

Ten Things You Can Do to Help Your Child's Behavior Improve

- 1. Have a regular schedule and routine at home.** Establish regular times for going to sleep, eating meals, playing, doing chores and homework. Even children who are not talking much may be able to follow a picture schedule. When you have to change your routine, give children some advance notice and let them know what to expect. Knowing what to expect helps children feel calm and secure, which helps them behave better.
- 2. Pay attention to good behavior.** When you see your child doing something you like (sharing, playing nicely with toys, using a polite voice to ask for something), be sure to praise your child for this and let them know what you like about their behavior. Sometimes we pay a lot of attention to children when they are acting up (yelling, hitting, fighting, being rude) and forget to notice when they are acting nicely. We usually get more of what we pay attention to!
- 3. Spend some one-on-one time with your child every day.** Children often act up to get attention, so it's important to give them some positive attention on a regular basis. Small amounts of time (5-10 minutes) doing something fun with your child, like building with Legos or working a puzzle, can be very meaningful for your child. Try to let your child choose what to play with and try to follow their lead while you are playing. Decide ahead of time how much time you can spend and let your child know how long you can play. For example, tell them at the beginning that you will be having 10 minutes of "special time" with them. When the time is up, remind them that you will have special time again tomorrow.
- 4. Set a few simple rules for your household and talk to your child about the rules.** Think about the behaviors that are most important to you and tell your children what you expect them to do. Have a "family meeting" to talk about the rules and make sure your children understand. Keep the rules simple (around 6 words) and post them on your wall so that you can remind children of the rules as needed. Rules such as "We walk inside the house" or "We keep our hands to ourselves" are simple and easy for children to understand.
- 5. Have a plan for when your child misbehaves.** Decide ahead of time what you will do when your child breaks one of your rules. For example, you can decide to use time out as a consequence whenever your child hits his sister. Parents sometimes fall into the trap of punishing when they are very upset or stressed, and may say things they won't follow through with (like "We won't go to grandma's this weekend" or "I'm going to throw away all your toys.") If you don't have a plan, you might also say or do things that are not as helpful in changing behavior, like threatening your child or spanking.



6. **Ignore annoying behavior that does not hurt anyone.** Some behaviors are really annoying - such as whining, screaming, and tantrums - but they do not hurt you, your child or other people. Try to ignore these kinds of behaviors instead of reacting to them. Remember, we want to pay attention to positive behavior and take attention away from behavior you don't like. When your child stops the annoying behavior, find something to praise right away.

 7. **Use time out effectively.** When your child breaks a more serious rule or behaves in a way that hurts someone or something, there should always be a consequence for this behavior. Time out can be very helpful in taking attention away from your child and giving him/her a chance to calm down and get back in control. Three things to remember about time out: 1) it should be done in a boring place, where your child won't get any attention; 2) it should be kept short (about 2-5 minutes, depending on your child's age); 3) after the time is up, your child can come out once he/she calms down. After time out is over, find something positive to do and praise your child for good behavior.

 8. **Get a good night's sleep.** Children who don't get enough sleep do not act like adults who are tired - they often become hyperactive and speed up instead of slowing down. They also tend to become grumpy and uncooperative. Toddlers (1-2 year olds) need 12-14 hours of sleep, including naps; preschoolers (3-5 year olds) need 11-13 hours; and school aged kids need 10-11 hours. Having a regular bedtime routine (such as bath, story, bed) helps your child get used to going to sleep more easily.
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9. **Spend time being active every day.** All children need to play and be physically active, and some children need to move more than others. Spend some time playing actively with your child every day, and encourage them to play actively with their siblings or friends as well. Some ideas include going for walks, playing catch or kickball, swimming, etc. If playing outside is not an option due to weather or safety concerns, plan some active play that can be done indoors (for example, jumping on a mini trampoline).

 10. **Limit screen time.** We recommend limiting your child's screen time (including TV, computers, iPads and smart phones), including no screens at all for children under 2. Screen time takes away time from other important activities such as play and social interaction, and can make problems with attention, learning and behavior worse. Screen time too close to bedtime can also make it harder to fall asleep.

