

Tips for Parents: Behavior

Make the rules fit your needs.

Your rules don't have to be the same as anyone else's rules. You decide what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in your home. You may want your child in bed by a certain time every night, but you may not care if the bed is made every day.

Notice the good stuff.

Emphasize the positive. A lot can be accomplished by emphasizing the positive. Everyone, adults and children, like to be complimented on accomplishments. That good feeling of a job well-done is motivation to keep doing a good job.

Find opportunities to praise. Instead of keeping an eye out for the times your child is selfish, notice when he or she shares. Look for what she does right, then reward her with a smile, a pat, or a hug. An important benefit of looking for the positive is that you become aware of many things your child is doing "right" that you hadn't noticed before. She may not hang up her clothes, but she does feed her dog regularly.

Be honest. If neatness is important to you and your child's homework paper is correct (but messy) it's better *not* to say, "What a nice job you did!" when you don't mean it. Instead, find something good about the effort, something you can sincerely compliment. "That's a good story you wrote," or "You spelled all the words correctly." Then decide whether this is the time to suggest re-copying the work.

Make sure you're understood.

Watch what you say. "Thanks for coming when I called you" will be more effective than "Well, you finally heard me". "You really worked hard today" will have better long-term effects than "I knew you wouldn't finish your chores."

Be clear and direct. If you want your child to finish his homework before he watches television, say so. Don't say, "Do it promptly when you come home." Instead, say, "If you finish your homework by 6 pm, then you can watch 30 minutes of TV."

Follow through. If the reward for doing a good job is to read a book with you, don't put it off. If the consequence of not finishing homework by 6 pm is the loss of TV privileges, make sure you carry out the punishment.

Have a plan in mind and make sure your child understands the plan.

Define the problem. Before developing a plan of action with the teacher, you both need to be clear about what the problem is. Have a conference. Discuss the ways in which your child is

disruptive or uncooperative. When is she misbehaving? Is there a time when she does pay attention? What has the teacher already done about trying to correct the situation?

Share information. You know your child. What rewards will motivate him? What consequences will be effective? If your child likes to be alone, sending her to her room will not be an effective consequence for neglecting homework. If your child likes to paint, extra time at the easel may be the motivation he needs to sit still during show-and-tell.

Make the plan clear and concrete. A vague, “I’ll try to see to it that he gets his homework done,” is not a plan. You and the teacher need to work out a system for communicating improvements or problems, and for insuring that rewards and consequences are given when deserved. Put the plan in writing so you are both clear on the details. The teacher might send home a note daily to tell you if your child was disruptive that day. Perhaps three good reports in a week earn a trip to the park.

Good behavior at school is as important as it is at home.

Make sure your child understands that you expect good behavior in school. Your child should see that you expect good behavior at school just as you do at home, and that learning is important to you.

Create a partnership with the teacher. If discipline problems occur at school, it is important that you and the teacher work together. Your child should be aware that you are working with the teacher. That doesn’t mean threats of “If I hear from your teacher again, you’re going to be in big trouble!” It does mean telling your child that “Ms. Brown and I want you to do your homework when it is assigned. We’ve been talking about how we can help you and this is the plan we’ve come up with.”

For more information:

Kelley, Kate. “The Baffled Parent’s Guide to Stopping Bad Behavior.” McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Nelsen, Jane. “Positive Discipline.” Ballantine Books, 2006.

Videos: “Discipline With a Positive” I & II
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