



PREVENTING MISBEHAVIOR

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When you were a child, misbehavior probably meant one thing to you, another to your father, and something else to your mother. What misbehavior is depends upon what the child does, how he or she behaves and how the parent feels about or interprets what the child does. Thus, depending on the time, place, and circumstances, misbehavior can be just about anything a child does or says. Sometimes the child's behavior can be unintentional, while at other times it can be deliberate and intentional. A child's behavior at any given time or in any situation may simply be due to his or her age and stage of growth and development. Much of what may be considered misbehavior by the parent may simply be normal behavior for the child.

Many behavior problems can really be parent problems. If your child is misbehaving too much, stop and examine your own behavior. Honestly and thoughtfully consider these questions:

- Do I use more "do's" than "don'ts"?
- Are my rules reasonable?
- Does my child understand the rules in our home?
- Are my/our rules related to the ages and abilities of the children?
- Am I consistent in enforcing rules?
- Do I make it easy for my child to behave well?
- Do I let my child make choices?
- Do I give a few minutes warning before stopping my child's play?
- Do I provide interesting things to play with?
- Do my spouse/partner and I agree on rules and guidance and discipline?

REMEMBER:

- **Depending on the time, the place, and the circumstances, misbehavior can be just about anything a child does or says.**

It is easier on both parents and children to prevent misbehavior than to deal with it afterwards. You need a plan in order to prevent problems. Try some of these suggestions. Try only one new technique at a time. Try it for at least two weeks. It takes time to form new habits, for parents as well as children.

WAYS TO PREVENT MISBEHAVIOR

- **CHANGE THE SETTING.** Put dangerous items, breakables, and valuables out of the reach of infants and toddlers. For preschoolers, have places to play that are safe and worry-free.
- **PROVIDE INTERESTING PLAYTHINGS.** Playthings prevent boredom and misbehavior. They do not need to be store-bought or expensive.
- **MAKE CLEAR RULES.** Rules should be relevant, reasonable, and consistently enforced. And, the fewer rules, the better.
- **BE FLEXIBLE.** There are times when the rules can be relaxed. Rules need to change as the child grows in ability and responsibility.
- **SET A GOOD EXAMPLE.** Children imitate those around them. They learn what to do and how to behave by seeing what adults and older siblings do.
- **GIVE CHOICES.** When you can, give children a choice of several things to do.
- **GET THE CHILD'S ATTENTION.** Say his or her name, touch, and look him or her in the eye before you talk to or give instructions.
- **GIVE WARNING TIME.** When it is necessary to change a child's activity, give him or her five to ten minutes to finish a task or project/activity and to get ready to go on to something new.
- **SPEND TIME WITH YOUR CHILDREN.** Children need undivided, personal, one-on-one attention on a regular and consistent basis from their parents.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Child Guidance Techniques, PNW0064
Communicating With Young Children, EB1348
Young Children and Safety, PNW0483
Young Children and Stories, PNW0484
Young Children's Play and Toys, PNW0485
Teaching Young Children Right from Wrong:
Learning to be Honest (video—6/98)
Understanding Babies and Toddlers, PNW0279
Understanding 3- to 6-Year-Olds, PNW0280
Disciplining Preschoolers, PNW0281

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Web sites:

- National Network for Family Resilience (NNFR):
<http://www.nnfr.org/parented/>
- National Network on Child Care
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