

# Handy Handouts®

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## Tips for Managing Behavior

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Helping children to modify behaviors at a young age fosters self-respect and respect for others. It also teaches them the importance of social rules and the consequences of their actions.

### Here are some ways to prevent behaviors before they occur:



**Reduce distractions:** During structured activities, it is helpful to place toys out of the child's reach. Having items within the child's view may create problems. Hide toys you are not using by covering them with a cloth, curtain, other barrier, or putting them in a closet. Even if you can't hide all the toys, make sure you put away the "favorites" - those you know the child will focus on.



**Use a schedule:** Some children, especially those with a language delay, have difficulty understanding the concept of work before play. A schedule acts as a visual aid designating the work activities required. Visual schedules can also help children feel calmer and more in control because they know what to expect throughout the day or session.



**Model appropriate play:** Children learn by observing. Taking turns during play will allow you to demonstrate appropriate play, which the child may imitate.



**Limit wordy or complex directions:** Many children may have difficulty with auditory processing or understanding spoken directions. Limit directions and verbal feedback as well as distractions.

Give children time to process and respond to directions before repeating them. Rules should be simple, clear, and shared with the child ahead of time.



**Give choices (when appropriate):** Children feel as if they have some control when they have choices. Choosing between two to three activities also provides a good

opportunity to use language in order to request! It is just as important to avoid language that seems to offer a choice when a child needs to complete a task. For example, avoid saying, "It's time to go to the park--can you put your shoes on?" Instead, say, "It's time to go to the park. Put your shoes on, please."

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## OK. You've tried these techniques and your child is still misbehaving. What do you do?



continues. For example: "If you throw the blocks we're going to have to put them away. In addition, tell the child what you want them to do instead of what you don't want them to do. For example, instead of telling a child, "Don't yell," say, "Use a quiet voice," so that the child knows exactly what is expected.



**Be consistent:** The key to making any positive behavioral change is **CONSISTENCY**! If we tell a child that we are going to put away the blocks if he throws

them, but don't follow through, we are not giving the child a good reason for stopping the behavior, and it will most likely continue. It may take a little time for the change to be evident, but keep in mind that we may be changing behaviors previously reinforced by ourselves or others. Communication between parents and professionals is also essential in maintaining consistency.



**Promote co-regulation:** Young children are often not yet able to regulate, recognize, control, or respond to their own emotions. Adults can help them learn to do

this by calmly helping the child stay safe while working through big feelings (frustration, anger, sadness, etc.). Adults can validate the child's feelings while still setting boundaries for safety. For example, "I know you are angry, but you are not allowed to hit me. You can squeeze this pillow or stomp your feet instead." Once they have calmed down, you can engage with the child and praise the appropriate behaviors. For example, you could say, "I like how you are keeping the blocks in the play area," or "Great job using a quiet voice."



**Be firm:** This may be hard for some of us. Kids can be cute even when they are misbehaving. However, it's important that children understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and an easy way to demonstrate this is through changes in our voice. Use a stern voice, without yelling, and say "No" when necessary. It may seem obvious to most of us, but if you are smiling at a child while saying no, you are giving that child mixed signals.



**Be clear:** If the child can understand conditional statements, tell him/her what will happen if the behavior

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**Calm Down:** Designate a quiet and relaxing area or a room as a “calm down area” that the child can use. This provides them with a safe space to be in until they feel more calm or the behaviors have decreased. You can include sensory items or other calming tools that might help.

Ideally, you want to find an approach which is not authoritarian, but rather encourages the child to independently problem solve. Every child is different, so certain techniques work better with

some children than with others. If you think your child’s behaviors are abnormal, self-injurious, or injurious to others, you should consult your physician or current therapist. It’s also important to keep in mind that some children may have sensory issues, which can affect the way they react to their environment. Talk to your Speech Pathologist or consult an Occupational Therapist if this is a concern. You need to find what works for you and your child. Just remember to keep your cool and be consistent!



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