

DISCIPLINE

Behaviour is a form of communication. It is learned, functional, predictable and changeable. Behaviour is often a response to the environment and not a deliberate choice. Things that occur before (aka triggers) and after the behaviour (aka consequences) can influence that particular behaviour.

Common Triggers

Hungry
Fatigue (tired)
Illness
Overstimulated
Disliked or difficult tasks

Common Behavioural Concerns

Crying or yelling
Hitting
Throwing Objects
Property Destruction
Non-compliance with task
Running Away

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Discipline

Discipline is the act of training your child to remove the problematic behaviours. This is best accomplished by a combination of positive (ie. rewards) and negative reinforcement (ie. consequences).

- There are no quick fixes. If the behaviour has been there for weeks, it will probably take weeks to respond to discipline. Sometimes things can be worse before they get better. So be patient!
- Discipline is more effective when performed in *structured and consistent* way. Is it important that all caregivers deal with a behaviour in the same way every time.
- To reduce the problem behaviour, you must replace it with a positive behaviour that will meet the same need.
- Ignore the behaviour when you think your child is looking for a reaction (ie. attention seeking behaviours).

Steps to Effective Discipline

1. Identify the triggers
2. Make a list of the problematic behaviours
3. Observe the behaviour and its variations
4. Develop a structured plan to address each behaviour
5. Enforce the plan with consistency
6. Evaluate the success and modify if needed

Negative Reinforcement

- Timeouts – Enforce them in the same location for the same length of time regardless of the behaviour. Time in minutes is their age in years (ex. 3 min for a 3 year old) up to 5 minutes. Time starts when the child is settled.
- Removal of Privileges – This may include anything from a favourite toy or activity, or screen time. A common variation of this, is they need to display positive behaviour to earn the privilege.



Positive Reinforcement

- **Reward System** – Make a visual chart with the child’s daily expectations, and record your child as they complete them with no or minimal reminders. Make it easy by rewarding small tasks, but harder to get a big reward.
 - For example, a sticker for each part of the morning routine, but it takes 10 stickers to pick out dessert (or whatever the reward is).
- **Discipline Free Time** – Schedule time each day or each week with just that child, without other distractions. Although problem behaviour may occur, ignore it and create a positive experience.

Prevention Tips

- Ensure your child has regular meals and snacks
- Proper sleep is important and should be a priority
- Reduce screen time and replace with physical activity
- Create a schedule or routine (visual if possible) and prep the child when a change is anticipated
- Clearly define rule and expectations
- Teach them how to ask for help, take a break, etc.
- Remove excess distractions, but allow access for sensory stimulation
- Provide choices or allow child to provide choices when appropriate

More Parenting Support

This handout reviews the basic strategies that work for most children. Some children present with more challenging behaviour that requires more parental support.

You are not alone! Having a difficult child does not mean you are a bad parent! You simply need to be taught some extra skills to manage your child’s behaviour.

For more information, take a look at our handout call “Parenting Resources”