

Managing your child's behaviour

The following is our top ten list of guidelines for managing your child's behaviour. While we consider each of them to be equally important, we purposely listed the first three ahead of the others as we consider these to provide the base upon which parents can successfully manage children's behaviour.

#1 Parent/Child Relationship

We put this one at the top of the list because all of the others are dependent upon it. Basically, if you have not established a solid attachment between you and your child that is characterized primarily by positive regard (on your part), you do not have the foundation necessary from which to successfully manage behaviour. Children do what their parents say primarily because they care what their parent's think of them or how they feel about them.

#2 Spending Time

This one goes along with the one above. You must spend time with your child on a regular basis that is not centered around behavioral problems, and this time should be used for play, conversation, and relationship-building activities. The more loved and understood your child feels by you, the easier it will be to manage his or her behavior.

#3 Developmental Knowledge

Be sure that you know what your child is actually capable of doing depending on his or her age. Very often parents personalize their children's misbehavior as something they are "doing on purpose." Sometimes this is true, but more often the behavior is quite natural for the developmental age. Knowing this helps you look at behavior management more objectively and less reactively.

#4 Clear Delineation of Rules

This may seem like a given, but it is very easy to find yourself in the position of waffling on rules you have set. Likewise, it is equally problematic if you do not state every part of the rule in a clear and concise way. Don't lump a lot of rules together, especially for younger children. Make one very clear statement. The younger the child is, the more exact the wording must be.

#5 Positive Reinforcement

Use positive reinforcement whenever possible. This is most helpful when a child successfully behaves in the way you have prescribed. Be careful, however, not to use material inducements for good behavior (such as buying new toys, etc.). Reinforcements should be centered around feelings of self-esteem, accomplishment, and cooperation. Do something with your child such as play a game, go to the park, or simply give verbal praise and appreciation.

#6 Providing Consequences

For rules that don't seem to be followed using positive reinforcement, the parent must establish consequences for failure to comply. These must be realistic, match the nature of the infraction, and teach something if at all possible. Further, they must be consistently enforced. Start with small, time-limited consequences, and then slowly increase the time or intensity of the consequence for repeating the same infractions. When you can, use natural consequences. An example would be having your child work to earn the money to replace something he or she has destroyed.

#7 Repetition

Repetition is an integral part of all learning and mastery. "If at first you don't succeed, try again." Decide how many times you will repeat a command before acting on it. It really shouldn't be more than two or three times for the smaller child and less for the older child. You might start by giving a warning of what will happen if the rule is not followed, and then following through with your consequence after the warning is ignored.

#8 Consistency

This is another given, but perhaps the most difficult to facilitate. Consistency in rules and consistency in following through with consequences are both extremely important. Children naturally look for loopholes such as trying your patience when you're tired, but these are the times consistency is most important and effective.

#9 Parental Accord

If two parents are involved, they must be in accord with what the rules are, what the consequences are, and what the procedures are for carrying out these consequences. Never let a child restate what the other parent has said without first checking to be sure of the accuracy

of the statements, and be sure that you and your partner are in complete agreement with rules before trying to enforce them.

#10 Model Behavior

As always, who you are and how you act is the most potent guide and teacher for your child. Treat him/her with respect in all situations, and strive to manage his/her behavior with a calm attitude that comes from your understanding that self-control is ultimately necessary and good for your child.