

Part 4 – Specific Solutions for Everyday Problems

Applying No-Cry Parenting Skills to Everyday Problems

In the previous chapters of this book we've covered the basic parenting skills. You can use these skills to solve nearly any behavior issue that you face. Sometimes, though, there's so much rolling around in your head that it's hard to sift through all the information you've learned and come up with a specific solution in a given moment. This chapter will provide some quick tips for the most common discipline problems that parents face during the early childhood years.

It is critical to keep in mind that your child's age and level of understanding will affect the way you'll respond in any given situation. How you'll approach a two year old who has a tantrum is very different than how you will approach a six year old having a tantrum – even if both children are having tantrums because they are tired, hungry and rebelling because you said no potato chips. Younger children will require much more teaching and direction than older ones who have already had years of lessons from you. In addition, you'll have to honestly assess how *you* have responded to your child in the past, as the history between you will affect both of your reactions today. You can't abruptly change your way of interacting with your child and expect him to modify his responses to suit your new goals.

All children are unique. There isn't an exact perfect solution that works for every single child. Even siblings can be very different from one another. I have four children who are as alike as apples, oranges, brownies and chewing gum. It often amazes me that these four children were

birthed by the same parents and raised in the same home. They are very distinctive individuals and they have very different strengths and personality traits. And they each require very different things from me and yet other things from their dad. When parents expect all children to act exactly the same, or if they expect the same child to respond precisely the same way in every situation (which they don't!), they set themselves up for frustration. That's why I think that it's important for us to have a wide repertoire of parenting skills so we can modify what we do to make it work best for each child in our family, and in each different situation.

The best advice I can give you is to be flexible and ambidextrous! Apply what you learn to each of your children in the unique and special way that is best for them in each separate situation that arises. And then take pleasure in the variety and spice that they give to your life.

Each of the following topics could easily fill an entire book of discussion, and there are several hundred additional topics that could be added to this list. What you'll find here are a handful of the most common discipline-related problems that occur during early childhood, along with a variety of solutions for each issue.

Mother-speak:

“The list of topics in this section sounds like my three-year-old daughter's daily “to do” list!”

Patti, mother to Maddison, age 3 and Mason, age 1

The combination of solutions for each problem that follows is varied. I don't mean for you to follow every single suggestion as if it were a road map. These ideas are meant to act as a starting point for you to develop your own customized solution. With this in mind, the following chapter provides you with a number of practical solutions for solving each type of parenting problem.

When you are struggling with a behavior issue, look up that particular topic and any other similar topics, as you might pick up pointers in various places. Look over the ideas, combine them with the other skills you've learned, and customize them to create several options that suit your family. Review your options, and consider your child's personality, your parenting style, and your family goals. Then put your decision into action. If your original plan doesn't bring success, then try another option, and on occasion, even a third option, until you feel good about how things are going. Remember: This too shall pass. Relax and take a deep breath.

Baby talk

See also: Fussing, Whining

My preschooler has gotten in the habit of talking in a baby voice. When she *was* a baby, that kind of talk was adorable. Now that she's not, it's extremely annoying.

Think about it

This is a normal stage of behavior. Many preschoolers think that talking like a baby makes them sound more cute and lovable. It's one of those phases that will pass on its own, but can be

frustrating in the meantime when you want your child to “act her age.” You can give nature a nudge and move your child past the baby-talk stage more quickly by using some of the following suggestions.

What to do

Give more attention.

Children sometimes use baby talk as a way of holding on to babyhood as they take a developmental step forward. It’s a way for them to feel safely rooted in the familiar cared-for environment they are used to – but that they know they must leave behind. Acknowledge this as a real need, and give your child a bit more loving attention. A few extra hugs or a chance to sit on your lap or hold your hand may build her sense of security and give her the courage she needs to grow forward.

Express your feelings.

Let your child know how much the baby talk bothers you. Ask for her help in changing the behavior. *“The baby talk really bothers me, and I love your big-girl voice very much. Will you please use your regular voice for me?”*

Fail to understand her.

When she says, *“Me wanna gas of mik.”* Look at her with a very confused look on your face and say, *“I can’t understand. What do you want?”* This should be easy, since you probably don’t fully understand her. Don’t respond to her request until she uses her normal voice.

Be silly.

Intentionally interpret her baby-talk request into something ridiculous, “*Did you say you want some lima beans and liver?*”

Give your child more responsibilities.

Help her to see that she is growing up, and encourage her with praise. Choose fun tasks for her, such as helping to prepare the salad for dinner, feeding the cat, or sweeping the floor. Often, when a child begins to see herself as a big kid, the baby talk will disappear.

What *not* to do***Don't assume she's doing this to annoy you.***

This reversion to baby behavior isn't intended to irritate you, because it's not about you at all. Sometimes it's a sign that your child is sorting through her feelings about growing up and leaving her babyhood behind.

Don't mimic or mock her baby talk.

Your child may not be fully aware of what's she'd doing or how often, but don't call it to her attention in an angry or sarcastic manner.

Backtalk (also called sassing, mouthing-off, arguing, impertinence, or cheekiness)

See also: Bossiness, Hitting a parent, Swearing

I always thought backtalk was something older kids did, but my four year old is proving me wrong.

Think about it

The first time a child talks back to a parent it is usually just honest emotion being expressed: “*No, I don’t like this.*” The problem is not the child’s opinion – which he is entitled to – it’s about the way the opinion is voiced. If the parent doesn’t correct the way the child is communicating – then and there – the pattern will continue and become worse over time because the child will assume that this is an acceptable way to express his feelings.

What to do

Identify it.

When your child talks back to you, you should immediately call attention to it. Look your child in the eye and make a serious, firm comment such as, “*That is back-talk and a proper way to tell me what you think.*” And then, since you want to teach good manners, use your good manners when requesting them, “*Please don’t talk to mommy that way.*”

Teach.

Your child is talking back to you because he disagrees with you. His disagreement is not the problem; his manner of dealing with it is the problem. Teach him how to politely and

respectfully voice his opinion. Tell him how to communicate politely, “*What I want to hear you say is, ‘Mommy, can I please play a little longer. That’s using your good manners.’*”

Watch for bad influences.

Keep your eye on your child’s friends and older siblings. Pay attention to television programs that are tuned in when your child is in the room. Children imitate other people, that’s how they learn; what goes in children’s ears often comes out their mouths.

Be consistent.

This is a situation that will come up from time to time during childhood, and it can be curbed with calm guidance. The key is to be unswerving in your dedication to address every single episode of backtalk.

What *not* to do

Don’t empower it.

Whenever your child talks back, don’t let it turn into a two-way argument between equals. The issue is not the subject that caused the backtalk, anyway. It is the backtalk itself that needs to be addressed.

Don’t ignore it.

You must be consistent in your response to backtalk. If you selectively ignore it, depending on

how it happens or when it happens, then you can count on having to deal with more and more sass over time.

Don't shout or slap.

A child who erupts with a biting, sarcastic remark can bring out the worst in parents, who feel shockingly disrespected and unloved. Responding with knee-jerk anger may startle your child into silence, but won't solve the problem.

Bath, not behaving in

Also see: Bath, not wanting one; Bath, won't get out

Bath time at our house is a disaster. My daughter splashes, throws toys, and sprays the entire bathroom with water. Washing up doesn't happen without a big fuss.

Think about it

For lots of kids, the tub is a grand private swimming pool, and washing up is last on their list of priorities. They're not being naughty – they are just having fun!

What to do

Have a specific list of bathtub rules.

Children can't guess what you expect of them in every situation. It helps to clearly express your expectations. State your rules in a way that lets your child know exactly what you *want*, rather than what you *don't want*. As an example, instead of saying, "*No splashing*" a better rule is "*Keep all water in the tub*" or "*Keep the carpet dry.*"

Put only a few inches of water in the tub.

Tell your child that when she shows you that she has learned how to keep the water in the bathtub you'll increase the amount of water you put in the tub next time.

Don't make bath time play time.

If toys and wild play are the problem, then don't put any toys in the tub for a while. Get your child into the tub, washed up, and out of the tub quickly. Over time, as bath time gets under control, provide a couple of toys and see how it goes.

Shower instead.

If your child is six or over have him take a shower instead of a bath.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

If you have a younger child, and you're comfortable with family nudity, or with bathing in a swimsuit, you could sometimes get in the tub with her and have a good time splashing together.

Relax, it's just water.

It may help if you budget extra time for a bath and put up a clear shower curtain and close it while your child splashes and plays. That way you can still see in the tub, but the water stays contained. Bring a chair and a book into the bathroom and enjoy a few minutes of relaxation. Water play is free and lots of fun, so if you can make it work for you, bathtime can be a great play experience for your child.

What *not* to do

Don't let this routine continue.

Children are creatures of habit, and your daughter's bath play is a fun routine for her. In order to change things you'll need to revamp your entire bathtime routine.

Don't complain without action.

If every time your child wrecks havoc in the tub the only consequence is hearing you complain about it, then she'll have no reason or motivation to make a change.

Bath, not wanting one

Also see: Bath, not behaving in; Bath, won't get out

My child never wants to take a bath. She doesn't cooperate at all, and it becomes a battle.

Think about it:

Take a minute to stop and think about *why* your child doesn't want to take a bath. Is it because she's having too much fun doing other things and doesn't want to stop? Is it because bath time usually includes a battle of wills? Is it because she always gets soap in her eyes? Or is it because it signals the beginning of the bedtime routine? Once you figure out the real reason, you can take steps to move past the problem.

What to do.

Make it fun.

Allow your child to use bubble bath or kid's bath foam to make it more fun. Buy a few fun bath toys, or use plastic kitchen products for play. Allow your child to play for a while before washing up.

Control the suds.

If your child fears getting soap in her eyes when you wash her hair, let her wear swimming goggles or a plastic sun visor while you wash her hair.

Be very consistent.

Have a bath every day or every-other-day at exactly the same time, and in the same way.

Specific routines can overcome resistance after they've become regular occurrences.

Give a forewarning.

Let your child know ahead of time that bath time is nearing. Give a few warnings; “*Bath time in ten minutes.*” Then “*Bath time in five minutes.*” Your child will respond better than if you just drop the bomb in the middle of his fun activity.

Change your routine

Bath time is often done at bedtime when a child and the parent are tired and grumpy. In addition, if your child knows that bedtime follows bath he may want to put off the entire sequence. Instead, let your child bathe first thing in the morning when everyone is fresh and energetic.

What *not* to do

***Don't* lecture about the importance of personal hygiene.**

Hygiene isn't the reason your child avoids the bath -- she isn't even thinking about that aspect of bathing. It's the time that it takes and the process involved that she objects to.

***Don't* wheel and deal.**

Parents inadvertently get into the practice of bargaining with their child: “If you get in the bath right now then I'll let you have bubbles.” Bribes are the wrong approach to gaining cooperation, and take power away from the parent and give it to the child. Bribes are different from rewards or encouragement. Bubbles offered to a child up front, to make the bath more fun, are fine.

Bubbles offered to stop a tantrum could be seen as a reward for misbehavior or as incentive for future tantrums.

Bath, won't get out

Also see: Bath, not wanting one, Dawdling

My child doesn't listen to me when I say it's time to get out of the tub.

Think about it:

Your child probably doesn't want to get *in* the tub either! You might notice that your child doesn't adjust quickly to any kind of change. Often, the problem occurs when he's doing something fun (splashing in the tub) and has to stop and do something not-so-fun (get dressed and ready for bed). A little motivation goes a long way in helping this child adjust to changes.

What to do

Use a timer.

Set it for a pre-determined amount of bath time. Give a five-minute warning and then a three-minute warning before the timer goes off. Announce that when the timer rings your child will need to get out of the tub. At the ding, be pleasant about getting him out of the tub. Once he's used to this routine he'll go along with it.

Offer a choice.

Giving children choices moves them in your direction because they have a say in what's happening, so they willing cooperate. When it's time to get out, stand by the edge of the tub,

hold out a towel and offer a choice, such as, *“Do you want to dry your hair by yourself, or do you want me to help you?”*

Use the “When/Then” technique.

Give your child a reason to get out of the tub. Promise something fun after the bath is done, *“When you are out of the tub and dressed, then we’ll have some hot cocoa and read a book.”*

Get silly!

Make a game out of the process. Sing a song or hold the towel like a puppet and make it talk to your child.

If you say it, mean it.

Don’t tell your child it’s time to get out of the tub until you REALLY mean it’s time to get out of the tub. Repeating yourself five or six times until you mean business is only setting yourself up for a struggle next time and the next time and the next ...

What *not* to do

***Don’t* spring it on him.**

If your child is having a grand time in the bath don’t suddenly whisk him out without prior warning.

***Don’t* dawdle or waiver.**

Multiple requests, nagging and pleading for compliance inform your child that listening to you is optional, and that he can get out of the bath when he's ready.

Don't yell or threaten.

Getting angry will only lead to your child's tears and an unpleasant end to the day for both of you.

Biting, child to adult

See also: Biting other children; Hitting a parent

When I was getting my son dressed this morning he got upset over my choice of t-shirt for him. As I was putting it over his head he bit my arm. I was so startled by this that I nearly cried!

Think about it

It's natural to be shocked or hurt by your child's actions, but rest assured that your little one didn't intend to injure you – he just couldn't find the right words or actions to get his point across, and a quick bite seemed like the right solution at the time. It helps when you understand that this behavior is normal, and that it's not intentional misconduct. Nonetheless, it is something you'll want to put a halt to immediately. This is an opportunity to teach him an important lesson in social skills.

What to do

Respond humanly.

Go with your natural response. Say “Ouch! That hurts!” Often, your startled response will send a message to your child that what just happened wasn’t a good thing. He may even start to cry, which indicates his understanding that he hurt you. You can then encourage him to apologize and ask him to kiss the place where he bit, if this is how you make his boo-boos feel better. He will soon make the connection.

Watch for early signs of frustration.

When you see that your child is unhappy, angry, or frustrated, help him to express his feelings with words. You may need to even start him out by giving him the specific words he needs, such as, “I can see that you don’t want to wear this shirt. You can say to me, “Mommy, I don’t want this shirt.”

Respond firmly.

Use a no-nonsense voice and tell your child, “Stop! No biting. It hurts.” Move away from him for a few minutes so that he understands that his actions don’t bring him positive attention.

Avoid biting him in play.

Children are so incredibly sweet that parents sometimes nibble their little fingers, toes, or bellies. Parents sometimes play biting games with young children – “See if you can put your finger in my mouth without it chomping shut.” Doing these things, though, might confuse your child, who

may have a hard time understanding when a bite is okay, and when it's not. So, if you have a child who has taken a bite out of you or a playmate, its best if you avoid playful biting.

What *not* to do

Don't bite your child back.

You don't have to demonstrate to make your point. This might reinforce his idea that biting is a feasible solution to a problem. It certainly will create confusion about what you are trying to teach.

Don't respond in a distressed, angry or pleading way.

If you overreact or accuse your child of intentionally hurting you then you might frighten him and prevent him from learning a valuable lesson from the experience.

Don't worry.

There's nothing "wrong" with your child, and he isn't bad. He's reacting in a very normal way for his stage of development.

Biting other children

See also: Biting, child to adult; Hitting, kicking and hair pulling, Sibling fights

Today at the park my son *bit* my friend's daughter on the arm! I'm horrified!

Think about it

Biting a playmate is a common occurrence among young children since they don't always have the words to describe their emotions. They don't quite know how to control their feelings, and they don't have any concept of hurting another person. When a child bites a friend, it most likely isn't an act of aggression: It is simply an immature way of trying to get a point across, experimentation with cause and effect, or playfulness gone awry.

What to do**Watch and intercept**

As you become familiar with your child's emotional actions, you may be able to stop a bite before it even occurs. If you see that your child is getting frustrated or angry – perhaps in the middle of a tussle over a toy – step in and redirect her attention to something else.

Teach

Immediately after your child bites another child, look her in the eye and tell her in one or two short sentences what you want her to know, and how she can make amends, such as, "Biting hurts. We don't bite. Give Emmy a hug and say you're sorry. That will make her feel better."

Give your child lessons on how she should handle her frustrations

Your child is going to get upset with a playmate, so teach her some ways to handle her feelings. Tell her what she should say or do. “If you want a toy, you can ask nicely for it or come to Mommy for help.”

Avoid playful biting

Nibbling your little one’s toes or playfully nipping his fingers sends a mixed message to your child. A child won’t understand when biting another person is okay and when it’s not, nor is she able to judge the pressure she’s putting into the bite. As she gets a little older, she will start to understand that some things can be done carefully and gently in play, but not in anger. This takes a more maturity to understand — more than you can expect your child to have at her young age.

Give more attention to the injured child

Typically, we put all our energy into correcting the biter’s actions and we don’t give the child who was bitten much consolation. The little victim is left sitting alone, crying. Soothing the child who was hurt can show your child that his actions caused another child fear or pain. You can even encourage your child to help sooth his friend with a pat on the back or a hug.

The repeat offender

If you’ve gone through the above steps, and then your child bites again, you can respond with more intensity. If you catch him in the act, immediately go to him. Get down to his level, look him in the eye, and firmly announce, “No biting: time-out.” Direct him to a chair and have him sit for a few minutes. It doesn’t take long for your message to sink in.

If you miss the action, but are told about it later

Have a talk with your child about what happened. Limit yourself to a few brief, specific comments, as a lengthy lecture is almost never effective. Reading children's books together on the topic, role-playing, and demonstration of appropriate actions can all help your child learn how to respond to his own emotions in socially appropriate ways.

First aid

Although the risk of injury from a child's bite is small, it's good to know what to do in case of a bite that breaks through the skin: Reassure the child who was bitten. Wash your hands with soap and water. Wash the wound with soap and water. If the bite is bleeding, apply direct pressure with a clean, dry cloth. Cover the injury with a bandage.

What *not* to do

***Don't* respond emotionally.**

When their child uses his teeth on another human being; a parent's immediate response is often anger, followed by punishment. This is because we view the act from an adult perspective.

However, if we can understand that a child bite is most likely a responsive reflex, we can avoid responding in the following typical, yet unnecessary and ineffective ways.

***Don't* bite your child back to "show him how it feels."**

He isn't purposefully hurting his playmate. He likely doesn't understand that what he did is wrong, so by responding with the same action you may actually be reinforcing that this is an acceptable behavior, or confusing him entirely.

Don't assume that your child is willfully misbehaving.

The ways that you'll treat these behaviors in an older child, who understands that biting is wrong, will be different than how you will approach this with young child.

Don't yell at your child. This will do nothing more than scare her; it won't teach her anything about what she's just done, nor does it teach her what she should have done instead.

Bossiness

See also: Backtalk

My daughter is always telling her friends what to do. She decides what games to play and then makes the rules (which are ever changing.) The other kids just go along with her now, but as she gets older, I'm sure they won't.

Think about it

Learning how to play with other children is a social skill that takes practice. If the other children go along with your daughter then she's under the impression that all is well. You'll need to help her understand how to play politely. The good news is that a child who frequently takes the lead

often develops into a strong leader. You'll just need to help her learn how to develop and refine her leadership skills.

What to do

Discuss what you feel.

Stay calm and don't accuse, simply state what you saw, *"I noticed that you kept taking the ball from Jeremy."* Then ask what your child thinks of the situation. Direct the conversation with helpful questions. *"How do you think your friend felt? Do you think you could have done something different?" "What should you do next time?"*

Encourage your child to be a positive leader.

Teach the difference between bossy statement, and one that is assertive, but respectful. She likely doesn't realize there is a subtle, but important, difference between the two.

Enroll your child in a team activity

Have your child participate in a group activity such as little league, scouting, a YMCA program, or a church youth group. Being part of a team or special group will help your child experience group play in a monitored situation and may help reduce her bossy behavior. Take the time to select a group with a polite and able leader. Look for a coach or director who is comfortable leading the group, and who appears to enjoy spending time with young children.

Determine if someone else is bossing your child around.

Is there an older sibling, a baby-sitter, or friend who is doing some bossing of her? (Could it be *you*?) If you can modify this person's behavior to be more polite when requesting things of your child, that person can become a more positive role model.

Mother-speak:

"Lately I have found my son Orrin bossing around my husband and I, and even our dogs. He makes demands like, "Mom, come here now." It's no wonder! This is exactly what he hears from us when we are asking something of him, so he has picked up on it. Now, when I hear him demand something like this, I tell him that he needs to ask nicely. He will then change his voice back to a nice voice and will say "Please mommy, will you come here." Of course, the most important thing to learn from this is that we need to model for him the behavior that we want him to follow, so we are working on that, too."

Tara, mother to Orrin, age 2, and Annalee, 5 weeks

Give the child responsibilities that she can be in charge of.

Let your child take care of a family pet, or have responsibility for setting the silverware on the table, or watering a plant. Chores that encourage independence and give a child some control can fulfill the need your child has to be in charge of something.

Point out good behavior.

Watch your child and catch her doing something right – and then praise her for it.

What *not* to do

***Don't* make a public correction.**

Reprimanding her in front of her friends will likely embarrass your daughter and her friends as well. Not only is this modeling poor manners for all of them, but it will prevent her from learning anything from the episode as she'll be hindered by her humiliation.

***Don't* stop having play dates.**

Your child needs practice to develop better friendship skills. Over time, she'll learn how to socialize in more appropriate ways. You'll need to be more aware and involved until you see that things are running more smoothly.

***Don't* continually give in to your child's requests.**

Make sure you aren't encouraging bossy behavior by always giving in to your child when the two of you are together. This is a pattern many parents get into when their children are babies, and they don't modify their responses to be more age appropriate over time.

***Don't* always play by her rules.**

When you play with your child according to *her* rules, even when you don't want to play her way, you are promoting bossiness. Instead, encourage your child to learn how to play according to group rules, how to respect other's wishes, and how to compromise. Learning these things with a parent as the teacher is a comfortable, non-threatening way to learn.

Car problems

See also: Hitting, kicking and hair pulling, Other people's undisciplined children, Sibling fights

We spend a lot of time in the car and I get so frustrated over the same problems day after day: they don't want to sit in their booster seats; they fight with each other; and they whine and fuss at me.

Think about it

It's difficult for an active child to be strapped into a seat and required to be still for any length of time, but it is a necessary situation. Since you are in the car so often, you have a great opportunity to teach patience, and to create and reinforce a routine that works for you. You'll just need to figure out what that is and then make it happen.

What to do

Don't battle over non-negotiables.

Kids must be in car seats – it's the law. Tell them that a policeman could stop you and you will all be in trouble if they aren't sitting properly in their seats. It also helps to explain that the car seat keeps them safe. But don't go into too much detail about car accidents, this could cause anxiety.

Create "car rules."

Write down your top rules and keep them in the car. Review them each time you get in the car. If necessary, plan a consequence for breaking the rules. For example, kids who break the rules get to clean the trash out of the car when you get home. Even a five year old can do this task.

Remember to praise your children when you have an enjoyable ride and they follow the rules.

Keep them occupied.

Boredom can promote whining and fights. Keep books, travel games, car bingo cards, or radio headsets in the car. It's also helpful to keep a few healthy snacks, such as dry cereal or pretzels, on hand. Kids who are occupied or snacking are content and less likely to fuss or fight.

Take advantage of your captive audience.

Buy or borrow a selection of children's audio books and listen to them together. Talk about the story and use it as a launching pad for enriching discussions. Check your library or bookstore for a wonderful assortment of choices.

Give your children positive attention.

Keep the atmosphere in the car pleasant by using the time to talk to your kids. Ask thought-provoking questions, recount the events of the week, or play guessing games. They will start looking forward to being in the car – and so will you.

Sing

Turn on your favorite music, or some children's sing-alongs, and crank up the volume and sing!

What *not* to do

***Don't* add your own complaining and whining to the noise.**

It doesn't help to voice your aggravation every time you take a drive. Complaining doesn't solve the problem; you need to create an active solution.

***Don't* pay more attention to the kids than to your driving.**

Distracted drivers are three times as likely to be involved in a car accident as more attentive drivers. Refereeing a backseat battle or tending to a whining child is very distracting. So keep your eyes and your attention on the road. If your child's backseat tantrum upsets you, pull the car off the road. Park. Look your child in the eye and say, "When you stop I will drive." Turn around in your seat and wait; read a book, look through your purse, do some stretches. If the behavior doesn't cease, repeat your statement, or if possible, return home.

Dawdling

See also: Doesn't come when called

My son moves at an excruciatingly slow pace. When we need to get somewhere and I'm rushing about it is very frustrating to have to keep prodding him along.

Think about it

Children live according to a much slower clock than we adults do. They don't give a moment's thought to what they might be doing next. They prefer to enjoy each moment for what it is. They pause as they watch the cat sleep, examine the color patterns in the carpet, and ponder the reasons for having toes. If you think about it, it's a shame that we can't all live on "kid-time."

What to do

Give specific step-by-step directions.

Make incremental requests that your child can easily follow. Give your child one or two tasks at a time, and when complete, assign the next. *"Please put your puzzle in the box and go to the bathroom."*

Make a list.

Write down the sequence of tasks to be completed and give the list to your child with a pencil to cross things off as they're done.

Give an incentive to finish.

Encourage your child to finish the task with a "When/Then" statement, such as, *"When you get in the car, then you can have your crackers."*

Analyze your own daily schedule.

Determine if you are trying to do too much. If you are, see if you can make some changes. Start focusing on the priorities in your life, eliminate some of the unnecessary time-wasters, and slow *yourself* down a little bit.

Check your child's nap and sleep schedules.

Children who aren't getting a proper amount of sleep will lack energy and tend to move slowly and dawdle.

What *not* to do

***Don't* rush your child with the words, "Come on!" or "Hurry up!"**

These requests tend to frustrate children and then they rush to the point of taking *extra* time to make up for the mistakes that happen when they move too fast.

***Don't* reinforce the pattern.**

Children often dawdle out of habit. A parent will announce, "*Time to go*" and then be distracted by a phone call or a household task (so then it really *isn't* time to go.) Children come to expect that you'll repeat yourself numerous times before they have to respond. Practice this: think before you speak, make a very specific request, and then follow through.

***Don't* expect speed.**

Allow a reasonable amount of time for your child to meet your request. Watch your child to learn

his pace. Just because you are in a hurry doesn't mean your child will move any faster than his usual speed.

Avoid miscommunication.

Make clear, specific statements that don't leave room for misunderstanding. As an example, instead of the vague statement, "*Get ready to go,*" clarify by saying, "*Right now, would you please put on your shoes and your coat, and get in the car.*"

Daycare or preschool, dropping off and picking up
--

See also: Dawdling

My child dawdles and fusses when I drop her off at daycare. You'd think she doesn't want to be there. I know she loves it because she repeats the behavior when I pick her up in the afternoon- she doesn't want to leave!

Think about it

Some children have a difficult time adjusting to changes. They like things to flow in a predictable way. Anything that upsets their current activity is cause for alarm. These children require a bit more thought to help them maneuver the changes they encounter in their day.

What to do

Create very specific routines.

Consistency can help your child be more comfortable. *Very specific* means that you do and say the exact same things every time you drop her off and pick her up. For example, park in the same area, enter through the same door, approach the cubby, hang the coat, check the job chart and comment on the day's assignment, give two hugs and two kisses and say, "*See ya later alligator!*"

Let your child know when you will arrive each day.

It's comforting for a child to know that you will be there at a certain time. Tie in your arrival with a specific activity, such as after snack time, and let your child know when to expect you.

Schedule an adjustment period.

When you drop off your child, and again when you pick her up, allow a five-minute adjustment period. (The time is worth it, as you'll save at least fifteen minutes of fussing!) When you arrive at the center allow your child to play or show you something for five minutes. When it's time to leave, use a fun indicator, such as a tickle on the neck, or hold up your key ring and have *it* tell your child (in a funny voice) that the car is waiting and ready to go.

Have a fun routine for the drive home.

Leave a snack bag on your child's seat with different contents every day, such as graham crackers, dry cereal, pretzels, or fruit. Play a certain game in the parking lot as you walk to the car, such as counting all the red cars you see, or counting your steps. Mention something that

your child can look forward to at home, such as reading the new library books, or Grandpa coming over for dinner.

What *not* to do

Don't cater to the complaints.

If you try too hard to convince her that everything is okay you may just make her nervous. Instead, stay light-hearted and have confidence that everything will be fine. Most children stop crying within five minutes of a parent's departure. Ask your daycare provider if this is true for your child. If you'd like, call the center when you get to work or arrive at home, so they can reassure you that your child has finished crying and is playing happily.

Don't get mad.

Your anger will just make your child fuss and cry even more, and it won't solve a thing. It's also a very unpleasant way to start the day (for both of you.)

Doesn't come when called

See also: Dawdling

Even if I call my child four or five times he still won't respond to me. It's like he's wearing ear plugs! If I want him to come at all I usually have to go get him.

Think about it

Your child has learned exactly what you've taught him. That he doesn't have to heed your calls. He knows that if you really do want him -- you'll come and get him.

What to do

Call. Wait. Act.

Follow this procedure: Visually locate your child. Call once. Wait three minutes. Go to your child, take him by the hand, say, "*When I call, I would like you to come.*" Then lead him to the desired location. If you do this consistently he will know that you really do expect him to come when called.

Watch how the adults in your family act.

Does the caller yell from two rooms away? Does the callee mumble, "*in a minute*" and then have to be reminded several times before responding? These are the models for your child's behavior. Change the ways you respond to each other and model the behavior that you want of your child.

Give a warning.

Making a transition from one activity to another can be difficult for children. Instead of calling, "*Come now!*" try giving two warnings first, "*You'll need to come in five minutes.*" A few minutes later, "*Two minutes.*" Then, "*Please come in now.*" At this point, wait a minute, and if

he doesn't respond go to him and take him by the hand saying, "*When I call I would like you to come.*"

Acknowledge your child's desires.

Let him know that you understand he wants to continue playing, and then follow with a statement and an action that promotes compliance, "*I bet you wish you could stay in the pool forever, but it's time to go now. Here's your towel.*"

Use a dinner bell or timer to call your child.

Tell him that when he hears the bell, he needs to come before you count to fifty. This is a fun and specific indicator. If you have more than one child you can allow the first one to arrive to ring the bell a second time.

Check his hearing.

Make sure that your child has had a hearing test and that his failure to respond isn't because of a hearing problem,

What *not* to do

***Don't* call to your child from more than ten feet away.**

The farther you are from your child the more likely he'll ignore your calls.

Don't call your child until you're really ready for him to come.

If you summon your child, but then get involved in something else you are reinforcing that your call is only a forewarning that you'll need him some time soon.

Fussing – See Chapter 3, page XX

Hitting a parent

See also: Biting, child to adult

When my child is angry, she sometimes shoves or hits me. I've tried to explain to her that she shouldn't, but she keeps doing it.

Think about it

Children typically hit because they are frustrated, don't get their way, and can't get their point across. However, hitting an adult is a serious offense and should be treated as such and nipped in the bud. This is as much about establishing control in the relationship as it is about teaching how to handle emotions and how to show respect for other human beings.

What to do

Respond naturally.

Many children are unaware of how other people feel or about how their actions affect others. It is through experience that they best learn. If your child hits you, respond with an, “Ouch! That hurts!” And then explain that it isn’t the way to get your attention. Say, “Use your words to tell me what you want.”

Respond instantly.

Every time the child hits you, immediately take her by the hands, look her in the eye and say in a firm, no-nonsense voice, “*No hitting! Time out.*” Guide the child to a chair or other time-out place and announce, “*Stay here.*” After a few minutes, when both you and your child have calmed down, you can give your child permission to get up. At that point, make a brief statement to re-cap the situation, and ask for an apology. Avoid a long follow up lecture. It’s more important to respond quickly and appropriately each time the child hits.

Stop play time slaps.

Children will do as they see done, even though they may do it at inappropriate times. If you are in the habit of playful roughhousing with your child, and allowing him to hit you in fun, he may find it difficult to draw the line between the play behavior and the angry behavior.

Talk to a professional if you need help.

If your child continues to hit you after you’ve taken measures to stop the behavior, it may be time to talk to a family counselor or therapist. A trained professional can determine the reasons your child is hitting and help your family work out a plan to stop the behavior.

What *not* to do

***Don't* respond in a timid voice, or with a lengthy lecture.**

Neither accurately communicates the severity of the misbehavior, nor does it teach your child how to handle her anger appropriately.

***Don't* hit back.**

This can be a knee-jerk response, but obviously doesn't teach the intended lesson. How can you teach her not to hit people when you are hitting people?

Hitting, Kicking and Hair-pulling
--

See also: Biting other children, Sibling fights

When my daughter gets angry at a friend she hits or grabs a fist-full of hair and yanks. I've lectured her and yelled at her but it doesn't seem to help.

Think about it

Hair pulling, kicking, biting, and hitting are all typical emotional behaviors of young children. They exhibit these behaviors because of a lack of knowledge, wisdom and self-control. It is not a sign that your child is hateful or mean. Kids are human beings and human beings *will* get angry, we can't prevent that. It's up to us to teach our children how to handle their frustration and anger in socially appropriate ways.

What to do

Intercede before it happens.

Watch your child closely during playtime. When you see her becoming frustrated or angry, take the time to intervene. Coach her through the issue by teaching her how to handle her frustrations. Teach her what to do, or model what to say to her friend. Or if she seems too upset to learn redirect her attention to another activity until her emotions level out.

Teach your child how to express anger or frustration respectfully.

It's one thing to tell a child what *not* to do. It's one thing to step into an argument. It's another thing entirely to teach her what *to do* in advance of the next problem. This can be done through role-play, discussion, and reading children's books about angry emotions together.

Mother-speak:

“My daughter Gracie would sometimes hit her little friend when they were playing together. Of course Gracie never intended to hit her, but when she got overly excited or wanted a toy, she would hit. Recently I've tried “talking it up” before the playdate starts. “Gracie, in a few minutes, Caitlyn is coming over to play. Remember that you need to be very gentle with Caitlyn. You give her hugs. You share your toys with her. Be nice to Caitlyn, and no hitting. Hitting hurts. Hitting makes Caitlyn cry. You need to be gentle, okay?” I just keep repeating myself over and over again and she will repeat back a few of my sentences, as if reciting a mantra of some sort! And lo and behold – the times I've done this, there's been no hitting.”

Sarah, mother to Gracie age 2, and Sam 9 months

Examine any hidden causes.

Is your child hungry, tired, sick, jealous, frustrated or scared? If you can identify any feelings driving your child's actions you can address those along with the aggressive behavior.

Give more attention to the injured party.

Often the child who hits or kicks gets so much attention that the action becomes a way of gaining the spotlight. Instead, give more attention to the child who was hurt. After a brief statement, "*No hair pulling!*" turn and give attention to the child whose hair was pulled, "*Come here, honey. Mommy will give you a hug and read you a book.*"

Show how to use positive physical touches.

Show your child how to hold hands during a walk or how to give a back rub or foot massage. Teach a few physical games, like tag or leap frog. Under direct supervision, children who are more physical can gain a positive outlet for their physical energy.

Teach the child to clap his hands together whenever he feels an urge to hit.

This gives him an immediate physical outlet for his angry emotions and helps him learn to keep his hands to himself. An alternate is to teach him to put his hands in his pockets when he feels like hitting. Reward with praise anytime you see him doing this successfully.

Give your child a time out when needed.

Every time your child acts out aggressively, immediately and gently take the child by the shoulders, look him in the eye and say in a firm voice, “*No hurting others, time out.*” Guide the child to a chair or other time out place and tell him, “*You may get up when you can play without hitting.*” By telling him that he can get up when *he’s* ready, you let him know that *he* is responsible for controlling his own behavior. If your child gets up and hits again, say, “*You are not ready to get up yet,*” and direct him back to time out.

Avoid play hitting and wrestling.

Young children who hit, wrestle or roughhouse with a parent or sibling during play time might then use these same actions during non-wrestling times. It can be hard for them to draw the line between the two. If you have a child who has trouble controlling his physical acts then avoid this kind of play.

What *not* to do

***Don’t* lose control and yell, hit, or grab your child roughly.**

When you see your child hurting another person it’s easy to fly off the handle. Getting angry, though, won’t teach your child what she needs to learn: how to control her emotions when others are making her mad. You are mad at her, so she’ll be watching how you handle your anger.

***Don’t* focus on punishment.**

More than anything your child needs instructions on how to treat other human beings, particularly during moments of anger or frustration.

Don't let your child watch television shows or movies that involve hitting or other violence.

Children can become immune to the impact of the violence. Studies tell us that children copy what they see depicted on television, which often portrays aggression as an appropriate way of handling anger.

Don't assume your child can figure it out.

If your child comes to you asking for help in dealing with a difficult situation, don't send him away for tattling. But don't step in and handle it for him, either. View his call for help as an invitation to teach him important social skills.

Interrupting

See also: Manners, Mealtime behavior

My husband and I haven't had an uninterrupted conversation since our twins started talking! The girls interrupt us constantly.

Think about it

Your children interrupt you because they always get a response from you when they do. They've learned that you are always willing to stop what you're doing to answer them. Children often are so focused on their own needs that they don't realize that you also have needs at that moment.

They need to learn how to pay attention to other people's needs as well as their own.

What to do

Give lessons and examples.

Teach your children how to determine if something warrants an interruption, as they may have a hard time deciphering when interruptions are justified. Discuss examples of times when it's okay to interrupt, for example, when someone is at the door, or on the phone, or if a sibling is hurt.

Coach the proper manners.

Teach your child how to wait for a pause in the conversation and to say, "Excuse me." When she remembers to do this, respond positively to her. If the interruption is of a nature that it can and should wait, politely inform your child of this.

Teach "The Squeeze."

Tell your child that if she wants something when you are talking to another adult, she should walk up to you and gently squeeze your arm. You will then squeeze her hand to indicate that you know she is there and will be with her in a minute. At first, respond rather quickly so your child can see the success of this method. Over time you can wait longer, just give a gentle squeeze every few minutes to remind your child that you remember the request.

Create a busy-box

Put together a box of activities or games that can only be used when you are on the telephone, working at your desk, or talking with an adult. Occasionally refill it with new things or rotate the contents. Be firm about putting them away when you are done. Your child will be look forward to your next conversation, which will be interruption free!

Plan ahead.

Before you make a phone call or have a visitor, let your child know what to expect. *“I’m going to make a phone call. I’ll be a while, so let’s get your busy box ready to use while I’m on the phone.”*

Commend your child when deserved.

Praise your child for using good manners, for remembering to say “excuse me,” and for interrupting only for a valid reason.

What *not* to do

***Don’t* answer the question.**

Many parents admonish kids for interrupting, but in the same breath respond to the child’s interrupted request, which just reinforces the habit.

***Don’t* be rude.**

Parents sometimes jump in so quickly to correct their child’s bad manners that they don’t realize that the way in which their correction is delivered is itself rude. (*“What is the matter with you?”*

Stop interrupting us!") Use your own good manners to model appropriate communication skills. Pause, look at your child, and say, "I'll be with you in a minute."

Lying

Lately I've been catching my son in small lies, such as "*I didn't do it.*" I know that he did, but I'm reluctant to call him a liar.

Think about it

It is good idea to avoid tagging a child with any unpleasant label, as children form opinions of who they are, and we don't want them to view themselves in such a negative way. We do want to deal with this behavior whenever it happens, teach our children about honesty, and prevent it from becoming a habit. Children don't tell the truth for a number of different reasons. They lie so they won't get in trouble, they lie to cover embarrassment, or they lie because they don't make the distinction between fact and fiction. Mainly, they lie because they don't understand the importance of always telling the truth. Teaching your child the value of telling the truth takes time, teaching, consistency and patience.

What to do

Make telling the truth a recognized family value.

Children learn what traits are important to you by your words and actions. Choose those values that are most important to you, such as being truthful, and discuss them with your child from time to time. You can point out the subject when it comes up in books, in movies or in life experiences.

Focus on finding a solution instead of laying blame.

When your child makes a mistake, and comes forward with the truth, resist the urge to yell or punish. Instead, involve him in finding solutions. *“Regardless of how it happened, the lamp is broken. What are we going to do about it?”*

Don’t build unreasonable expectations.

Children sometimes lie because they feel they’re not meeting your expectations, and they think it’s easier to lie than disappoint you. Take a look at how you respond to your child’s mistakes or inadequacies, and make sure you leave room for imperfections.

Teach your child to take responsibility for his mistakes.

If you witness him doing something wrong coach your child to say, “I was wrong. I’m sorry.” This is something many adults still have trouble doing – so start him young. People who are comfortable admitting their mistakes are less likely to lie to cover them up.

Model truthfulness.

When your child hears you telling “little white lies” you are teaching your child something important about honesty.

What *not* to do

***Don't* ask questions that set your child up to lie.**

When your child has chocolate on his face and the candy wrapper is on the table, don't ask, "*Did you eat the candy that was on the counter?*" Instead make a statement of fact; "*I'm disappointed that you ate the candy without asking.*"

***Don't* assume a lie if you are not sure.**

If you suspect your child isn't telling the truth, but you're not 100% sure, then don't accuse him of lying, but do express your concern. "*It appears that you've eaten the candy.*" Or "*That doesn't sound like the truth to me.*"

***Don't* assume your child is lying to be naughty.**

Your child may be afraid to confess what he's done for fear of the punishment or fear of disappointing you. That's different from purposely lying to deceive you.

Manners

See also: Bossiness, Interrupting, Mealtime behavior, Restaurant behavior

My son has bad manners – he doesn't even remember the basics, to say please and thank you.

Think about it

Your child doesn't run into the freeway or play with steak knives because you've made it clear that these behaviors won't be tolerated. You must decide that using good manners are just as important for him to learn. Children aren't born with proper manners. They must be taught and then consistently reminded.

What to do**Tell him exactly what you'd like to hear.**

Rephrase what your child has said in the way you find acceptable, "*What I'd like to hear you say is, 'May I please have more pancakes.'*"

Teach, don't chastise.

Instead of saying, "*That's horrible!*" respond in a positive, teaching way, "*It's impolite to belch at the table, and if you do, it's proper to say excuse me.*" If your child didn't know what the proper behavior was, you're teaching a valuable lesson. If he did, you're displaying *your* good manners as you correct him.

Don't respond to bad manners.

Look your child in the eye and say, "*I know that you have nice manners. When you can ask me using your good manners, I'll be happy to answer you.*"

Model the behavior you'd like to see.

It's easy for a parent to forget to use *please*, *thank you*, and *excuse me* when dealing with young children. Remember your manners. It's easy teaching, and it makes life more pleasant. So, replace, "*Stop making that noise,*" with "*Please play quietly.*"

Mother-speak:

"I've discovered that simple modeling often brings about the behavior I'm hoping for. I have always said "thank you" when my daughter handed me something. She started saying it, and now she almost always says thank you when something is given to her. When I wanted her to start saying "please" I tried the "Say please for Mommy" and "Where are your manners?" route, and got nowhere, then gave up and just started making sure I said please to her all the time, and it worked! She now says please consistently. Now I've incorporated this form of teaching into everything else. It's not instant, and not perfect, but it works. Plus, I have a cheerful, confident, happy little girl who I get to enjoy because I'm not constantly frustrated in a Mommy-child tug of power."

Sheri, mother to Faith, age 2

Praise your child.

Show your appreciation when your child uses good manners.

What *not* to do

***Don't* laugh at bad manners.**

Laughing encourages children to see dreadful manners as a source of humor.

Don't use those old school responses, "Waad-do-ya-say?" or "Where are your manners?"

These aren't very polite ways to remind your child to use his manners.

Mealtime behavior

See also: Interrupting, Manners

My son won't sit still for a meal. He's up and down, picks food off his plate, and doesn't use good table manners.

Think about it

Children have an abundance of energy, so sitting still for any length of time is a challenge. Also, kids don't find social pleasure in sharing a meal (they'd rather play), and food itself is not a priority for them (unless it's ice cream.)

What to do

Be patient and teach.

Tell your child what you want, rather than what you don't want. Instead of saying, "*Don't eat with your hands!*" Tell him what you DO want, "*Please use your fork.*"

Keep a happy mood at the table.

Focus on pleasant conversation; don't use the time to reprimand. Don't let the adults dominate the dinner conversation and continually shush the children, allow them to partake in the conversation, too. Make mealtime a joyful family time.

Accept age-appropriate behavior.

All children spill their milk, splatter their ketchup and leave an array of crumbs around their chairs. It takes time to acquire the motor skills required to be tidy and clean.

Be consistent.

Require children to use the good manners that you've taught them. Children who routinely practice using good manners will adopt those manners as good habits.

Practice formal manners.

Every once in a while, have a formal meal. Use a tablecloth (an old one!), a full selection of silverware and napkins. Pretend you're at a fancy restaurant and allow everyone to exaggerate his or her best manners. You may even choose to dress up and use candles. In addition to teaching good manners, it's a beautiful family ritual, and will create wonderful memories.

What *not* to do

Don't have unrealistic expectations.

If you expect your young child to sit quietly at the table for a long meal, and use impeccable manners, you are setting yourself up for disappointment. Children aren't little adults.

Don't force your child to eat when she's not hungry.

Children have natural appetite control. They should be allowed to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. Allow your child to continue to listen to his body. If you require your child to clean his plate, use a smaller plate and child-sized servings. One caveat here; your child might not differentiate between cookies and broccoli, so you need to provide healthy choices.

Messiness

My child leaves toys, socks, tissues, and dishes lying around the house and expects me to clean up after him.

Think about it

We set ourselves up for this one, I'm afraid. One day we have a baby who requires our total care, and the next thing we know it, we are still providing the same level of care to a six-year-old who's never had a compelling reason to want life any other way. If you had a live-in maid who followed you around and tidied up all your messes, I bet you'd be pleased to let her do it, too!

What to do

Be consistent.

If some days you encourage clean up, but other days you ignore the mess, your child won't have a clear expectation of what you want him to do. Set a plan and stick to it.

Create a daily routine for clean up.

One day's mess is usually manageable, but a mess that adds up day after day becomes insurmountable. Pick a scheduled time that you can adhere to every day, such as after dinner or before putting on pajamas.

Join in during the clean up time.

Doing clean up together makes it more pleasant. Over time this clean up routine will become habit and your children will cooperate with little fuss.

Get more organized.

Make sure there is a place for everything and teach your child to keep everything in its rightful place. Use plastic bins, boxes and shelves to stay organized.

What *not* to do***Don't* constantly clean up after your child.**

If your child never participates in clean up he won't learn how to do it.

Don't complain about it.

If your child doesn't have a clean-up routine, and you don't have clear expectations, then it's not his fault that you're unhappy.

Other people's undisciplined children
--

See also: Biting other children, Bossiness, Playtime behavior

I have a close friend that I've always enjoyed spending time with. The problem is that her children are boisterous and disobedient, and she does nothing to correct them.

Think about it

When you love your friend and she loves her kids, but your parenting styles are very different it becomes a very sensitive issue. Chances are she doesn't see her kids the same way you do. Tread lightly when you approach issues about other people's children because life-long friendships can be broken over contrasting parenting approaches.

What to do

Use distraction and redirection.

If you see a problem brewing, step in and invite the children to get involved in an activity.

Keeping them busy may help avoid confrontation or problems.

Focus only on the issue at hand.

Find a solution to the current problem only, don't address personality or lifestyle. Do what's necessary to get through the visit. Make your comments about the action or the group, not the individual child.

Share parenting knowledge in a non-threatening way.

Invite your friend to accompany you to a parenting class or to attend a lecture. Share a copy of your favorite parenting book – tell her that you love it and you're sure she will, too.

Pick your battles.

Try to take pleasure in your visits and overlook the petty issues. Focus on the things you enjoy about your friend and open your heart to finding some things to enjoy in her children, as well.

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Have child-free visits.

If her children's behavior affects your own children or causes too much stress for you, then schedule mainly adults-only social events.

What *not* to do

***Don't* parent other people's children.**

Allow your friend to deal with her children's behavior (or not deal with it, as the case may be).

Get involved only when something involves your children or your property.

Don't think you can change other people.

Don't expend energy thinking you can change your friend's family life with a few well-placed comments. Forcing change on others can make them hurt, angry or defensive. Furthermore, unless she asks for help she may be content with things as they are.

Don't stop seeing your friend.

Friendships are precious and important to your health and happiness. Children eventually mature and grow up, and you won't be around her children as much as they get older. Find ways to make this situation work for you.

Playtime behavior

See also: Biting; Hitting, kicking and hair pulling; Other people's undisciplined children

I joined a play group with the idea that my preschooler would have fun playing with other children. But it's usually not fun, because they don't share, they bicker and they all have crying spells – my son included.

Think about it

Developing friendship skills takes time and experience. The only way kids learn social skills is by practice, so even though there are plenty of bumps along the way it's worth scheduling play time with other children.

What to do

Have realistic expectations.

Young and inexperienced children will need guidance during playtime. Even with supervision, children will get into tussles with each other – and if they didn't they'd never learn how to handle the disagreements that are a part of life. Look at these moments as golden teaching opportunities.

Watch for signs of hunger or tiredness.

Children lose patience and good humor when they are tired or hungry. If hunger is the issue, supply a wholesome snack to the group. If tiredness hits, either leave for home or pull out a quiet game or a favorite movie for the kids to watch together.

Choose the right activities.

Sharing toys can be a challenge, so avoid having few special toys to pass among the group. Good choices for group play are things like building blocks, art projects, and imaginative play supplies like dress up clothes and play kitchen supplies. Having several different activities to choose from can help, also.

Coach them through problems.

Children can get frustrated or angry with a friend, but they don't have the self-control or wisdom to handle their frustrations in the proper way. You'll need to teach the kids how to negotiate and

compromise when they have a problem. Ask each one in turn to explain what happened. Then guide them through problem solving.

Listen and watch.

You don't have to mediate every argument. Often children will work through a disagreement on their own. Step in only if the argument continues with no sense of resolution in sight, or if they begin to push or hit each other.

Praise and encourage.

When your child has had a good play session, don't be shy about giving out compliments. Let your child know that you're proud of him.

What *not* to do

***Don't* make play dates too long.**

Children's social skills tend to deteriorate over time. Watch your child for signs that it's time to end the event. One to three hours is usually plenty for young children. As they get more familiar and comfortable in the friendship you can experiment with longer play times.

***Don't* force friendships on kids who don't mesh.**

Just like adults, some children click and play well together. Others seem to clash whenever they are together. Try to choose playmates that bring out the best in your child.

Don't leave the kids alone while the adults socialize.

When children are older you'll be able to leave them alone to play. Younger children, though, require more monitoring and supervision to keep things running smoothly.

Don't have too large a group.

If you are having behavior problems, see what happens if you pare down to only two or three children together at a time. The more little personalities in the room the more likely problems will arise. Once you notice that things are consistently going well in the small group then you can move on to a bigger play group.

Restaurant behavior

See also: Interrupting, Manners, Mealtime behavior

We like to go out to eat, but with our children, but even a meal at a fast-food restaurant is exhausting. Every time we go out we end up wishing we'd stayed home and ordered pizza.

Think about it

Children can be both excited and bored when at a restaurant. Also, they can find it difficult to sit in one place for the length of time necessary to order, wait, eat, and pay for the meal. This problem is one that improves with age, development and practice. With a good game plan, you can help your children learn how to behave appropriately in a restaurant so that you can all enjoy the experience.

What to do

Pick the right restaurant.

Choose a restaurant based on its level of child-friendliness. What's important? The availability of a children's menu that includes food your kids will actually eat. The absence of a long wait for a table. Booster seats or high chairs. Private booths or eating nooks as opposed to one large open room. And a noisier, family-friendly atmosphere.

Teach restaurant manners at home.

If you are casual about mealtime manners at home, don't expect your children to miraculously develop table manners because you happen to be sitting in a restaurant. Practice good manners at home for every meal, and your children will be prepared when you eat out.

Have longer sit-down meals at home.

Typically, at home we call our children to the table when all the food is ready, and then excuse them as soon as they are finished eating. If you want to practice for restaurant visits it's a good idea to have them come to the table a few minutes earlier. Then sit and chat for a bit after you are finished with the meal. Make it fun by telling stories or jokes or talking about upcoming plans. Not only will this be great practice for eating out, it's a wonderful ritual to introduce into your home.

Dine out at your regular meal time.

When possible, stick close to your routine. Plan to dine at a reasonable time, before the kids become famished and tired. If you must go out later than your usual time, then provide your children with a snack at the normal time, and allow them to have a smaller meal at the restaurant, or to eat half the meal and bring the rest home.

Review your restaurant rules before you go.

Be very specific and leave no stone unturned. A sample list of “restaurant rules” might be: Sit in your seat. Use a quiet inside voice. Use your silverware, not your fingers. Have nice conversation, no bickering. If you don’t like something, keep your comments to yourself and fill up on something else. If you have to use the restroom, ask me privately and I’ll take you.

Ask for an immediate appetizer.

Many restaurants automatically bring bread or chips to the table as soon as you are seated. If this isn’t the case, ask for something to be brought out for the kids.

Prevent boredom.

Bring along a few simple toys, like a deck of cards, plastic animals, or small quiet toys that can keep the kids occupied while they wait.

Mother-speak:

“We ask for to-go boxes and the check at the same time we order our food. This way, if we have to leave because of a tired or whiny child, we can make a fast get away.”

Reagan, mother to Hailey, age 2

What *not* to do

***Don't* imagine that eating out *with* kids is the same as dining *without* them.**

When you take children to a restaurant the focus is not the cuisine or the atmosphere. It's all about controlling the excitement and boredom, teaching your children formal manners, and having quality family time.

***Don't* stay too long after eating.**

Keep your post-meal conversation short. The longer you stay, the more likely your children will run out of patience and act up.

***Don't* make them eat what they don't like.**

Stick with familiar foods when possible. If the grilled cheese sandwich your child ordered turns out to be Swiss cheese on sourdough allow your child to eat the French fries and pack up the sandwich. A restaurant is not the place to battle over new and unfamiliar foods.

***Don't* stay if you're not having fun.**

If a child's behavior gets out of hand, take her to the restroom or out to the car for a time out. If she continues to misbehave, don't be afraid to ask for doggie bags and leave the restaurant. But don't give up. Review your expectations and try again.

Roughhousing or wild play

See also: Sibling fights, Yelling, screaming and shouting

When my children play they like to wrestle, chase and shout. They're noisy and rambunctious. I don't have a lot of patience for this so I usually end up yelling at them to stop.

Think about it

Children have an abundance of energy – and it's a good thing. We just need to help them find the right outlets for that energy.

What to do

Move them to another place.

If the problem is the *location* of the play, more than the play itself, just shift the setting. When you see the kids begin to get physically active, move them outside or to room that is safe for rough and tumble activity.

Stop the play before it gets out of hand.

Perhaps you repeatedly admonish the kids to “be careful” or “settle down” but then let things progress until something is broken or someone is hurt. Only then do you actually put a stop to the action. Instead, step in when you sense that things are headed in the wrong direction and divert the kids to a different activity.

Provide optional entertainment.

Sometimes kids start horsing around if they are bored and not being creative about finding something to do. Put together an easily accessible “activity closet” with games, crafts, puzzles, art supplies and other activities that can help to absorb their energies.

What *not* to do***Don't yell.***

Adding your loud voice to an already intense situation won't help your children calm down or find something productive to do.

Don't threaten.

Don't make empty threats like, “*If you don't stop right now, then I'll...*” These statements undermine your authority and they assume disobedience. These threats usually aren't carried out, and your children know that, so they don't encourage the cooperation you're hoping for. The only thing threats tend to do is create negative energy. Try to stick to instructions that tell your children what you *do* want them to do.

Sharing

See also: Biting other children, Hitting, kicking and hair pulling, sibling fights

My child has a hard time sharing her toys with others.

Think about it

Sharing is a complicated social skill that takes guidance and practice to develop. Young children get very attached to their possessions, and they don't understand how sharing will affect them or their toy. In order to get a better understanding of these feelings, think for a minute about one of your most prized or important possessions – perhaps your computer, camera, car or boat. Now think of having a friend take it away to use for a day. That feeling of apprehension and uncertainty, plus inexperience, may be at the root of your child's reluctance to share.

What to do

Demonstrate how to share.

Share things with your child and point out that you are sharing. For example, *“Would you like a turn on my calculator? I'd be happy to share it with you.”*

Encourage your child to share toys with you.

It's often easier for a child to share with a parent, since the child knows you'll be careful and that you'll give the toy back when you're done. It makes for good sharing practice. When you hand her toy back, explain what she just did, “You shared so nicely, thank you.” That way she has a good feeling about what it means to share, since her young friends probably won't treat it the same way.

Give your child choices.

Instead of demanding that your child share a specific toy, give her some options. For example, *“Sarah would like to play with a stuffed animal. Which one would you like to let her play with?”*

Create situations that require sharing.

Your child can get good practice with sharing when given toys or games that require two or more people to play, such as board games or yard games (like badminton or ball games.) Also look for activities that have plenty of parts for everyone, such as modeling clay, coloring or art projects, or building with blocks.

Let your child know what to expect prior to a sharing situation.

Before a friend’s visit let her know how long the friend will be there, and reassure her that all her things will still be hers after the friend leaves. Allow your child to put away a few favorite things that do not have to be shared. Never require a child to share a special toy that is a frequent plaything or bedtime companion.

Praise good sharing moments.

Watch for good things that happen – no matter how briefly – and praise your child for sharing nicely.

Mother-speak:

“My children were constantly fighting over toys, even if there are two identical ones. My husband bought one of those label making machines, and now if one of the children has a special

toy we label it. My son, Daniel is into spelling things right now, so he types his name onto the label maker, prints it out and sticks the label on his toy. We help my daughter label her toys, too. They both beam at seeing their names on their special things, and they respect each other's toys as well."

Ezia, mother to Daniel, age 4 and Sedona, age 2

What *not* to do

***Don't* shame your child for not sharing.**

If your child isn't willing to share he needs to learn more about the process. Teach, rather than punish.

***Don't* embarrass your child with a public reprimand.**

Even if you've given lessons, prepared your child and set up a good situation for sharing, your child might still refuse to share. When this happens, take him to another room and discuss the issue privately, and set a plan.

***Don't* force your child to share special toys, gifts or lovies.**

Some things should be exempt from sharing rules, such as a favorite doll, a stuffed animal he sleeps with, a fragile toy, or a gift recently given to him.

Shopping misbehaviors

See also: Backtalk, Car problems, Dawdling, Doesn't come when called

I have to go shopping once or twice a week, and I have to take my child with me. He hates to go and so he usually ends up begging for candy and then fussing, crying or having a tantrum in the store.

Think about it

Often it's not shopping that young children object to, but the stressful, business-like approach that parents adopt when running errands. In addition to that, many adult events are uninteresting to children, and the length of most shopping excursions tends to exceed a child's limited amount of patience.

Mother-speak:

“I did an experiment with my son one day. I decided (without telling him) to let him lead us through our shopping experience. I had no schedule for the day and we were just out for fun. He walked and I followed. He found all kinds of things that were interesting to him and I found lots I wanted to see too, unfortunately he "made me keep moving" to get where he wanted to go. I found myself wanting to wander off or go home, but we stayed until he wanted to leave. It was an excruciatingly painful experience and test of my patience, but it made me realize what children go through as they are dragged along on countless uninteresting errands with busy adults.”

Janell, mother to Allen, age 4 and Megan, age 2

What to do

View shopping trips as an event rather than an errand.

This is a great time to achieve two things at once: get your shopping done and have some quality time with your child. If you are a busy, multi-tasking parent you'll find this mindset helps you have a more patient, pleasant attitude which will easily rub off on your child.

Plan more time to shop.

When you are not in a rush, you and your child will be more relaxed and have a more pleasant time. If you must hurry, make a list in advance and stick to it. Roaming the store for random purchases makes it a much longer trip.

Engage your child.

Most children love to be helpers at the store. They can carry things to the car, choose produce, and find items on the shelves. Children who can read might enjoy having their own short list of items to find.

Ask him for input.

When you can, pick two similar items ask your child which one you should buy. Having a say in what you put in the cart is very exciting and empowering for children.

Acknowledge your child's desires.

“Yummy. Those cookies do look good.” Follow this with a statement of why you’ll not be buying it, without sounding reproofing, such as, *“But we’re not buying any cookies today.”*

Create a written or an imaginary wish list.

Whenever your child says, *“I want this”* tell him that you will remember that he likes it. You can even jot it down on paper and call it his wish list.

Prevent the constant gimmees.

Let your child know in advance what you will or will not be buying that day before you enter the store. If you can allow him to choose one treat to put in the basket each time you shop he will know not to ask for an endless list of things. Having to decide on his one thing also gives a purpose to the trip.

Have consistent rules.

If you shop frequently it will help to write out the top five or six shopping rules and put the note card in the car. Review the rules each time before you shop.

What *not* to do

***Don’t* take a hungry child food shopping.**

You might not intentionally plan this, but it happens. If it has been an hour or two since your child last ate, the first item on your list should be a snack your child can eat as you shop. A box

of crackers, a bag of pretzels or a corn dog can work wonders to take the edge off. (Just remember to pay for it – even if it’s an empty bag.)

Don’t take a tired child shopping.

Avoid scheduling shopping trips too close to nap time. Tired children are absolutely more fussy and impatient.

Don’t shop at the store’s busiest hours.

When possible schedule your shopping times to avoid the biggest crowds. More people in the store mean longer lines and more complications. A quiet, less-populated store will also help you feel less stressed. A cashier or manager can recommend good shopping times.

Sibling fights

See also: Biting other children; Bossiness, Hitting, kicking and hair pulling, Playtime behavior

It really bothers me when my children fight with each other. I want them to be friends!

Think about it

When our children fight, it not only grates on our nerves, it tugs on our hearts. We want them to love each other, and we want them to build life-long friendships. When they quarrel it seems this will never happen. In reality, all siblings fight with each other, and it is not a measure of their love or their friendship. It’s the normal development of social and relationship skills. The vast

majority of sibling battles are not destructive to the relationship between the children. All this considered, there *are* ways to reduce the number of fights, and the severity of them, as well.

What to do

Identify and solve the problems

Try to determine if there is a pattern to your children's fights. *Do they typically fight over one thing, such as sharing toys?* If so, make rules about sharing. *Do they always fight while you're making dinner?* You could enlist their help in preparing the meal, feed them a healthy snack, or have an activity planned during that time, such as coloring or modeling with clay. *Do they fight while they are getting ready for bed in the evening?* Create and follow a peaceful bedtime routine that occurs earlier in the evening before the nighttime meltdown occurs. The idea here is to identify the "hot spots" between your children and create a plan to prevent the problem from continually causing arguments.

Teach

Teach your children how to talk, negotiate and compromise with each other. They both are likely to be blinded by their own side of the story and need help to see the other's point of view. You can even have both children sit on a sofa together, or on two adjacent chairs to talk. Rather than dictating a resolution, help them discuss the problem and come to the best conclusion. Over time, and with practice, they will learn how to settle arguments on their own.

Mother-speak:

“Recently I've been dealing with Kekoa being less than nice to his little brother. It's really frustrating because the mama bear comes out in me each time he knocks Kalani down or takes a toy away from him. I've been telling myself I need to be calmer, nicer about how I handle those situations, and to be patient and teach. Kindness begets kindness, I think.”

Michel, mother to Kekoa, age 3 and Kalani, age 1

Distract

If the argument is over a trivial issue, you can often defuse the tension with humor, or distract the kids with another activity.

Praise good behavior

It frequently happens that when children are playing together nicely the parent takes advantage of the peace to catch up on some work. Then, when a fight breaks out, the parent shows up to solve the problem. So, don't disregard your children when they are getting along well! Reward them for getting along with some positive attention. Make a comment of appreciation, such as, *“I'm happy that you enjoy playing together.”* Giving attention when things are going well will confirm your expectations and encourage them to continue the positive behavior.

What *not* to do

***Don't* assume that only one child is at fault.**

Don't assume that your older child controls the relationship. Don't assume that a more aggressive child is always at fault. Sometimes one child has taunted or teased the sibling to the

point of frustration. It's important to be aware of any behind the scenes ordeals that may be testing one child's patience to its limit.

***Don't* assume there's nothing you can do.**

Yes, siblings fight. But they can learn from you how to handle their disagreements in a respectful way.

Sleep issues – bedtime

See also: Sleep issues - naps

Our daughter hates bedtime. It's a battle every night to get her into bed, and then she's up several times during the night.

Think about it

Up to 70% of children under age six have sleep problems. Sleep issues are complicated and have many different causes. They're hard to deal with because when children aren't sleeping, parents aren't sleeping, either. Lack of sleep affects *every minute* of *every day* because lack of sleep isn't just about being tired. Sleep has a role in *everything* -- dawdling, temper tantrums, hyperactivity, growth, health, and even learning. Sleep affects *everything*. Improving your child's sleep patterns can bring more peace to your home.

Maintain a consistent bedtime and awaking time.

Your child's biological clock has an influence on her wakefulness and sleepiness. When you establish a set time for bedtime and wake up time you "set" your child's clock so that it functions smoothly.

Aim for an early bedtime.

Most children will sleep *better* and *longer* when they go to bed early.

Encourage regular daily naps.

Daily naps are important. An energetic child can find it difficult to go through the day without a rest break. A nap-less child will often wake up cheerful and become progressively fussier or hyper-alert as the day goes on. (See Sleep issues – naps, page XX)

Set your child's biological clock.

Take advantage of your child's biology so that he's actually *tired* when bedtime arrives. Align your child's sleepiness with bedtime by dimming the lights during the hour before bedtime. Expose your child to bright morning light to push the biological "go" button— one that says, "Time to wake up and be active."

Develop a consistent bedtime routine.

Routines create security and prevent battles. A consistent, peaceful bedtime routine allows your child to transition from the motion of the day to the tranquil state of sleep. An organized routine helps you coordinate the specifics in a peaceful manner.

Create a cozy sleep environment.

Where your child sleeps can be a key to quality sleep. Make certain the mattress is comfortable, the blankets are warm, the room temperature is right, pajamas are comfy, and the bedroom is welcoming.

Provide the right nutrition.

Foods can affect energy level and sleepiness. The right food choices can bring better sleep. Sugar, junk food and soda pop too close to bedtime can affect sleep. A few ideas for pre-bed snacks are: whole wheat toast and cheese, bagel and peanut butter, apple and cheese, oatmeal with bananas, or yogurt with low-sugar granola.

Help your child to be healthy and fit.

Too much TV watching and a lack of activity prevents good sleep. Children who get ample daily exercise fall asleep more quickly, sleep better, stay asleep longer, and wake up feeling refreshed. Avoid activity in the hour before bedtime though, since exercise is stimulating.

Help your child relax.

A child who is listening to a parent read a book or tell a story, or one who is listening to peaceful music will tend to lie still and listen. This quiet stillness allows him to become sleepy.

What *not* to do

***Don't* keep doing what you're doing if it isn't working.**

In order for your child's sleep issues to be resolved you'll need to make changes in your current routine. Examine what's *not* working and then make a brand new plan.

Don't discipline your child for not sleeping well.

Sleep issues are resolved more effectively and peacefully when you take a positive, pro-active approach to them.

Don't ignore the problem or think it will resolve itself.

If sleep issues are upsetting your household, take a look at the solutions in my books on this topic: *The No Cry Sleep Solution: Gentle Ways to Help Your Baby Sleep Through the Night*, and *The No Cry Sleep Solution for Toddlers and Preschoolers*.

Sleep issues –naps

See also: Sleep issues - bedtime

My daughter refuses to nap, but I suspect that she still needs one. How I can convince her to sleep?

Think about it

Naps are important for your child's health and growth. A nap refreshes a child so that she can maintain her energy for the rest of the day. Studies show that children who nap are more adaptable, have longer attention spans, and are less fussy than those who don't nap.

Determine if your child needs a nap.

There are some signs that tell you that your child would benefit from a nap. If he wakes up happy, but gets cranky later, if he has more temper tantrums during the hours from dinner until bedtime, and if he routinely falls asleep in the car or when watching TV, he's telling you that a nap is a great idea.

Figure out how much naptime your child needs.

Children differ in the amount of sleep they require — but most have similar needs. Toddlers usually need 1 to 3 hours of naptime, and preschoolers can use 1 to 2 hours. Many kindergarteners benefit from an hour or so of naptime. Your child's behavior is a good indicator. When in doubt try for a nap, since even if your child does not sleep, the quiet time can help a child feel refreshed.

Mother-speak:

“I really believe that the quiet hour is important to my children's sense of equilibrium in the day. Even when my son Eliot doesn't sleep it gives him practice at being awake and quiet in his bedroom, which helps him lie quietly in the evening before he drops off to sleep. Equally important, it gives me a break as well. That one hour in the day is my sanctuary. I'm going to defend it for as long as I can!”

Julie, mother to Eliot, age 3, and Oliver age 2

Timing and length of naps

Timing of naps is important. A late nap, or an excessively long nap will prevent your child from being tired at bedtime. Alternatively, a too-short nap won't meet your child's sleep needs.

Tips for a better nap

Provide a healthy lunch or snack before nap. Have a quiet, pre-nap routine, such as book-reading or massage. Keep the room dark. Play lullabies or white noise during the nap. Dress your child in comfortable clothes. Be sure that discomfort (teething, allergies, etc.) isn't preventing sleep.

Watch for signs of tiredness

Tired children fall asleep easily. If you miss the signals they become *overtired* and are unable to sleep. Your child may show signs such as losing interest in playtime, becoming whiny or fussy, losing patience, having tantrums, rubbing eyes, yawning, caressing a lovey or blanket, or asking for a pacifier, bottle or to nurse.

The nap routine

Once you've created a schedule that works with your child's periods of tiredness, follow a simple but specific nap routine. Your child will be comfortable with a pattern to his day. He may predict when naptime approaches and willingly cooperate with you.

Nap routines change

Children's sleep needs change over time. The routine that you set up today won't be the same one you're using a year from now. Be adaptable!

Swearing, bad language and bathroom jokes
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See also: Backtalk, Manners

My son thinks it's hysterical to talk about (and mimic!) bodily functions and waste products in a grossly funny way. He also finds it very funny to use swear words.

Think about it

Children find jokes about private body parts, waste products and body sounds hysterically funny. They also figure out at a very young age that certain words have a distinctively forbidden aura. Many children go through the phase of exploring these words. While normal, it is socially inappropriate, and the sooner you take action, the sooner it will stop.

What to do

Ignore the first offense

If your child innocently injects the word into his conversation he may just be repeating something he heard. Ignoring it may be the best first defense. If your child uses the word a second time, it's clear that he's ready to learn more about improper language.

Teach your child what is socially inappropriate.

Children will repeat things that they hear, even when they don't know what it means – after all, that's how they've learned all the other words in their vocabulary. Your child likely doesn't know the definition of the swear word, but is using it because of mimicking someone else.

Identify the word and explain, *“That is not a word children use.”* Or *“That's not something we joke about in this house.”*

Keep an eye on siblings, friends and other adults.

Young kids are great mynah birds. Determine where your child is picking up the swear words or off-color jokes. Friends? Older siblings? Playmates? (Certainly not from *you!*) This might be a good time to have a chat about the power and meaning of words, why people swear, what you feel is acceptable, and to provide some appropriate alternatives to use when they are tempted to use the wrong word.

Monitor television shows and movies

Even shows that are turned on when your child is in the room, but not intended for him, can influence his vocabulary. Children are capable of picking up background words, even when they are busy playing.

What *not* to do

Don't laugh.

Even if it's funny.

Don't get angry.

You child might have innocently repeated a word or phrase he heard in conversation and be confused by your anger. *"Why was it okay for Daddy to say that in the car, but it's not okay for me to say it?"*

Don't express shock or offense.

Your extremely interesting response might elicit more of the same. It's unlikely that your child understood what he was saying. This is normal childish exploration of language. It just needs to be defined and corrected.

Mother-speak:

“Abby and I had a very interesting conversation about swear words yesterday. It went like this:

Abby: Mommy, we can't say "sh*t"?

Mommy: Well, it's not a nice word.

Abby: It hurts people's feelings?

Mommy: It can hurt people's feelings, yes.

Abby: But YOU sayed "sh*t"

Mommy <gulp>: Well, ummm, yes, I have. But I only say it when I am really angry, or when I'm hurt, like when I burned my thumb.

Abby <thoughtfully>: Mama, if I burn MY thumb, may I say "sh*t"?

These days Abby is so into linguistics that she was clearly just asking for information. It's not like I could get angry with her for that!”

Jenn, mother to Abigail, age 3

Tantrums - See chapter 3, page XX

Teasing and name calling

See also: Playtime behavior, Sibling fights

My children frequently tease each other and their friends. Sometimes they call either other names.

Think about it

Child-sized teasing is a normal way of experimenting with social interaction and part of the process of figuring out how relationships work. It is sometimes a misguided attempt at gaining power or covering emotional hurt. It can also be a sign of nervousness, shyness or confusion.

Just like anything else that children must learn, it takes time for them to understand the power of their words, and how to properly use that power.

What to do

Allow the children to work it through.

If the child being teased doesn't seem bothered, and there are no inappropriate or foul words being used, then it's okay to consider this harmless childishness. Avoid getting involved. Listen in to see if the children can work through the problem on their own before you step in.

Teach.

Explain what teasing is and why it's not right. Focus your children's attention away from the actual words used and onto teasing in general, and its inappropriateness. Discuss the fact that a person who teases is being unkind, even if they don't mean to be unkind.

Re-direct.

Interrupt the teasing and change the subject. Re-direct the children's attention to a group activity that promotes cooperation, such as building with blocks or playing a board game.

Make it a rule.

"We do not tease others." Post the rule on poster board, along with three or four other main family rules, in a central location in your home. (See Family Rules, page XX)

Teach the child who is being teased how to protect herself.

Privately discuss several options that she can use to discourage the teaser. For example, suggest that she laugh at the comment, ignore the teaser, or express her unhappiness in a confident statement. Let her know that she can come to you if she feels unable to handle it herself.

What *not* to do***Don't* ignore adult teasing.**

Make sure none of the adults in the family are teasing the kids. Often adults think it's funny to

tease, and assume that the kids think it's funny, too. Children may even laugh and act as if they enjoy the teasing, when in reality, it hurts their feelings. The children in the family will model the parents' actions and tease each other in the same way they have been teased.

Don't assume a child who teases is being bad.

There may be underlying emotions such as embarrassment or nervousness that are causing the teasing. See if you can determine what's really happening before you jump in to correct the behavior. Once you understand its origin you can address that first, and teach better ways to handle these emotions.

Don't embarrass the teaser with a public reprimand.

Interrupt the children when you hear teasing. Take the child aside for a private discussion. Firmly state your position on teasing. Request that he apologize and send him back out to play.

Don't forget to monitor media influences.

Keep an eye on the television shows your child is watching. Some TV shows' source of humor is sarcasm and putting people down – which are followed by big laughs. Your child may be picking up on this and adapting the technique to his own repertoire.

Toothbrushing

See also: Bath, not behaving in

I have to fight to get my child to brush his teeth! It's a major disruption every morning and every night.

Think about it

Daily tooth care is vital to your child's health. Having your child brush every day is an important part of that care. To make the task less stressful — maybe even pleasant — try some of the following ideas.

What to do

Make tooth brushing a part of your routine.

Do it at the same time every night, such as right after putting on pajamas, and as part of your morning routine, such as right after your child gets dressed. Don't miss a day, and soon it will be a natural habit.

Model good tooth care.

Children watch their older siblings, parents, and others for cues to how they should behave in life. Let your child observe other people brushing their teeth. Brush together and take advantage of your little one's desire to imitate your actions.

Choose the right brush.

Use a brush designed for children. While using a bigger brush may seem more efficient, it's the equivalent of sticking a hairbrush in your mouth: overwhelming. Instead, opt for the special

brushes made especially for children's smaller mouths. Choose a soft-bristled brush to make brushing more pleasant and to prevent hurting your child's gums.

Experiment with different types of toothbrushes and toothpastes.

Search out colorful, musical toothbrushes, or those with playful designs. Try an electric or battery-powered brush made especially for children; these do a great job of cleaning teeth, and your little one may enjoy the buzzing sound and tingly feeling. If you have several brushes, let your little one choose which brush to use each time he brushes.

Use only a small swipe of toothpaste.

Too much can be unpleasant (and unhealthy) for your child, and a tiny bit does the job.

Be creative.

Pretend the toothbrush is a train and the teeth, a track. Make enthusiastic train noises and encourage your child to drive the train. Give the toothbrush and teeth voices and have them talk to each other. Make up a toothbrushing song, or use a variation of a favorite tune. There's no reason that this daily ritual can't be a fun one!

Mother-speak:

"After many months of trying to get my son to cooperate with toothbrushing, it finally occurred to me that Elmo was on his toothbrush and I could use this to help. I mustered up the best Elmo impression I could and said, "Elmo is REALLY hungry. Elmo heard that you ate burritos for dinner. Would you please give Elmo some too?" Samuel smiled, giggled, and gladly opened his

mouth to feed Elmo. Now he and his little sister usually run off down the hall to "feed Elmo" before bed."

Morgan, mother to Samuel, age 4, and Abby age 2

What *not* to do

***Don't* let your child off the hook to avoid the battle.**

Not only can cavities develop quickly if you don't brush, but you are setting in place important life-long habits.

***Don't* threaten future problems.**

Telling a toddler he'll have to have a cavity filled at his next check up, or threatening a preschooler that he'll have dentures at age forty won't have much impact. Children can't think that far ahead.

Traveling

See also: Car problems, Restaurant behavior

When we go on trips with our children it seems to bring out their worst behavior. What should be a fun vacation turns into a trying chore.

Think about it

A new location, unusual foods, mysterious unfamiliar people, loss of household routines, and a liberal dose of excitement – all of these contribute to your children’s unruly vacation behavior. There are a number of things that you can do to turn things around and have a delightful excursion with your children.

What to do

Keep your normal routines.

Disruption of the familiar can create chaos with children. When planning your travel times and vacation events, try to keep four things consistent with your usual routines: morning wake up time, nap time, meal times, and bed time. Of course this isn’t always possible, but the further you veer from your usual routines the more likely your children’s behavior will deteriorate.

Have realistic expectations.

Adults are able to transform their normal behavior to vacation behavior, but children don’t function this way. If your child is a picky eater at home, she’ll be a picky eater on vacation. If your children argue at home, they’ll argue away from home. If your child dawdles at home, he’ll move slowly on vacation. When you expect something different from the norm just because you are away from home you’ll set yourself up for disappointment. Yet almost all parents fall prey to the belief that their child’s behavior will magically improve because they’ve bought airline tickets and rented a hotel room.

Banish boredom.

We expect a vacation to bring all the fun our children need. However, here are many hours of unfilled time involved: waiting in lines, sitting in busses, awaiting meals to be served. Boredom is one of the main culprits for cranky kids and misbehavior during trips. Prevent boredom by packing “fun bags” and keeping a few with you at all times. The party aisle of your favorite toy store has lots of inexpensive ideas to fill your bags, such as: tiny plastic animals, Silly Putty™, stickers, drawing paper and markers, playing cards, comic books, and miniature travel games. These toys can be used anytime you need to keep your child occupied.

Tell them what to expect.

In advance of your journey, let your children know what the travel plans are – how long the journey will take, the expected time of arrival, where you will sleep, what you will do all day. The better prepared they are, and the fewer the surprises, the more pleasant your children will be to travel with. For younger children, you can even role-play the trip in advance. As an example, use chairs set up as an airplane in your living room. Pretend your bedroom is the hotel room. Play-act the trip; discussing what will happen when you’re on vacation.

Have vacation rules.

Children will respond much better if they know exactly what is expected of them. At the start of the trip, or even before you leave, write down a list of rules. (Add to them as necessary.) Review the rules each morning. This is a fantastic way to avoid power struggles during the day.

Use your parenting skills.

Remember to use all the skills you have learned. Offering choices, 5-3-1 Go, engaging the imagination, and having clear, specific, eye-to-eye discussions will all help prevent you from losing your patience.

What *not* to do

Don't expect perfection.

It doesn't matter how much money you've paid, how much time it took to plan, or how excited you are about the trip, your children's behavior will be dictated by what's inside them, not by where they are in the world. They aren't misbehaving because they are ungrateful or bad – they are just being normal kids.

Don't be too rigid.

Relax and pick your battles. Bending a few rules is okay when you're away from home. Don't worry so much about the little things, and focus on having a good time yourself.

Whining – See Chapter 3, page XX

Yelling, screaming and shouting

See also: Playtime behavior

My son has one volume level: loud!

Think about it

Many young children have an abundance of energy and loud voices are the verbal aspect of that energy. Most learn better volume control over time.

What to do**Ask politely.**

When your child gets too loud, go directly to him, get down to his level, and ask him to use his quiet, inside voice. Then demonstrate what you mean by a quiet voice, say, “Talk to me in a voice like this.”

Watch your own volume.

Children are great at modeling the communication styles that they see around them. Many parents don't realize how often that they raise their voices at their children. Pay attention to your own voice. Do you call to him from another room? Do you raise your voice to be heard above his noise? Use your voice level to demonstrate to your child the appropriate tone he should be using.

Have more eye-to-eye communication.

Some children raise their voices to get your attention. To prevent this, get down to your child's level when he's talking to you and maintain eye contact as you listen.

Provide a time and place to yell.

Make sure your children have an outlet for their boisterous voices. Get them involved in a choir or a sports team. Take them to an indoor play arena or a large park often enough to exercise their lungs.

Try whispering.

Make a game of using a whispery voice to talk to each other. Practice with a quieter volume might help your child lower his.

Redirect your child's energy.

When your child's noise level increases and it begins to bother you, interrupt his current activity and redirect him to a quieter pursuit. Get him started on a puzzle, working with clay, making a drawing or building with blocks.

Have your child's hearing checked.

Children who constantly use a loud voice might have a problem hearing. Those who have had frequent ear infections might have fluid build up that creates difficulty hearing. It's always a good idea to check with a medical professional to be sure there isn't a problem.

Control your anger.

If your child's behavior upsets you, read Part 4 of this book, *Staying Calm and Avoiding Anger*.

What *not* to do

Don't raise your volume.

Your automatic response may be to yell louder than your child so that you'll be heard. Instead, use a gentle, calm voice to bring your child's level down to yours. Often, if you get your child's visual attention and begin to talk quietly, he'll stop to hear what you say. If you engage him in a quiet moment, often the effect will last, at least for a while.