

## Children and Discipline: A Parent's Guide

Young children are not born knowing how to be well behaved. They need help and guidance from parents and other caregivers and as all parents know this is not always an easy job.

### **Know what is 'normal' behaviour for what age**

Opening kitchen cupboards and dragging every saucepan on to the kitchen floor is not naughty for a two-year-old child, for instance, it just means he or she wants to find out more about his or her surroundings. It is also very common for four-year-olds to fight with their younger brothers and sisters. Talking to other parents with children of the same age is one way of finding out what is normal at what age. Many parents are often relieved to learn that other children are behaving in much the same way.

### **Teach by example**

One way children learn is by imitating others. This is why parents need to behave in ways which set good examples. It is important that we, as parents, show respect for children. Children who are shown respect themselves will show respect to others. Although children need to know they are unique individuals, they also need to know they are part of a group too. This is why we need to teach them to share, to listen to others and to take turns.

### **Think about what you say and how you say it**

Use the same tone of voice with children as you want people to use with you. Talk respectfully to them and about them, rather than saying things like, "Ann is always so naughty," or, "Joseph is always so lazy." It is very tempting to criticise children in the hope that constantly pointing out bad behaviour will make them stop doing it. But this often has the opposite effect. Children soon learn that they more get attention by doing things parents do not like.

A better way to encourage good behaviour is to remember to praise them as often as possible, even in small ways, such as, "Ann was very helpful today. She put away all her toys." This does not mean never reprimanding them for doing something wrong. But it is important to criticise the child's behaviour rather than the child as a person. Instead of saying, "You are very naughty," say something like, "I do not like what you are doing," or, "We do not allow that behaviour."

### **Set limits**

Let children know what behaviour is allowed and what is not. Giving children clear limits makes them feel secure. Be consistent about what is and what is not acceptable.

**Accept a child's right to say, "No," sometimes** - especially about things that affect only the child such as which clothes he or she wants to wear. Remember that children need to learn that saying, "No," is sometimes a good thing. Saying, "No," to strangers, for instance, may be the safest thing to do.

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**Praise and hug children when they co-operate**, as this encourages them to behave well.

**Do not expect more from children than they are capable of doing.**

Although a five-year-old can be expected to sit still in a doctor's waiting room, you cannot expect a two-year-old to do the same. Be tolerant and keep the child's age in mind.

**Avoid hitting children** as it only teaches children that violence is the best way of maintain control and it encourages them to hit other children.

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