



# Children with Challenging Behaviours

## Typical Versus Challenging Behavior

At some point, all parents will deal with the frustration of having their toddler spread eagle, crying and kicking, in the middle of a store aisle, or having their six-year-old disobey and challenge rules and limits. These behaviors are often hard for parents to deal with, but they are very normal for children in these age groups.

At almost every age, children may behave in ways that adults will not find easy or pleasant. However, with time and positive guidance from adults, these "trying" behaviors usually go away.

The term "challenging behavior" is often used to describe children's trying or "problem" behaviors that do not go away over time or after using typical tried-and-true discipline methods.



## What to Do?

When a child starts behaving in difficult ways, especially if it is sudden or unexpected, it is hard for parents and others to know what to do. Positive approaches to children have the most favorable impact on their behavior. It is important for parents and caregivers to have a variety of strategies to use when raising and caring for children.

Please be aware that every strategy may not work for every child. Parents will need to change strategies and approaches with their child as they get older.

Different stages and typical behaviours:

Age/Stages	Typical Behaviours
<b>Toddlers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tantrums</li><li>• Terrible Twos – “No!” being the most used word</li><li>• Emerging independence</li><li>• Bites or hits</li></ul>
<b>Preschoolers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tests limits</li><li>• Asks “Why?” a lot</li><li>• May tell lies, steal or argue</li></ul>
<b>Young School-Agers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stubborn, refuses to do something</li><li>• Bossy, likes to be in control</li><li>• Doesn’t like criticism</li><li>• Still emerging independence – wants things own way</li></ul>

The approaches below are helpful for all children and are particularly useful in preventing or reducing trying behaviors.

1. **Make sure your child or others are not in danger.** If your child is behaving in a way that may injure him or others, remove him from the situation or take steps to stop him. For young children, just pick them up and physically move them.
2. **Change the setting or location.** If your child's behavior occurs only in certain situations, specific places, or only around certain people, you may be able to stop the behavior by observing what is happening in these instances. You may stop the behavior just by removing your child from that setting or from being around those people.

3. **Create a distraction.** A young child can often be distracted into stopping an undesirable behavior. For example, if your preschooler has trouble sharing toys and gets into squabbles with other children over a toy, distract him or her with another toy. Present the toy in a way that makes it seem extra special.
4. **Tell your child in advance what is happening.** Most children like routines and predictability. Changes in their normal day's routine could upset them and trigger negative behaviors. When possible, let your child know what will happen ahead time. Prepare them for any changes to their daily routine. "Today, after your nap, we will go to the library to find some books to take home."
5. **Respond calmly, speak briefly.** Hard to do, but very important. To redirect or stop a behavior, try to remain and talk calmly. It is hard to listen to someone who is upset, talking in a loud voice or is talking so much that you can't really hear what it is they're trying to say. Don't try to talk about why something is right or wrong while your child or you are upset. Wait until a "teachable" moment when the both of you are away from the moment and calm.
6. **Teach alternative behaviors.** Teach your child what you want them to DO instead of what not to do. For example, say: "Tell me calmly what is wrong," instead of "Stop screaming and throwing things!"
7. **Offer choices.** Give your child choices to help build independence while also giving him some control over his environment. For example, when deciding on what to do, offer "Do you want to play outside or would you like to listen to some music?"



8. **Notice the positive - catch your child doing "good"**. Adults tend to not focus when children are showing positive behaviors. If you reinforce positive behaviors, they will continue. Praise your child when positive behavior occurs. For example, "You did a nice job of waiting for your turn. You know how to wait calmly!"
9. **Be consistent**. Children like things to be consistent and predictable. Establish regular routines for your child and stick with them (examples: routines for eating, going to bed, getting dressed, and so on). Let your child know ahead of time, if possible, if there will be changes to your daily routines. "It's almost 8:30, time to get ready for bed."
10. **Use humour or games**. Angry or upset preschoolers and young school-age children can often be calmed with humour. "How fast can you jump in the bed? If you can do it in 1 minute you'll win the game!"

