

## Why do children misbehave?

All children misbehave at one time or another. What can you do to help children learn to stop misbehaving? If you learn why your children misbehave, it will give you new ways to try to prevent problem behaviors. The next time your child doesn't follow the rules, try a new way to solve the problem by figuring out why she is misbehaving.

### Here are some reasons why children misbehave:

#### Your child is trying to get a real need met:

Young children often lack the language skills to tell adults directly what they might need. Sometimes they misbehave when they are hungry, tired, or bored. Children are often cranky when you pick them up from child care. If your child is hungry, bring him a snack. If your child is tired, try to give her time to rest. Children often get bored when waiting at a bus stop, in the doctor's waiting room, or in line at the post office. Keep a few small toys or a pad and pencil with you for just these times. These little tricks will help children be on their best behavior while you need to run errands. If you meet the real need, then it won't come out as a problem behavior.

#### Your child wants more independence:

Look for things your child can do for herself. Make a snack, pick an outfit from a set of clothes that you select, pick a family activity—whatever you are comfortable allowing your child to do. Channel their drive for independence into these manageable and appropriate outlets.

#### Your child is misbehaving as a way of asking for your attention:

When you are busy it can be hard to slow down and pay attention to your child. Many families find that it works best to bring a snack when they pick up their child from child care. When you get home, instead of rushing to check the mail and get dinner ready, sit down with your child read a book, cuddle, and talk about the day. The rest of the day will go better, with your child much more contented to let you go and do what you need to do. Remember: Just because they don't know how to ask for attention, that doesn't mean they don't really need it.

#### Your child is too young to be able to reliably follow the rules:

It takes time for children to understand what you are asking them to do. Be a good teacher and show them what you expect. For instance, if a child was too rough with a pet, take his hand and use it to gently stroke the pet while saying, "Gentle touch." Don't assume that your child knows something you have taught before. Treat each situation like it is a new one. For most children the learning process takes many repetitions.



Children under age two need childproofing more than they need rules. Childproofing means doing as much as you can to make it impossible for children do the wrong thing. Put latches on cabinets and drawers, close and lock doors. Childproofing is especially important for safety (electrical cords, open windows, etc.), but childproofing also helps protect things that may be lost or broken by young children. By age three, your child can understand the meaning of rules. Give simple explanations: "We put the toys away so we can find them later."

Sometimes children misbehave because your rules are unclear, inconsistent, or too much to expect of a child of this age. If your child is having trouble successfully following the rules at home, it may be time to look closely at the rules and see if you

can make them simpler and easier to enforce. The only rules you really must have are rules for safety and health.

Teach children the right place to do each thing. "If you want to make mud pies, you need to do it in the back yard, not the living room." Give children a place where it is OK to be messy as long as they help clean up. Give children time outside every day. Then they can use their loud voices, and their bodies can run and climb. This way you can teach them where it is appropriate to do these activities.



### Your child is stressed or has strong emotions:

It's hard to remember the rules if you are feeling stressed, frustrated, angry, or overwhelmed. Often children express their strong emotions through misbehaviors. You can help children better express these feelings by giving them simple art supplies like paper and crayons or markers. Ask them to make a picture about how they are feeling.

Remember, most children find any change stressful and are very sensitive to your stress. Even positive changes can be hard for children. Try to avoid making many changes at around the same time.

## Fresh start

The secret to keeping one misbehavior from leading to another is to give your child a fresh start after a misbehavior. If you say, "You always..." or if your face shows you expect the behavior again, your child will "live down" to your low expectations. Instead, say, "We all make mistakes. I know you'll do better next time." Your child will live up to your positive vision of her and will continue to improve her behavior. Expect the best and you will get it.

## Learning about time

Have you ever noticed something funny about time? If you are waiting, five minutes can seem like an hour. If you are riding a fun rollercoaster, five minutes can seem like it is over in an instant. Since young children don't understand time well and live in the present moment, they must feel this way a great deal. This is why it can be so hard for a child to finish up something that is fun, and why they cry when you leave them at child care. It must be hard to understand when you will be able to do something fun again or see your dad again if you don't understand time.

You can help children cope with these problems by keeping to a regular routine. Make a goodbye ritual: a special kind of kiss or a wave goodbye that you use every day when you drop off your child at child care. It comforts your child to know what to expect when you drop her off. You can also help by making a daily routine at the end of the day. A family dinner time is a routine that children really benefit from. Did you know studies have found children do better in school if their family has at least one meal together every day? Make a bedtime routine that includes bath and story time. This can help children understand that it is time to sleep. You don't need to rigidly enforce a routine, but if you stick to the routine as much as you can you will give your child more security.

