



How to encourage good behaviour in your child

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 don't like.

Here are some practical tips for putting this positive approach into action.

Tips for good behaviour

1. Be a role model

Use your own behaviour to guide your child. Your child watches you to get clues on how to behave – and what you do is often much more important than what you say. For example, if you want your child to say 'please', say it yourself. If you don't want your child to raise her voice, speak quietly and gently yourself.

2. Show your child how you feel

Telling your child honestly how his behaviour affects you helps him see his own feelings in yours. And if you start sentences with 'I', it gives your child the chance to see things from your perspective. For example, 'I'm getting upset because there is so much noise that I can't talk on the phone'.

3. Catch your child being 'good'

When your child is behaving in a way you like, give her some positive feedback. For example, 'Wow, you're playing so nicely. I really like the way you're keeping all the blocks on the table'. This works better than waiting for the blocks to come crashing to the floor before you take notice and say, 'Hey, stop that'.

4. Get down to your child's level

When you get close to your child, you can tune in to what he might be feeling or thinking. Being close also helps him focus on what you're saying about his behaviour. If you're close to your child and have his attention, you don't need to make him look at you.

5. Listen actively

To listen actively, you can nod as your child talks, and repeat back what you think your child is feeling. For example, 'It sounds like you feel really sad that your blocks fell down'. When you do this, it can help young children cope with tension and big emotions like frustration, which sometimes lead to unwanted behaviour. It also makes them feel respected and comforted. It can even diffuse potential [temper tantrums](#).

6. Keep promises

When you follow through on your promises, good or bad, your child learns to trust and respect you. She learns that you won't let her down when you've promised something nice, and she also learns not to try to change your mind when you've explained a consequence. So when you promise to go for a walk after your child picks up her toys, make sure you have your walking shoes handy. When you say you'll leave the library if your child doesn't stop running around, be prepared to leave straight away.

7. Create an environment for good behaviour

The environment around your child can influence his behaviour, so you can shape the environment to help your child behave well. This can be as simple as making sure your child's space has plenty of safe, stimulating things for him to play with. Make sure that your child can't reach things he could break or that might hurt him. Your glasses look like so much fun to play with – it's hard for children to remember not to touch. Reduce the chance of problems by keeping breakables and valuables out of sight.

8. Choose your battles

Before you get involved in anything your child is doing – especially to say 'no' or 'stop' – ask yourself if it really matters. By keeping instructions, requests and negative feedback to a minimum, you create less opportunity for conflict and bad feelings. [Rules](#) are important, but use them only when it's really important.

9. Be firm about whining

If you give in when your child is whining for something, you can accidentally train her to whine more. 'No' means 'no', not maybe, so don't say it unless you mean it.

10. Keep things simple and positive

If you give [clear instructions](#) in simple terms, your child will know what's expected of him – for example, 'Please hold my hand when we cross the road'. And positive rules are usually better than negative ones, because they guide your child's behaviour in a positive way. For example, 'Please shut the gate' is better than 'Don't leave the gate open'.

11. Give children responsibility – and consequences

As your child gets older, you can give her more responsibility for her own behaviour. You can also give her the chance to experience the [natural consequences](#) of that behaviour. You don't have to be the bad guy all the time. For example, if it's your child's responsibility to pack her lunch box and she forgets, the natural consequence is feeling hungry at lunch time.

At other times you might need to provide consequences for unacceptable or dangerous behaviour. For these times, it's best to ensure that you've explained the consequences and that your child has agreed to them in advance.

12. Say it once and move on

If you tell your child what to do – or what not to do – too often, he might end up just tuning out. If you want to give him one last chance to cooperate, remind him of the consequences for not cooperating. Then start counting to three.

13. Make your child feel important

Give your child some [simple chores](#) or things that she can do to help the family. This will make her feel important. If you can give your child lots of practice doing a chore, she'll get better at it, feel good about doing it, and want to keep doing it. And if you give her some praise for her behaviour and effort, it'll help to build her [self-esteem](#).

14. Prepare for challenging situations

There are times when looking after your child and doing things you need to do will be tricky. If you think about these challenging situations in advance, you can [plan around your child's needs](#). Give him a five-minute warning before you need him to change activities. Talk to him about why you need his cooperation. Then he's prepared for what you expect.

15. Maintain a sense of humour

It often helps to keep daily life with children light. You can do this by using songs, humour and fun. For example, you can pretend to be the menacing tickle monster who needs the toys picked up off the floor. Humour that has you both laughing is great, but humour at your child's expense won't help. Young children are easily hurt by parental 'teasing'.