



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

A photograph of a tree with dense foliage, rendered in a monochromatic orange or sepia tone. The tree is positioned on the left side of the page, with its branches and leaves extending towards the center.

Improving your Child's Behaviour

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk

IMPROVING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR

If the following positive parenting techniques are used **consistently** they will help you and your child enjoy and share a rewarding, happy relationship. Remember most difficult behaviour is learned, so therefore it can be unlearned.

1. **Prepare your child for changes** and give them warning about what is going to happen next. For example, *“its five minutes until dinner time”* or *“you can play for five more minutes then it will be time to get ready for bed”* or *“remember its hair washing tonight”*.
2. **Gain your child’s attention** before asking them to do something. Make **eye contact** with your child as this ensures their attention and that they listen to you.
3. Make your requests **clear** and **specific** e.g. *“put the bricks in the box”* instead of *“tidy all your toys away”*.
4. Make **one request** at a time.
5. **Wait** five seconds to check whether the request is carried out. If not, repeat it and at this point you can also tell your child the consequences of them not doing what they are told e.g. no TV after dinner etc.

Explanations are very helpful when you have to say ‘no’ to your child, e.g. *“You can’t have crisps because dinner will be ready in five minutes and you won’t be hungry if you eat crisps now”*. But try to avoid giving a lengthy explanation. This can just confuse the child.

6. **Reward** and **attend** to your child if they do as you ask. Praise, cuddle, or say something nice about your child. Rewarding your child helps them to learn what you want.
7. **Withdraw attention** from naughty behaviour (e.g. whining, shouting, complaining etc.) but immediately give attention to your child as soon as they stop these behaviours. This teaches them they cannot get your attention by whining.

Nagging and shouting are still giving attention to your child. That is why trying not to give them attention when they are misbehaving is best. However this only works if you **also give your child lots of attention when they are being quiet, behaving nicely, and doing what you want them to do**.

8. If needed, use specific strategies to avoid confrontations:
 - **change the environment**, e.g. remove ornaments from low shelves
 - **use distraction**, e.g. involve your child in the shopping by having them look for certain foods, put the shopping on the checkout etc. which can help avoid arguments over sweets.
 - **make everyday activities a game**, e.g. have your child dress teddy as you dress them; give your child a toy duster or toy hoover when you do your housework.

Try to avoid:

- A series of commands. This is too much information for children to remember in one go.
e.g. *“tidy your toys away, put your clothes in the drawer, and put those shoes in the wardrobe”*.
- A vague command. The meaning may not be obvious to the child.
e.g. *“be careful”* instead of *“please come down off that wall”*.
- Question commands. These types of requests can easily prompt your child to say ‘no’ and so trigger a fight.
e.g. *“Can you tidy up your toys?”*, or *“Would you like to set the table?”*
- Lengthy explanations.

**Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources**

Reviewed 2013