the game of Batman together, but you both want to be Batman and wear the one Batman costume at the same time. What can we do?"

9. Try another way, if the first doesn't work.

- For example, you say "No banging on the table with your truck; the table will get scratched. Come, let's make a road for you to drive your truck." (You gave a reason and an alternative.)
- But the child goes back to banging the truck on the table, so you say "I can't let you scratch the table. If you bang on the table, the truck will have to go away for the morning." Bang bang. You take the truck away. (You have used a reasonable consequence.)



Young children want to please adults, but they will misbehave at times. It is a normal part of growing up and helps them learn about their world.

Parents need a number of ideas that will work for them and their child. Some of these are: talking to another parent, reading a book or joining a parent group. The more ideas you have, the more likely you will have one that fits your child and the particular situation.

Good books to learn more

Magic Tools for Raising Kids; by Elizabeth Crary

The Incredible Years; A Trouble-Shooting Guide for Parents of Children aged 3-8; by Carolyn Webster-Stratton

How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk; by Adele Sabar & Elaine Mazlish

www.childreseechildrenlearn.ca/index.htm

For more information, call a Nurse at your local Health Centre or Office:

.....

Other information on parenting are available at your local Community Health Office/Centre

For more information, contact:

A public health nurse at Vancouver Coastal Health
www.vch.ca

.....

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca> or email phe@m@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. **GK.600.P67**

© Vancouver Coastal Health, February 2016

The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.

www.vch.ca

