

# Tips and hints when dealing with your child's behaviour

A guide for parents



**West Lothian Child and Adolescent  
Mental Health Services  
(CAMHS)**

## **Introduction**

Isn't it amazing how much information new parents are given about their baby? There are leaflets on illnesses, breastfeeding, inoculations and so on. But, how many times have you heard a parent say: "I wish they came with a manual?"

This leaflet gives some very general tips on how to cope with the range of behaviours that most children demonstrate as they grow up. Whilst you may not need it immediately, it won't be long until your baby becomes a toddler and you may find this advice reassuring and helpful. If you read it now, you will be better prepared to use it when the time comes.

It is also worth remembering that your Health Visitor can advise you on how to cope with your child's behaviour and will have other leaflets on behaviour.

### **Try to ...**

#### **Stay in control:**

- Remember you are the adult. It is up to you to decide what is allowed and what the rules of the house should be
- Have only one set of rules in the house and do not get dragged into arguing or negotiating about them. Once you have decided the rule, stick to it and make sure everybody keeps to the same rules, e.g. mother, father, grandparents, and so on
- Have sensible expectations of your child. Don't expect them to be perfect
- Be confident and believe in what you are doing. By giving your child clear rules and limits you help them to behave well.

#### **Use praise:**

- Praise good behaviour as often as possible
- Make sure you take time to notice good behaviour. Do not take good behaviour for granted. Notice your children being

good and praise immediately. Don't wait for perfect behaviour

- Praise your child in front of other people
- Give praise that tells your child exactly what they did well, e.g. "I am very proud of you when you share your toys with your brother."

### **Use commands sensibly:**

- Give commands firmly and calmly, only one at a time
- Give 'do' commands rather than 'stop' commands, e.g. "Sit down and play with your puzzle," rather than: "Stop running around"
- Make commands clear, short and to the point.

### **Have sensible rules and limits:**

- Do not make rules for **everything**, just the most important behaviours
- Limits and rules should be fair and suitable to the child's age, e.g. do not expect children to do the chores without being reminded; your four year old to wash dishes, or your eight year old to look after their younger brother for more than 20 minutes
- Use warnings and reminders. If you want your child to stop playing and get ready for bed, start to prepare them in advance. Tell them they have 10 minutes to finish playing before you will ask them to stop.

### **Stick to your limits and boundaries:**

- If you have made a rule, make sure you stick to it
- Stick to the same rules every day and every time, regardless of how you feel

- Be prepared for the fact that every child will test his/her parents, to see if they will give in
- Praise, praise, praise and praise again. As soon as your child starts to comply give them praise.

### **Learn how to ignore minor misbehaviours:**

- Behaviours that are good to ignore include: backchat, gestures, sulking, making noises/faces, spitting, swearing, nail biting and hurtful comments. They may even become worse if you pay them attention, e.g. shouting
- Be aware of when your child is about to act up and be ready to ignore them. Avoid eye contact with your child when you are ignoring them
- Do not talk to or hug your children when they are misbehaving, even if they try very hard to get your attention
- Be prepared that their tantrums or other behaviour, may get worse at first, as they try to get you to pay attention to them
- Do not give attention back to the child until he/she has completely stopped the behaviour
- Once the behaviour has stopped, immediately give attention to the child.

### **Think ahead and try to stop situations getting worse:**

- Anticipate and avoid problems before they occur
- Ignore minor misbehaviours
- Avoid things getting out of control. You cannot reason with a very upset or angry child. Wait until you have both calmed down and then discuss the behaviour
- Catch your own temper and go away for five minutes if you are about to say or do something you might regret.

## **Make your child feel special:**

It is important to spend time playing with your child every day on games he/she chooses. Remember your child is not a little adult. They have a lot to learn about what is expected of them. We all make mistakes. Once misbehaviour has stopped and been dealt with, forget it. Don't keep bringing it up.

## **Mistakes to avoid:**

- Do not expect perfection
- Do not ignore children who are behaving well, e.g. playing quietly
- Do not give attention to misbehaviour
- Do not give unnecessary commands or constantly nag your child about their behaviour
- Do not threaten a child with a punishment unless you are prepared to carry it out
- Avoid arguing with your child. Ignore backchat, cheek or attempts to argue about rules and commands
- Do not retaliate. If your child says: "I hate youm," do not be tempted to say the same back. If your child hits out, do not hit back
- Research tells us that smacking and retaliation are **not** helpful. They make a child become angrier and frightened of you. The child may even think that hitting is OK and learn to express anger in this way
- Do not give praise and criticism at the same time, e.g. do not say: "Well done, **but why can't you do it all the time?**" or: "You were good today, but yesterday you were awful."

## **Finally...**

Bringing up children is a big task and takes a lot of effort. Children do not 'know' how to behave. They need to be taught and shown good examples by the important adults in their lives. Research tells us that children brought up being praised by parents who remain

calm and show them a good example, will generally be better behaved. If you stay calm and make sure that you and everybody involved with your child deal with him or her in the same way, you are on the road to a happy home!



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