

Toddler Discipline

Toddlers often say "no" or do the opposite of what you want them to do. During this normal phase of development, children test the rules parents make to see if a parent will really do what they say.

Toddlers can be passionate about getting their own way. They want to do things for themselves, like run and climb up stairs or chairs. They want to be in charge of what they wear and eat, where they go, and what they do. A toddler's bossiness is way to test how much power he or she really has. Toddlers will do things purposely to anger or frustrate parents just to get parents to pay attention to them. They are great imitators of behavior they see and hear.

Handle bossiness with gentle firmness and kindness. In time, children will see that there are better ways than demanding to get what they want. Try these strategies to help develop a happy, well-behaved, and independent child.

How can I avoid conflict?

Here are some ways you can avoid trouble.

- **Childproof the home.** Go through every room in your house and remove anything valuable, dangerous, or messy. Preventive child-proofing will remove temptations. Expect children to be curious and want to explore. Create a safe environment where they have the freedom to do so.
- **Give choices.** Give 2 or 3 choices to avoid "no" answers. For example, do not ask if the child wants to go to the park. Instead, ask "When we get to the park, do you want to play on the swing or the slide?" Do not give too many choices, and try to avoid situations that make your child feel that the only choice he has is to throw a tantrum.
- **Redirect your child.** Instead of punishing your child, redirect them into a suitable behavior. If a child plays with something you don't want him to have, replace it with another object or toy that he enjoys. This approach avoids a potential power struggle and does not place children in a situation where they might say "no."
- **Set sensible limits.** Suggest alternatives such as, "you cannot run in the parking lot, but you can run around the yard when we get home." If she demands something in the grocery store, instead of saying, "No," (which may lead to a screaming, kicking child) say, "Let's write that down on the list." Then you can let the child choose something from the list at the end of the shopping trip.

How can I encourage good behavior?

Approach your child with understanding and humor. Use your authority for the larger issues, such as safety. Your rules should not be too strict or too lenient. Enforce the rules fairly every time. Be gentle but firm with your child. If a rule is broken, after a short, clear, and gentle explanation, immediately find a place for your child to sit alone for 2 minutes. Time-out should be composed of complete withdrawal of any person's attention from the child. It is very important for a time-out to come right after a rule is broken. The most important thing parents can do is to be consistent in following through with reasonable rules. If you feel like your child does not respond to time-out, talk to your doctor for advice.

Teach your child about consequences. For example, if your child doesn't stay in the car seat then the car doesn't go. If he throws food on the floor, then he doesn't get any more and may be hungry (and if your child is old enough, have him help clean the floor).

Most importantly, be consistent with your discipline. Don't make rules you don't intend to enforce. If you say you are going to do it, do it.

Your child's self-esteem will increase as he or she learns to deal with the world and other people. How you manage this period of growing independence and individuality will impact your child's future behavior. Many parents find the toddler stage difficult. Ask your healthcare provider if you would like more advice on managing behavior. With patience, support, understanding, and consistency, you and your child will survive this phase.

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