

# Keys to Great Parenting

*Fun and Learning with Your Baby or Toddler*

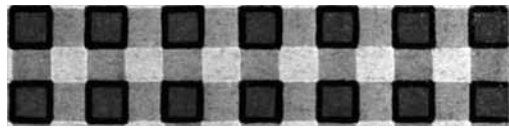


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# Teach Self-Control

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As parents, one of our top concerns is our children's behavior. We want them to respect others and make the most of relationships. Researchers tell us that children begin even as babies and toddlers to decide how to express feelings and relate to other people.

How can we start our little ones on the path to managing their own behavior? Teaching self-control does not have to be hard—not if we start early and guide our children in positive, creative ways.

*Babies need respect and love.* Babies are wonderful new human beings, but they are not ready to think about your feelings or rules. They will learn to trust and depend on you if you are respectful and consistent in meeting their needs. If you are, you will not need to worry about misbehavior. Trusting babies naturally learn peaceful behaviors.

*Toddlers need respect, love, and guidance to learn self-control.* As babies become toddlers with minds of their own, it is time to teach them self-control and about getting along with others. At this point, positive discipline techniques are good to know.

It is important to start early in shaping a child's behavior with consistency, love, and understanding.

This key—**Teach Self-Control**—talks about the difference between positive and negative discipline for older babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. It offers suggestions for preventing misbehavior in the first place and teaching better ways to behave.

## Positive Discipline

Positive discipline teaches your child to behave in acceptable ways and to develop a personal sense of self-control. Examples of positive discipline include:

- Being a good example for your child by staying calm and in control of your feelings.
- Reducing the need to say "No!" by reasonably child-proofing your home.
- Learning what behavior is realistic for your child's stage of development to help you avoid unnecessary frustration or anger. (Children with special needs may have a different timetable.)
- Giving toddlers words to tell you how they feel and how to work out conflicts.
- Stating, kindly but firmly, a few reasonable rules and telling your child what will happen if the rules are broken.
- Patiently repeating the rules. Young children need time to learn.
- Enforcing the consequences when your child breaks a rule that she understands.
- Tailoring your guidance to your child's unique needs and temperament. (Children with special needs may require different strategies.)



# Negative Discipline

Negative discipline uses shame or hurt to tell a child he has done something wrong. With negative discipline, control comes from the parent, not from within the child. Here are some examples:

- Sarcastic or belittling looks and remarks, sometimes in the form of “teasing.”
- Unrealistic expectations about your child’s behavior, such as expecting him to sit still for a long time.
- Name calling.
- Threats of abandonment.
- Depriving a child of basic needs such as food, water, or sleep.
- Shaking a baby or toddler when you are frustrated or angry.
- Long time-outs away from other people.
- Slapping fingers or spanking parts of the body with the palm of your hand, a belt, or another object.
- Believing and acting as though your child is “out to get you.”



*Never shake a baby! Severely shaking babies may result in neck whiplash, back and other bone injuries, paralysis, permanent brain damage, and sometimes death.*

## Negative Discipline Is Harmful

Negative discipline may temporarily stop a child’s misbehavior, but it seldom helps a child learn why her behavior was wrong. It does not show her how she can help herself behave in a better way. A child may instead learn from her parent’s behavior to be secretive, belittle other people or call them names, or threaten. She may try to see what she can get away with. She will learn that screaming and hitting are ways to get what she wants.

Negative looks and remarks, sometimes passed off as teasing or joking, are likely to damage a child’s view of herself. Young children are usually not able to understand this kind of adult humor.

Negative discipline may damage a child’s trust in her parents. It also may leave the child with feelings of powerlessness, fear, hurt, anger, or hopelessness. The result may be resentment and bitter memories that will last a long time.

Negative discipline can cause physical injuries such as bruises, pulled muscles, and broken bones. *Never shake a baby! Severely shaking babies may result in neck whiplash, back and other bone injuries, paralysis, permanent brain damage, and sometimes death.*

Recent research tells us that high stress brought about by frequent negative discipline also harms the brain development of babies and toddlers. This harm can cause learning and behavior problems.

*Positive discipline teaches your child to behave in acceptable ways and to develop a personal sense of self-control.*

# Is Spanking or Paddling Damaging?

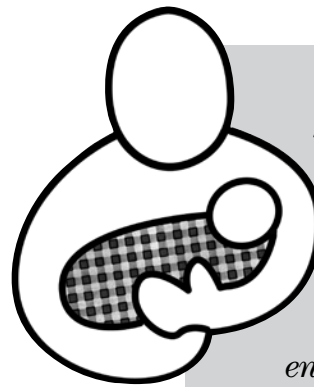
It is not always easy to decide how best to set limits for a very young child who is just learning right and wrong. If it is used only once in a while, done calmly and with caring, and if the parent also talks with the child and teaches better ways to behave, the potential for harm from spanking or paddling is minimized. But there are more creative ways that do not involve spanking or paddling to guide your child's behavior and set a pleasant tone in your home. Learning these methods is what the rest of this booklet is about.

## Preventing Misbehavior

A strong, close parent-child bond built on trust and respect is the foundation for discipline that teaches self-control. Build on this foundation by having realistic expectations and setting up your home for harmony. Both mothers and fathers can promote preventive discipline—the kind of discipline that may eliminate the need to say “no” often or use other negative techniques. Here's how to discipline in a positive, preventive way:

### Build Trust and Respect

- Set a good example, because your baby or toddler is learning from you all the time. Try to be an example to him of warmth, patience, calmness, firmness, and self-control.
- Meet your child's basic needs. Be trustworthy and consistent in providing food, dry diapers, rest, clothing, and play.
- Stay tuned in to your baby's or toddler's feelings. Give him your cheerful, undivided attention and trust your own inner sense about what he is feeling. Respond promptly to your child's cries. He is crying for a reason.
- Be a cheerleader for his accomplishments.
- Share your power. Give your child frequent chances to choose between two equally desirable choices, then accept what he chooses: “Do you want to read the farm animal book or the angel story?”



*Honor your child as an individual. Her temperament, rate of development, abilities, likes, and dislikes are different from those of any other child.*

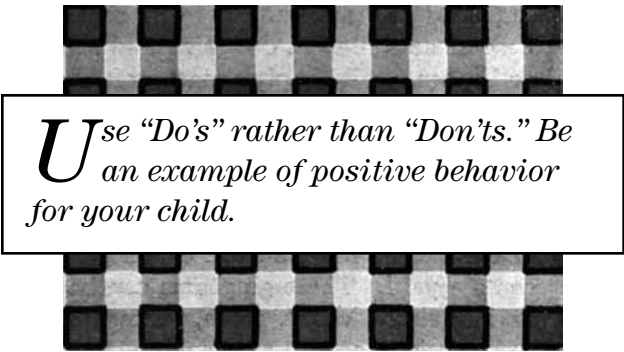
## Have Realistic Expectations

- Understand what is normal for young children. For example, babies cry when they need help. They have no other way to let you know that they need to be fed, changed, cuddled, put down to sleep, or rescued from a tight space into which they have crawled. They are not trying to bother you. Toddlers often are awkward as they practice new skills. They may spill milk, miss the toilet, or forget your instructions. They need your patience, understanding, and encouragement.
- Check your own expectations for your child's behavior. Are you frustrated or worried because your baby or toddler is not behaving the way you think she should? She behaves according to her own timetable for development. It is also OK to ask an experienced parent, a health care professional, or your Cooperative Extension Service agent for help in understanding your child.
- Prepare for trusting and testing in the second year. As your little one learns to creep, crawl, and walk, she discovers a whole new world. She is learning to trust and test her new abilities. When necessary, set limits. You can also show her other things to do that are OK. You might say “It hurts the doggie when you pull on her tail, but you can pet her like this all you want.”

- Look at things from your child's point of view. Your toddler has so much to learn—her brain cells are developing millions of new connections every day! Try to feel how exciting and demanding her life is. When she refuses to do something or says “no,” she is learning to make decisions. She is practicing the important skill of speaking up for herself.
- Honor your child as an individual. Her temperament, rate of development, abilities, likes, and dislikes are different from those of any other child. Let her unfold in her own way at her own pace. Your job is to notice and encourage her unique abilities and gifts. Children with special needs and disabilities may have their own characteristics and challenges, and they may especially need your awareness and understanding.

### Set Up Your Home for Harmony

- Child-proof your home by removing unsteady furniture, breakable knickknacks, and slippery throw rugs. Put expansion gates across stairs and plastic covers on electrical outlets. Close doors to rooms that should not be entered.
- Make space for your child to explore. Rearrange furniture to give your baby as much free space as possible to wiggle, squirm, roll, crawl, or toddle. Find safe outdoor spaces for him as well. He needs lots of fresh air and active play each day.
- Provide a few interesting playthings. Your child's brain is growing by leaps and bounds, so the older he gets, the more quickly he tires of the playthings and places he is used to. It is not necessary to buy expensive toys. The key is to challenge his mind and body just a little beyond where he is at the moment.
- Be organized yet flexible in planning the daily schedule to help your child trust that his world is predictable.
- Announce a change in activity before it happens. Reduce angry outbursts from your child by announcing a coming change ahead of time. Talk enthusiastically about the coming event. Your toddler still may protest, but the jolt will be less severe.



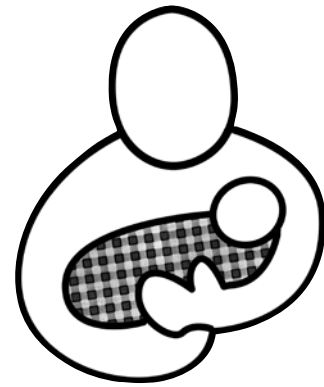
*Use “Do’s” rather than “Don’ts.” Be an example of positive behavior for your child.*

## Responding to Misbehavior

Although preventive discipline goes a long way toward discouraging misbehavior, toddlers will test your limits. Here are some tips for handling immediate behavior problems in ways that teach self-control. (You also may be able to teach these ideas to older sisters and brothers or other family members.)

- Consider your child's behavior from her viewpoint. Children have reasons for how they act, whether or not those reasons are clear to adults. Before you decide on a method of discipline, put yourself in your child's situation. She may not have the language to express her frustration about any number of things, so she acts on her feelings in some other way. For example, ask yourself, “I wonder why Brooke would bite like that?”
- Say calmly and firmly what you expect. For example: “Biting is not a choice. Biting hurts Susan. Use the teething ring to chew on.” Give a short, clear reason and show her what the right action is. Repeat the rule until your baby or toddler shows she has learned it. Young children need time to learn your expectations.
- Establish a few simple, reasonable, positive rules.
- Always follow through with consequences when a rule is broken.

- Use “Do’s” rather than “Don’ts.” Be an example of positive behavior for your child. If a frustrated father loudly snaps, “Don’t yell!” what is he teaching by his example? He could instead gently touch his child’s arm, look into her eyes and say “Please talk to Shandi in a calm voice.”
- Redirect her attention. Toddlers easily become interested in a different plaything or activity. Redirection works better than scolding. It keeps your child’s trust level high.
- Give your toddler words to express feelings. Toddlers often feel relieved that you name their feelings for them.
- Make a task into a game. If it looks like fun and your child gets to play, she is more likely to agree. “Come on, let’s sing ‘The Paw-Paw Patch’ and put the blocks into the basket. I’ll help!”
- Remove your toddler from a situation if she is very angry or is having a tantrum. Give her space to calm down. Stay close by, keep your eye on her, and remain calm. Do not sympathize or scold. When you think she is calm, talk with her clearly and simply about what happened and what to do about it. Then give her a big hug, assure her of your love, and ask her if she would like to go back and play.
- Ask for help. If you’re like most parents, at times you are going to need a helping hand. Parenting is a long-term learning process. Talk over your parenting skills with a friend or professional you trust. Knowing when to reach out for help is a sign of wisdom and courage.



*Raising a child well is not only demanding, it is the most important job there is. You are helping create both your child’s future and the well-being of society. Be patient and listen carefully to your inner guidance as you teach your child self-control. Your wisdom and love make all the difference in the world.*

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This publication provides information about good parenting. Readers are encouraged to use it for education but not as a substitute for other professional advice.

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**Focus on the Positive:** Make it a point to catch your little one behaving well, and encourage him with your smiles and loving touch. You are likely to see more positive behaviors if you pay the most attention to those behaviors. Use words often that express your appreciation.

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## Teach Self-Control

This publication is No. 6 in a seven-part series on fun and learning with your baby or toddler, an educational program based on seven keys to unlocking your child's wonderful abilities:

- 1 Care for Yourself
- 2 Cuddle, Talk, and Read with Your Child
- 3 Know How Your Child Develops
- 4 Be Playful with Your Child
- 5 Show Your Child the World
- 6 Teach Self-Control
- 7 Practice Health and Safety

