

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

ISSUE NO. 43

MORE THAN JUST SAYING "NO": Guiding Your Child to Positive Behaviors

You may hear the terms *discipline*, *punishment*, and *guidance* when it comes to addressing children's behavior. Debates and discussions are sparked continuously over what is the best way to discipline children. Are timeouts useful? Just how can I get my three-year-old to behave? All parents want their children to show positive behaviors and at the very least not be disruptive, or hurt anyone, including themselves.

Each of us has a few different ideas on what behavior is acceptable or not. But, because we live in a society with laws and social expectations, we learn to adapt our behavior. We obey the laws and tend to meet most societal expectations. If we don't, we learn to deal with the consequences. The same rules apply to how children learn to "behave". Children's positive behavior is guided by knowing the expectations, as well as the results of their behavior.

Goals and Tools for Discipline

Discipline is not just stopping children from doing something or punishing children for unacceptable behavior. Discipline means teaching. The goal of discipline is to teach children to be responsible for their actions, develop self-control, and develop the ability



to make better behavior choices. Using positive guidance techniques will help children learn acceptable behaviors.

Positive guidance tools to that will help meet your goals for your child's behavior, include:

- **Make the environment behavior-friendly:** Young children need and love to explore. Make sure dangerous objects are removed and there is no temptation to pull or climb on things that are not safe.
- **Set clear rules/expectations:** For preschoolers and older children, set clear rules and make sure they understand what they are. You can have rules like: "You must walk indoors."
- **Give choices when appropriate:** Give children a sense of control and practice in making choices. For example, "Would you like to sit and eat your lunch now or wait until after your bath"? Don't offer choices you are not willing for them to have.
- **Praise and notice children when their behavior is acceptable:** If children only hear when they are doing things wrong, they may continue to do them if that is the only way they get attention. Point out instances when they are behaving positively: "I see you are cleaning up now that you are done. That's great."
- **Focus on the behavior, not the child:** When your child does something you don't like, make sure you focus on the behavior as being unacceptable. Don't use language such as "You're bad". That just makes her feel bad and she can start to believe she is bad. What you want her to know is that particular behavior is 'bad,' and that she shouldn't do it anymore.
- **Be consistent in the rules and consequences you set.** Teach your child consequences. Once you set

In This Issue

What to Expect from Children.....	2
Different Developmental Stages.....	2
For More Information.....	3

The Daily Parent – GUIDING YOUR CHILD TO POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

some rules and expectations, make sure you always follow-up on them if your child does not go along. “If you do not want to take turns and share the toy with your sister, you will not have a chance to play with it again today. “



what is typical for children in that age group, are you able to have expectations that are reasonable, and that your child can successfully meet.

What to Expect From Children

Before you are able to guide your child’s behavior, you have to start with your child’s age and what is right for your child at that age. Your child’s developmental level will determine how she thinks and behaves. Only by knowing where your child is, and

It’s important to know that no one discipline method works all the time. Children are all different, they respond differently, and their responses may

change over time. Some methods are more effective on young children, some on older children.

Most parents use a mixture of tools or practices naturally because guidance is not an exact science. You know your child better than anyone. Go by what

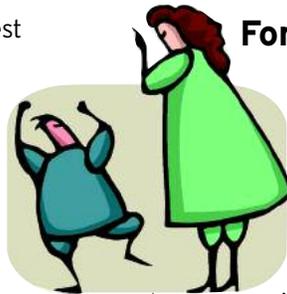
Here are some basics on different developmental stages and what is known about how children understand and relate to their world during these ages.

Age Group	Developmental Characteristics	Typical Behavior for Age Group	What You Can Do
Infants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curious about everything • Learning and testing their environment, the people, the things, the places • Full of emotions and reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to touch everything • May cry a lot to express their needs and feelings • Will want to play with, test things over and over again (let them) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your baby a chance to explore your home, or outside, without any dangers in their environment (hanging cords, unstable objects, and so on). • As you carry your baby around, talk to him about where you are, what things are • When talking to your baby, use words that may describe what they are feeling or wanting (“You look a little sad.”, “Are you hungry?”).
Toddlers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming independent • Beginning to learn to cope with frustrations • Has little self-control • May play with other children, but not directly • Not ready to share yet • Need time to make changes or transitions from one activity to another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will say “no” a lot and may be defiant • May have tantrums • Can act out by biting or hitting • Has difficulty sharing toys or other things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start to teach them right and wrong and good choices • Give toddler quiet activities when she need to calm down. • Remove him from situations instead of trying to ‘reason’ with him • Don’t require her to share toys • Give warnings ahead of time to make changes

The Daily Parent – GUIDING YOUR CHILD TO POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

you know and how you know your child best handles things.

Remember, guidance and learning self-control takes time. As children grow older, so will their abilities to control their emotions and behavior. They need time, patience, consistency, and most of all, children need to know they are loved, even though you sometimes find their behavior unacceptable.



For More Information

• **Positive Parenting, University of Minnesota Extension Service,** www.extension.umn.edu/positiveparenting/, Positive Parenting offers parents effective parenting tools and strategies that will benefit families of infants, school age children, and teenagers.

This website highlights online information for parents and professionals, and has a "Parent Education Resources" link.

• **Zero to Three, Parenting Section,** www.zerotothree.org/ztt_parentAZ.html, has

Here are some basics on different developmental stages and what is known about how children understand and relate to their world during these ages.

Age Group	Developmental Characteristics	Typical Behavior for Age Group	What You Can Do
Preschoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning expectations for behavior and testing limits • Using more words to express needs and feelings • Enjoying playing with other children • Understanding choices in behavior and their consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May try to test limits with adults • Physically active • May want and ask to play with other children and have "friends" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set rules and let your child know what the rules and expectations are • Provide outlets for physical activity – outdoors, playground • Follow through with age-appropriate consequences of not following rules • Provide your child with choices to help them make decisions and increase their self-esteem • Provide opportunities for your child to play with other children regularly
School-agers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming more social • Like to feel "in control" • Willing to please others • Learning different ways for coping with frustrations and expressing themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still need rules, choices, consequences for behavior • May be sensitive to criticism • May be stubborn at times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be consistent with rules and consequences • Label the behavior and not your child • Use humor and other strategies to help with stubbornness or frustration in young school-agers • Be prepared for changing behaviors and moods as your child grows



The Daily Parent – GUIDING YOUR CHILD TO POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

child development information that can help parents support the healthy development and well-being of their infants and toddlers.

- **Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior,**

<http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/>, is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. Their website has resources for carrying out research-based intervention strategies for children who have ongoing challenging behavior.

- **Talaris Research Institute,** www.talaris.org/parents.htm, translates early brain and behavioral development science into easy-to-understand tools and information for parents and anyone who regularly interacts with parents and their children: parenting educators, childcare workers, health professionals. Their website has a parenting section with video clips on parent/child relationships, as well as research section with that addresses various



aspects of children's development. Parents can sign up to receive free articles and research papers as well.

- **PBS Parents,** www.pbs.org/parents, a web section on the public broadcasting service, exclusively for parents. You can access all kinds of information by topic, including child development, where you can get detailed information on the social and emotional growth of children by their ages.

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