

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOURS DISCIPLINE POLICY

Age/Stage	Typical Behaviours
Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tantrums• Terrible Two – “No!” being the most used word• Emerging independence• Bites or hits
Preschoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tests limits• Asks “Why?” a lot• May tell lies, steal or argue
Young School Age Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stubborn, refuses to do something• Bossy, likes to be in control• Does not like criticism• Still emerging independence – wants things own way

1. Stay calm.

The first step in dealing with a challenging behavior is to look calm. A parent who expresses anger and frustration, even unintentionally, can generate fear and anxiety in the child and possibly escalate an already-chaotic situation. Keep in mind that your child’s emotional reaction is rooted in some type of an unmet need; the calmer you are, the easier it will be for *you* to recognize the need and find the best way to respond to it. Modeling composure while facing a disordered situation can help strip away a child’s anxiety and nurture a sense of safety and reassurance.

2. Give clear and positive instructions.

Keep in mind that children need to know exactly what your expectations are and that they respond more effectively to positive statements even when they are upset. For example, if you are concerned that your 3-year-old might be too upset to be left alone in his room with the door shut, you can calmly and clearly communicate your positive request: “Please keep the door open” versus “Don’t close the door.”

3. Be consistent.

Consistency is the key element to shaping a new behavior in children; because of the level of commitment it requires, it is often one of the most difficult tasks for parents to adhere to. Keep in mind that children learn more from your modeling than from your telling. For example, if you would like to replace TV time with reading right before your son goes to bed, you need to demonstrate your commitment to consistency by avoiding distractions (even your work-related conference calls) right before his bed time. Keep in mind that your commitment is only the first step. Children react to change, and your son might not be pleased with a demand that results in a change of routine. He may respond with anger, resistance or frustration. However, your consistent behavior—reading a book at

the same time every night—will gradually start to wear away his frustration and introduce him to a new routine that he can become attached to. Consistency makes a task predictable for children and gives them a sense of control. Once your child is in this state of mind, tantrum-free learning is more likely to happen!

4. Be aware of emotions.

Young children often do not have a full understanding of how they feel or the appropriate words to label their emotions when they are upset. It is the parent's responsibility to offer them appropriate tools to enable them to deal with their emotions. The following suggestions can be helpful while modeling appropriate emotional response:

- Acknowledge emotions. We need to send the message to children that we see and hear them. Acknowledging their emotions helps with this process and makes the child feel safe and less anxious. It may even put an end to a noisy tantrum!
- Label emotions. Children may or may not be at the developmental level to understand emotional complexities. However, labeling an emotion such as anger or sadness can help the child to find the right word for certain feelings or facial expressions. Simply stating "I can see you are sad" when the child is crying will enable the child to make a connection between sadness, the intensity of her emotions and (most importantly) the appropriate vocabulary for expressing sadness. You can use books such as Today I'm Feeling Silly by Jamie Lee Curtis or When Sophie Gets Angry by Molly Bang to label emotions through pictures. If developmentally appropriate, you can ask your son to draw a picture of his face when he is sad or happy.

5. Set boundaries and be creative about it.

Boundaries are not designed to limit children. On the contrary, setting age-appropriate limits and providing structures helps children to feel less overwhelmed and more secure. Keep in mind that creativity can smooth the rough edges of rules and makes limit setting more effective. The following examples might be helpful when setting boundaries on waiting and turn-taking:

- Sing a short song while helping a distressed child put his shoes on.
- Count to 10 to offer some time to a child who is not ready to go down the slide (*and does not care that his friends are waiting*).
- Clap your hands 5 times to offer a concrete *waiting time* to a child who wants a toy that his sibling is playing with.

6. Replace words with actions.

Regardless of how consistent we are or how boldly we set boundaries for children, a child might be too overwhelmed to be comforted or accept directions. In such cases we need a stronger tool. In his book 1, 2, 3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12, Thomas Phelan advises caregivers to use his simple steps to replace words with actions, give options and take action. To illustrate his point of view, let's review the following example and the dynamics between Cindy and her 3-year-old daughter Meagan:

Meagan was excited about Story Time at the library, but right before the librarian started reading her favorite book, she noticed that she had forgotten Mr. Teddy Bear at home. Meagan started to lose control. Cindy managed the situation according Phelan's steps:

- *Step 1- Acknowledging emotions:* “Meagan, I can see you are upset and you want Mr. Teddy Bear.”
- *Step 2- Providing some possible choices:* “Do you want to go back home and be with Mr. Teddy Bear, or do you want to stay here and listen to the story?” This question can be asked twice to make sure that the child understands.
- *Step 3- Set boundaries:* “I am asking you this question one more time, and if you don’t make a choice I will make it for you: Do you want to stay here or go home and be with Mr. Teddy Bear?”
- *Step 4- Take action:* Either value your child’s choice, which should be within the boundaries you set, or make the choice for her: “I can see that you are too upset to make a choice, so I’ll make it for you and we will go back home.” And stick to it!

The underlying foundation of 1, 2, 3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12 is to provide three chances for your child to make a decision. If she is too overwhelmed to make a choice among some possible options, then you take an action and make the choice for her. Keep in mind that although your child might not be ready to immediately adapt to your decision, she will eventually learn to build trust in what you have to say, take control of a frustrating situation and make her own decisions. This concept will teach your child problem-solving skills and to take responsibility for her actions!

7. No words, no action.

As parents, we need to know that picking a battle with our children can help establish a healthy relationship. In his book ScreamFree Parenting, Edward Runkel advises us to “let the consequences do the screaming.” Sometimes, it is necessary to teach our children to make their own choices and learn to deal with the consequences later on. For example, if your child resists taking a toy to a play date to share with his friends, consciously choose to let go of trying to convince him. Instead, invest your energy in helping him see the consequence of his action during the play date when he realizes that he has no toy to share. The upside of such a practice is an inevitable fact: since your child has been exposed to the consequences of a self-directed decision, he is now more receptive to avoid the discomfort that resulted from his choice. As a result, he is more ready to listen to your suggestion before the next play date!

8. Create a reward system.

All children demonstrate positive behavior that needs to be acknowledged throughout the day. It is our job as parents to catch our child in the right moment, reward positive behavior and build the foundation of behavior modification. Depending on the child’s individual needs or the dynamic of a group, rewards can be used in different formats:

- *Simple reward system:* Using words to acknowledge a child for his behavior when he is upset can keep his attention on the new behavior. A simple verbal reward such as “good listening when mommy is speaking with you” can go a long way while facing a conflict.
- *Complex reward system:* Using visuals such as sticker charts can convey a positive message to children. Depending on a child’s developmental level, the parent can have the child postpone immediate gratification, earn 5-10 stickers first, and then get a toy from a *treasure box*.

9. Classroom Management Strategies:

Make sure your child or others are not in danger. If your child is behaving in a way that may injure him or others, remove him from the situation or take steps to stop him. For young children, just pick them up and physically move them.

Change the setting or location. If your child's behavior occurs only in certain situations, specific places, or only around certain people, you may be able to stop the behavior by observing what is happening in these instances. You may stop the behavior just by removing your child from that setting or from being around those people.

Create a distraction. A young child can often be distracted into stopping an undesirable behavior. For example, if your preschooler has trouble sharing toys and gets into squabbles with other children over a toy, distract him or her with another toy. Present the toy in a way that makes it seem extra special.

Tell your child in advance what is happening. Most children like routines and predictability. Changes in their normal day's routine could upset them and trigger negative behaviors. When possible, let your child know what will happen ahead of time. Prepare them for any changes to their daily routine. "Today, after your nap, your grandmother will pick you up instead of me."

Respond calmly, speak briefly. It is hard to listen to your child when she is upset, talking in a loud voice, or is talking so much that you cannot really hear what she is trying to say. Do not try to talk about why something is right or wrong while your child or you are upset. Wait until a "teachable" moment when both of you are away from the moment and calm.

Teach alternative behaviors. Teach your child what you want them to DO instead of what not to do. For example, say: "Tell me calmly what is wrong," instead of "Stop screaming!"

Offer choices. Give your child choices to help build independence while also giving him some control over his environment. For example "Do you want to put your shoes on before we get in the car or after you are in your seat?"

Notice the positive—catch your child doing "good." Adults tend to not focus when children are showing positive behaviors. If you reinforce positive behaviors, they will continue. Praise your child when positive behavior occurs. For example, "You did a nice job of waiting for your turn. You know how to wait calmly!"

Be consistent. Children like things to be consistent and predictable. Establish regular routines for your child and stick with them (examples: routines for eating, getting dressed, going to child care, and so on). "It's almost 7:30, time to get in the car."

Use humor or games. Angry or upset preschoolers and young school-age children can often be calmed with humor. "How fast can you buckle your seat belt? If you can do it before I get mine on, you'll win the game!"

* Please note: Approaches may vary based on temperament and level of concern of behavior and risk to child and others etc. Also, consequences will be developmentally appropriate. In extreme cases, a referral to the Child Development Programme will be made.