

EXTENSION UPDATE

Responding Effectively to Misbehaving Children

Understanding why children misbehave is important. Parents can respond more effectively to children and their behavior when the cause of the problem is discovered.

Remember children are not little adults. They are not born with information and wisdom. Mistakes and some misbehavior are part of the learning process. Many acts parents call bad are simply mistakes. These mistakes need to be discussed and explained.

Children need firm but fair guidelines geared for their age and developmental level. It is good to have a few reasonable rules. Consistent enforcement provides security and tells children rules are important. There may be special times when rules can be relaxed, but not forgotten. Rules need to change as children grow in ability and responsibility.

Children need plenty of sleep, nutritious food, exercise, and fresh air. When children don't get these things, they have difficulty managing their feelings and coping with daily life. A tired child can be cranky, a hungry child can be irritable, and a sleepy child can be fussy.

Children need undivided, personal attention regularly with their parents and care providers. This gives them a sense of security.

Change causes some children to become upset. When mother is sick, a new baby arrives, or there are pandemic concerns, misbehavior is more likely. Reassure children that they are loved and their home is a safe place.

Children who feel unloved and unwanted may become resentful, moody, and ill-behaved. When parents or other adults ignore children's thoughts and feelings, children tend to think of themselves as unworthy.

Children want to please those who love them and often imitate those around them, so set a good example. Without a loving relationship, children have no reason to behave in acceptable ways, except to avoid punishment. Love needs to be shown.

Children feel discouraged if they don't hear praise for the good and positive things they accomplish. Feelings of inadequacy may cause children to brag, boast, fight, or be unwilling to try new things and withdraw. Children may misbehave to get needed attention and closeness from their parents.

Give children sincere praise, compliments, and words of encouragement to help them feel confident and build self-respect. Insults only make children feel worthless.

There will be occasions when voices will be raised and different tones used, but this should rarely be done. Children will listen, follow rules, and feel better about themselves when they are spoken to in a kind, respectful manner.

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