

Encouraging Good Behaviour



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Top tips to help your child behave well

- Make sure they know how to conduct themselves without upsetting other people.
- Build your child's self-esteem by talking and listening to them. Spend time with them and show you have confidence in them.
- It's good to develop boundaries, both so that you can keep your child safe and so that your child understands that there are limits. But you may have to be ready to adapt these boundaries and talk them through as your child gets older.
- All children argue with their parents at some point. Stay positive and aim to help your child. Be supportive and show them how they can change the way they act in the future.
- Support them through puberty by trying to understand what they are going through and talking to them about everything. Maintain an open and trusting relationship.
- Tell your child that the rules you set at home also apply at school and when they are out with their friends.
- If things go wrong at school, you should try to support teachers who want to help solve the problem. If you refuse to accept that there is a problem, you could make things worse.
- Help your children to understand that there are serious consequences to behaving badly at school and in the community – it can get them into trouble now and affect their chances later in life.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help if things get too difficult. If you don't want to ask your family or friends, contact one of the organisations listed at the back of this booklet.

What is discipline?

The word 'discipline' makes a lot of people think of strict parents punishing naughty children. But it isn't about trying to keep children in line. It's about teaching them what is and is not acceptable behaviour. It's about showing them that the way they behave affects how people see and treat them. Finally, it helps them take responsibility for their own actions.

By helping your child to behave well, you can make sure they have good relationships with other people and the world around them. You can also help them to feel safe and secure, and make it more likely that they'll stay out of trouble when they're at school or out with friends. Most importantly, you can make it less likely that they'll get involved in behaviour that could get them in trouble with the police.

How your child behaves also has consequences for the children around them. Bad behaviour in schools, for example, can be unfairly distracting for the other pupils whereas good behaviour creates a learning environment that benefits everyone.

This booklet will help you to encourage your child to behave well. It will also help you to deal with problems by explaining how to set boundaries and encourage good behaviour at home, at school and when your child is out by themselves or with their friends.

Focusing on behaviour

Most parents want their children to make friends easily and do well in life. One of the most important things you can do to help them is to encourage them to behave well.

This means helping them to:

- understand what their own needs are;
- accept that they must be aware of other people's needs and respect those;
- conduct themselves without upsetting other people.

Top tips

- Be constructive with discipline. Tell your child what you want, explain why and stay positive.
- Set out to help not punish. When you need to discipline your child, try to give them the chance to change their actions and feel good about what they're doing.
- Try giving your child choices to focus them on action rather than resistance. 'You can catch the bus home at eight or we'll come to collect you at eight thirty.'
- Don't assume your child will react the same way as you did at their age.
- Remember that children learn by example.
- Don't worry if you occasionally have bad days – these will teach your children about people's changing moods and how to deal with them.
- Sometimes children behave badly as a way of getting attention so praise and hug them for doing something well. That way they will start to use good behaviour to get attention in future.
- It's important to let your family and friends know how you deal with your child's behaviour. It won't always be easy to get them to understand particularly if they don't agree with your approach, but their support is important.
- If you have a partner, you should also try to support each other, even if they don't live with you. Talk about how you will both encourage good behaviour in the same way and set similar boundaries, so that your child doesn't get mixed messages.

Building children's self-esteem

If you want to help your children feel good about themselves, you need to start with yourself.

Your children will pick up important messages about self-esteem from how you act and talk about yourself.

Build your self-esteem and your children's self-esteem by:

- Showing your children that you love them and are interested in them.
- Talking and listening to your children – when you listen you show that their thoughts and feelings matter to you. Ask their point of view on family decisions.
- Appreciating the things you do and the things your children do.
- Understanding how you are feeling and how your children are feeling.
- Encouraging children to have a go at new things and giving them opportunities to learn through doing, without pushing them too hard.
- Showing that you have confidence in them e.g. 'Tying laces is hard but I know you'll get there in the end!' If you believe in them they are more likely to believe in themselves.
- Spending time with your children and taking time for yourself.
- Accepting and respecting yourself and your children for the individuals you are.

Encouraging good behaviour - setting boundaries

Setting the bottom line gives a clear message about what you value and helps to keep your child safe and secure.

As a parent or carer, you'll know that rules are there for a reason. But it's important that your children know that too and that they respect the rules that you set. It's also important to make sure that they learn how to behave well even when they are frustrated, can't get what they want or are in a difficult situation.

Practical tips for setting rules

- It is important that you explain why boundaries are there. Tell them clearly what you want and why and listen to their point of view.
- Concentrate on what you want them to do and not on what not to do.
- Boundaries work best if they are made and agreed by everyone (especially older children) and when children understand why something is important.
- Try to be consistent about the rules and boundaries you set so that children know that you mean what you say.
- Letting them make choices focuses their attention on action rather than resistance. Even with small children: an extra 10 minutes in the park playing or leaving now and feeding the ducks on the way home.
- As children grow they will test the boundaries this is all about how children learn about values and how their behaviour affects others.
- As they get older, you may need to change or amend boundaries to reflect different behaviours and experiences. Involve your child in this - they're more likely to cooperate - and focus on the areas that are really important to you.
- You will need to negotiate and let them take more responsibility for their own safety. Remember, compromising doesn't mean failure. It shows that you are listening, valuing their opinions and letting them take more responsibility for themselves.
- If it's not working talk over why not and make a new rule or agreement together.

Handling difficult behaviour

Even little angels will test your patience sometimes. When you get angry, it's important to let them know that you're angry about what they're doing and not with who they are. Let them know why you are angry. 'I'm angry because you've made a mess and I want to rest' is better than 'You're selfish and lazy'.

Every year, thousands of parents phone helplines for advice on how to cope with demanding behaviour. If you're having difficulty with your child, you're not alone.

Top tips

- Stay calm and do not get angry – count to ten.
- Stay focussed - if you give in now it will be harder next time.
- Acknowledge how your child is feeling. Talk quietly and firmly and explain why you are saying no. With young children get down to their height when talking to them. Don't be flippant with their feelings – show you understand and are listening.
- Try to see things through your child's eyes. Sometimes it's easier to deal with an issue if you understand why they are behaving in such a way.
- After your child has calmed down, talk about what happened and their feelings. Help them work out how they can behave differently.
- Try to be honest and fair. Don't make promises that you can't stick to or threats that you won't carry out.
- Get support and help for both of you if what you're hearing is difficult or upsetting.
- To feel strong and calm you need to give yourself time and relax.

Helping your child cope with puberty

Around the age of ten children seem to grow up very fast and might begin to shut you out or to start challenging you. Mood swings can cause a lot of conflict, your child might seem bored and inactive or an obsession with looks might seem completely out of proportion.

Whatever they say or however they look or act, they are still very young and might be frightened by how fast things are changing. It is important that they understand what is happening to them and why and to be more confident about the changes they are experiencing.

Top tips

- Be prepared, and talk to other parents and friends about what they're going through.
- Talk to your children about setting limits, listen to their point of view and try to understand what they are going through. If you can maintain an open and trusting relationship now, things will be much easier when they eventually become a teenager.
- There is no right time to start talking about relationships and sex because every child is different but try to talk to your child about everything. Its better that they learn about it from you than in the play ground at school. Talking with parents/carers helps young people to be safer, feel less anxious, make up their own mind and be confident in their relationships both now and in the future.
- Explain what puberty means – start the conversation and give them reading material to look at on their own, offering to talk about any problems they might have.
- You will probably need to reassure your children that they aren't abnormal just because others seem to be maturing before them as puberty happens at different rates for different people.

Hints for talking about puberty and sex:

- Use TV or magazine stories to start the conversation
- Listen to what they are saying without judging them
- Keep it light - a sense of humour can be a real ice breaker
- Don't give them too many facts or questions – you might put them off talking about sex and relationships altogether
- Find out what the school is doing – particularly if you child is in Year 6/7

If they don't want to talk, you could either give them some relevant booklets or leave them lying around or your child might prefer to talk to another member of the family or a family friend.

If you're not sure what to say or which words to use the following contacts will be able to help:

- **Family Planning Association (FPA)** - 0845 122 8690 www.fpa.org.uk
- **Childline** - 0800 1111 or www.childline.org.uk
- **Family Lives** - 0808 800 2222 www.familylives.org.uk

Or for youth-focused information visit

- www.thesite.org
- www.likeitis.org

At school

It's one thing keeping an eye on your child's behaviour when they're at home. But what can you do to help them behave in the classroom?

The reality is that parents can't watch over school-age children 24 hours a day. But if your child misbehaves at school, they could be affecting their education and future life chances.

How to encourage good behaviour at school

- Help your child set off for school each day in a positive frame of mind. Make sure they eat a healthy breakfast, leave on time and have all they need for their lessons that day.
- Get to know your school's rules about behaviour (ask to see a copy of their behaviour policy), and talk to your child about it so that they know their school has a legal right to discipline them.

- Make sure they know the risks and consequences of behaving badly at school – including exclusion.
- If your child gets in trouble at school, support teachers who are trying to solve your child's problems. If you deny that there is a problem, or refuse to listen to teachers, your child might not get the help they need.
- Remember, you are responsible for your child's attendance and behaviour at school. If your child constantly misbehaves at school, you might be offered a parenting contract. This is an agreement between you and the school and/or local authority. It sets out ways in which you can try to improve your child's behaviour at school, and provides you with the support you may need.

In the community

It's sometimes hard for parents to accept that they are responsible for the way their children behave in public. As they get older, children are more influenced by their friends and the media, and they might seem to have little respect for what their parents think is important. But you should remind your child that the rules you set at home also apply when they are out by themselves or with their friends, and that they need to take responsibility themselves for putting them into practice.

If your child is behaving badly in public they could get into serious trouble. Even if they're not involved in criminal activity, if they are taking part in behaviour that is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to other people, they could get an Anti Social Behaviour Order (also called an ASBO).

What is an ASBO?

ASBOs are given to adults or young people who constantly get involved in behaviour such as verbal abuse, harassment, assault, graffiti and/or noise. They could stop your child going into certain areas or doing certain activities for up to two years. If your child does get an ASBO, it will affect how people living in your community will view them.

What happens if a young person ignores an ASBO?

If someone breaks the terms of an ASBO, they are breaking the law. They will most likely be arrested and the case will be heard in court. If they are found guilty, the punishment will depend on the age of the person and how serious the offence was. They may get a fine, a community sentence or spend time in custody.

How you can help your child

- Make sure your child knows about ASBOs and other consequences of getting involved in anti-social behaviour.
- Be a good role model – remember that even if your child doesn't seem to value what you think, they will still be influenced by your behaviour.
- If you hear about anti-social behaviour locally, use it as an opportunity to talk about what your child thinks is acceptable behaviour.
- Make sure you know where they are going and what they are doing with their friends – it will give you a better idea of what they get up to in their spare time.
- If somebody does complain about your child's behaviour, deal with the situation calmly. Be prepared to accept that your child might have done something you wouldn't expect. Refusing to accept that your child has done something wrong might give them the impression that it's easy to get away with anti-social behaviour.
- If your child gets an ASBO help them to understand that they must take it seriously, make sure they don't ignore it, and help them find ways of getting back on track.

Further help

Family Lives

Information on various parenting issues

0808 800 2222

www.familylives.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education

Advice on exclusion and other educational issues

www.ace-ed.org.uk

ChildLine

Free service for children and young people to talk about their problems.

Helpline: 0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

If you are looking for any further information or advice for your family the Family Information Service can help you. We offer a free and impartial information and signposting service for parents and carers of children and young people on a range of topics such as; childcare, benefits, health, leisure and much more. If you don't know who to ask, ask the Family Information Service!

