

## Discipline Means Teaching

Your job as a parent is to teach your child what behavior is okay and safe, and what is not. This is one of the hardest things you will do as a parent. Different behaviors are acceptable in different families. Discipline takes time and patience. Discipline does not mean punishment. It is not harsh. Discipline is for teaching your child. It is **not** a way for you to express your feelings.

The goal of discipline is for your child to learn to choose healthy behaviors. To help your child learn good behavior:

- Create a safe and secure environment.
- Make clear and consistent rules.
- Set a good example—be a role model.
- Reward good behavior.

Discipline is very different for an infant, a two-year old, and a four-year old.

**Babies**, until about 15 months of age, are too young to understand rules.

- Remove things from their reach that are not safe.
- Distract them with toys or activities that are okay.
- Never shake or hit your baby.

**Toddlers**, until about age 3, need very simple rules.

- Make rules that your child is able to understand and follow.
- Explain the rule ahead of time. Be sure he understands it.
- Keep the same rules every day.



**Your child will be better able to follow rules if you:**

- Keep simple daily routines.
- Give your child something to do when he needs to sit quietly.
- Give healthy snacks when meals are late.
- Avoid long visits and trips.

Almost all children between the ages of one and three have **temper tantrums** to get your attention or to get their way. If your child has a tantrum:

- Try to be calm. If you are loud or angry or hit your child, he will copy you.
- Make sure he is safe—that he will not hurt himself or others.
- If possible, ignore the behavior. Attention is usually what a child wants the most.
- If you can, take your child with you to a different room or go outside.
- Avoid arguing. It does not work.

**Children need to know what to expect.**

- A rule tells your child what you expect of him. He also needs to know what will happen if he chooses not to follow the rule.
- Set a simple daily routine. Remind your child about what will happen next.

**Children need to be praised and hear that they are loved.**

- Reward your child for good behavior.
- Tell your child what you like about what he is doing.
- Even if your child's behavior upsets you, make sure he knows that you still love him.



- Tell your child why his behavior upsets you.
- Give him a chance to understand what he has done.

**Children learn by copying what their parents do.**

- Tell and show your child what behaviors are okay.
- Show your feelings in ways that do not hurt.
- Try to remain calm. Never take your anger out on your child.
- Do not hit or spank your child. Do not use words that hurt.

**You can get help learning how to manage behavior.**

- Ask your child's doctor or nurse.
- Talk with other parents.
- Join a parent support group.
- Find out about home visiting programs in your area.
- Take a parenting class.

It is normal for your child's behavior to upset you. Take a break. You can call someone for advice or just to calm down. Call a friend or a parent hotline. Here are three telephone numbers to call for help:

**Parental Stress Line 1-800-632-8188**

Counseling, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**Parents Helping Parents 1-800-882-1250**

Counseling and referrals to support groups

**Children's Trust Fund 1-888-775-4KIDS**

Free materials and referrals to parenting classes and home visiting programs