

Behaviour (3-6 years)

Child behaviour

All children have different personalities and behaviours. You can help your child learn to manage his behaviour by understanding his temperament, and using simple, positive strategies that encourage good behaviour.

Why is managing behaviour important?

Young children need help to learn what behaviour you expect from them. A positive and constructive approach is often the best way to guide your child's behaviour. This means giving your child attention when he behaves well, rather than just applying consequences when he does something you do not like.

Your child's temperament affects his behaviour. You cannot change your child's temperament. What you can do is to understand and accept your child's individual make-up and adjust your parenting accordingly.

Tips to help with your child's behaviour

Here's some advice on managing some common behaviour difficulties:

- **Tantrums.** You might see crying, screaming, kicking, even breath-holding and vomiting. Hang in there – tantrums tend to lessen after children turn four. In the meantime, try to stay calm, wait it out and make sure you do not accidentally reward the tantrum by giving in.
- **Fighting.** Temperament, environment, age and skills all affect fighting. If natural rough-and-tumble play tends to turn into fights, involve children in setting rules in advance. For fights that are not fun, keep your cool and separate the children. Discuss the issue and decide on consequences when things have calmed down.
- **Lying.** This is part of development, and it often starts around three years of age. It is often better to teach children the value of honesty than to punish them for small lies.
- **Anxiety.** Pre-schoolers often fear things like being on their own or being in the dark. Support your child by acknowledging his fear, gently encouraging him to do things he is anxious about and praising him when he does.
- **Food fussiness.** You're responsible for making healthy food available regularly; your child can be responsible for deciding how much he eats. Do not bribe your child to eat healthy food by rewarding him with unhealthy treats.

Give your child **positive attention for good behaviour**. This almost always works better than punishing him for bad behaviour. Here are some ideas to encourage his good behaviour, so you will see less bad behaviour:

- Give clear instructions so your child knows what you expect. Aim for rules that guide his behaviour in a positive way. 'Please shut the gate' is better than 'Don't leave the gate open'.
- Make your child's space an environment for good behaviour, with plenty of safe, stimulating playthings. Reduce the chance of problems by keeping breakables or that things might hurt him, out of reach.

- Catch your child being good and reinforce good behaviour with positive feedback that describes what you are seeing. For example, hug your child and say, 'I really like the way you're keeping all the blocks on the table' rather than waiting for the blocks to come crashing to the floor then shouting, 'Hey! Stop that'.

Sometimes the best way to manage bad behaviour is to ignore it. You can also use consequences to manage behaviour. For example, if your child refuses to put on a coat, the natural consequence is that he feels cold. Or you might impose a negative consequence – for example, if children are fighting over a toy, you put the toy away for three minutes. Be sure to give the toy back as soon as the three minutes is up so they have an opportunity to try again and show you the behaviour you want to see.

What doesn't work – smacking

Smacking is not good for children's wellbeing and does not help them learn to follow rules.

Smacking has three big drawbacks:

- It can give children the message that hitting is OK.
- It can cause injuries – for example, if the person smacking is very angry.
- Physical punishment like smacking can lead to longer-term problems in children's health and development.

Positive attention for good behaviour and relevant consequences that teach the correct behaviour are much more effective, and much safer ways to help your child learn what behaviour you want to see.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [Young children's behaviour: guidance approaches for early childhood educators](#)
- [10 days to a less defiant child: the breakthrough program for overcoming your child's difficult behaviour](#)
- [Positive discipline for Pre-Schoolers](#)