

How to Teach Good Behavior: Tips for Parents

Children must be taught good behavior so they can live and work well in society when they grow up. Good teaching includes rewards for good behavior. Your child's age should guide your choice of ways to teach. Some tips to help you teach your child are listed below.

DO:

- Encourage your child and give lots of affection.
- Reward good behavior. Praise your child and give extra attention when he or she does something right. Give a reward for good behavior.
- Your child will copy your actions and words. Act and speak the way you want your child to act and speak.
- Be kind, but firm.
- Remove temptations (like breakable items) before children get into trouble. Preventing bad behavior is always easier than correcting a problem.
- Ignore some small problems or annoying behaviors. Bigger problems need to be corrected, especially if the child's bad behavior might be harmful or dangerous.
- Be consistent. Always treat a bad behavior the same way, or your child will learn that he or she can sometimes "get away with it."
- Correct your child soon after the bad behavior occurs, but wait until your anger has passed. Counting to 10 before you say something or do something may help reduce your anger so you are in control of yourself.
- Make rules that are right for your child's age. Rules work best for children who are school-aged. Younger children (infants and toddlers) don't understand rules yet. They are still learning what a rule is.
- Use "time-out" for children between 18 months and five years of age. Time-out may help correct bad behaviors like tantrums, whining, fighting, and arguing. To use time-out, put your child in a chair with no toys or TV. Don't speak to your child during time-out. Time-out should last one minute for each year of the child's age. For example, a four-year-old should be in time-out for four minutes. Your child should be quiet for at least 15 seconds before time-out ends.
- Correct older children by taking away things they like (TV or video games, or time with friends).
- Remember to tell your child that the behavior was bad, but the child isn't "bad."

DON'T:

- Don't nag or talk about bad behavior too much. Children ignore nagging.
- Don't try reasoning to get your point across to children younger than three or four years. They won't understand.
- Don't criticize your child.
- Don't call your child names.
- Don't call your child "bad." Only the behavior is bad.
- Don't scold too often. Scolding makes children anxious and may make them ignore you. It may also worsen the behavior. Never scold your child during time-out.
- Don't spank. Spanking teaches your child that it's okay to hit someone in order to solve a problem. Never spank a child who is younger than 18 months. It doesn't help, and you may hurt the child. Never spank a child when you're angry. Never hit your child with an object.
- Don't pull your child's hair, jerk an arm, or shake your child.

Where can I find more information about teaching good behavior to my children?

Here are two books you might find at your public library or local bookstore:

Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development, a book written by T. Berry Brazelton. Published by Addison-Wesley Publishing Company in 1992. The chapter on discipline is very helpful (see pages 252 to 260).

Parenting: Guide to Positive Discipline, a book written by Paula Spencer. Published by Ballantine Books in 2001.