

Behavior & Guidance

Getting Kids to Behave without Spanking or Spoiling

So you want to work with children!

Congratulations! You are entering a challenging and rewarding experience. As you work with children, you will learn more about yourself. You will learn about children and how they mature.

This publication is designed to help you become more responsible as a 4-H babysitter. When you first started babysitting, you probably spent just a few hours with the children. As you become more experienced, you will be with the children for longer time periods. The more time you spend with younger children, the more you will have to deal directly with behavior problems.

Children are like all of us. They want attention, they get restless and bored, and they sometimes can be quite stubborn. Good behavior and guidance techniques can be very helpful to you as you work with children. This can make your role as babysitter more pleasurable for you, the children, and their parents.

Here are some ideas to help you

- Use kind words
- Use more do's than don'ts
- Give plenty of praise
- Redirect to good behavior
- Ignore bad behavior
- Be firm
- Take time-out
- Let them experience consequences

Use kind words and build self-concepts

Unkind words cut off communication. Avoid unkind words that ridicule, shame, or label children.

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| Ridicule | “You’re acting like a big baby.” |
| Instead say | “I like to be with you when you act that way.” |
| Shame | “I’m ashamed of you.” |
| Instead say | “I am proud to know you.” |
| Label | “You’re a bad kid.” |
| Instead say | “You are terrific!” |



Unkind words, spoken without thinking of their results, make the child feel disliked. They discourage the child and develop a poor self-concept. More important, unkind words do not help. They only make matters worse.

Remember, the child is good even when the child's behavior is bad.

Kind words have happy results

- They help children learn self-control.
- They build good self-esteem.
- They set a good example of how to solve problems.

Unkind words have unhappy results

- Children learn to deceive.
- They damage children's self-esteem.
- They teach children that being mean is the way to solve problems.

Use more do's than don'ts

Using "Do's" rather than "Don'ts" is very difficult, especially if you already have the "don't" habit. It is very difficult to break bad habits. Using "Do's" rather than "Don'ts" requires much thought and practice. However, the improvement in your relationship with the child makes it worth the effort.

| <i>The Don'ts</i> | <i>The Do's</i> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Don't drag your coat on the ground. | Hold your coat so it doesn't drag. |
| Don't slam the door. | Close the door softly, please. |
| Don't squeeze the kitten. | Carry the kitten gently. |

Talk to children as you talk to your friends. If older people would talk to children with as much consideration as they talk to their friends, they could really communicate with children and be on the way to excellent relationships.

Give the child praise, warmth, and physical affection

Children thrive in a climate of love. They need lots of "warm fuzzies"—pats, smiles, hugs, and praise. Feelings of acceptance and love are necessary for a healthy self-concept.

When the child performs a job well, say so right away. Children are much more likely to repeat desired behavior when they receive immediate recognition.

Redirect

When a child is about to do something wrong, redirect his or her attention to something desirable. A child who is sad about going to bed may be redirected to comfort a doll. Children who are bored tend to misbehave. Direct them to a fun activity.

Give children attention but ignore misbehavior

Give children lots of attention when they are behaving well. Then they are less likely to misbehave. Some children misbehave just to get attention. For example, temper tantrums or using foul words are behaviors that are best ignored. The same is true of behaviors like stuttering, silliness, or exaggeration related to immaturity. Be sure the child doesn't get hurt, hurt someone else, or damage something. Tell the child the behavior is wrong. Then ignore it. Do not reward bad behavior with your undivided attention.

Be firm, not threatening

Being firm means clearly telling the child what to do—not yelling or threatening. Your tone of voice, words, and actions show that you mean what you say.

Children usually comply when their instructions are firm. Research findings indicate that children benefit from knowing that a responsible older person is in charge.

Don't think that children will like you better if you let them do as they please. Actually, the opposite is true. Children, like all of us, want to know the rules. They like you best when they know what to expect. Be sure your rules are clear and understood.

Time-out is not punishment

Time-out is not punishment. It is a boring 5 minutes when nothing happens. It gives everybody a chance to calm down and gain self-control.

When children are upset or fighting, simply say, "You need a time-out." Send them to separate rooms, chairs, anywhere to be alone for awhile. Set a timer for 5 minutes.

Eventually, children will learn to pace themselves and schedule their own time-outs. Be sure you are a good example. When you are feeling angry or frustrated, calm yourself. The children will follow your example.

Consequences is a disciplinary method

Consequences is the name of a disciplinary method of "punishment to fit the crime" or "experience is the best teacher." It means letting children experience the consequences of their behavior. It means not rescuing them, and it is not easy.

There may be a logical consequence such as, "You did not eat your dinner, so you are hungry now." But, there are times when you have to decide whether to use consequences or to help the child. An example is when a parent helps a kid finish a 4-H project that is due the next day. Another example is when a babysitter cleans up a mess the child made or fixes something the child broke.

Remember, as a 4-H babysitter, you are not a disciplinarian. You are simply filling in for the parents while they are away. Use these simple tips only to redirect unwanted or inappropriate behavior. Promote the type of behavior that leads to a much more pleasurable experience for all.

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