



# WHY CHILDREN MISBEHAVE

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There are many reasons children misbehave; for example, when they don't feel well, need sleep, are hungry, have had too much or not enough exercise. A misbehaving child can be hard to get along with. A tired child can be cranky, a hungry child irritable, a sleepy child fussy, and a sick child can be cross. Understanding a child's misbehavior is a significant aspect of being an effective parent.

## Children misbehave when they:

- **feel rejected.**
- **lack knowledge and experience.**
- **are upset and feel insecure.**
- **are discouraged.**
- **feel unloved.**
- **lack confidence.**

***Children misbehave when they feel rejected.*** When children feel unloved and unwanted they can become resentful, moody, and ill-behaved. When parents, or other significant adults in the child's life, ignore the child's feelings and thoughts, the child can begin to think he or she is unworthy or of little value.

***Children misbehave when they lack knowledge and experience.*** Children do not come equipped with information and wisdom. Children are not little adults. Children do not and cannot think and act like adults. Much of their behavior is simply normal for their age, and not done intentionally to irritate their parents. Young children cannot think of a variety of ways to do something, or consider the outcomes. They do need lots of information and explanations about how to behave.

***Children misbehave when they are upset and feel insecure.*** Children need constant attention and the security it provides. Change can result in upset children. When mother is sick, when a new baby arrives, or when the family moves to a new neighborhood, misbehavior is much more likely.

***Children misbehave when they are discouraged.*** Children who don't receive praise for the good and positive things they do may become discouraged. They may misbehave in order to get the attention and closeness they need from their parents.

**Children misbehave when they feel unloved.** Children generally want to please those who love them. Without a loving relationship, children have little or no reason to behave in acceptable ways, except to avoid punishment. It is not enough that parents love their children. Parental love needs to be shown and demonstrated.

**Children misbehave when they lack confidence.** Children who feel inadequate may turn to boasting, bragging, and even fighting; or, they may withdraw and be unwilling to try something new or different. "Put-downs" tend to make a child feel inadequate and worthless; encouraging words tend to help them feel adequate and confident.

## **CHILDREN AND MISBEHAVIOR**

- There is always a reason for misbehavior. Parents can deal with a misbehaving child more effectively when they understand what is causing it.
- When children misbehave because they are tired or rundown, it is possible to change the child's activity level, sleep habits, or eating habits in order to change their behavior.
- When parents expect children to behave like adults they will likely be disappointed. Love children as they are, i.e., noisy, nosy, energetic, messy, and often dirty.
- A child is a child for only a very short time.
- Children who feel loved are more likely to act the way their parents expect and want them to act.
- If a child's misbehavior results from lack of confidence, a parent can use more encouraging and positive words and fewer "put-downs."
- Separate the child from the behavior. It is possible to love the child, and not the behavior.

***Children need love, encouragement, approval, and kind words  
which reinforce good behavior.***

### **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  
(NNCC): <http://www.nncc.org>