

Who Should Use This Guide?

This guide provides tips and hints for decreasing unwanted behavior and increasing wanted behaviors in your preschooler (3-5 years old). Preschoolers are at an age where they have a lot of wants and needs, but do not have the patience and problem-solving skills to communicate these in an effective manner. Preschoolers may come across as defiant (e.g. saying "no" to your requests, pretending not to hear your directions, giving a "sassy" response to your directions). They may seem like they are testing you (e.g. doing something you have told them not to do). They might also seem like they have unending energy. All of this is a normal part of development and helps your preschooler figure out the world. How parents react to these behaviors is an important part in helping your child get through this phase successfully. Below are some tips to help get you and your preschooler through this stage successfully.

Tips for Parents

Ages 3-5

- Create a connection – Children are more likely to listen to you and follow your directions, if you spend time with them not giving orders.
 - o Praise – Give specific praise for all the behaviors you like (e.g. "I really like how you are sitting quietly at the table eating your lunch" or "You did a great job following my directions. I really like it when you follow my directions"). Do this as much as possible.
 - o 10 minute play time – Spend at least 10 minutes a day playing a creative, interactive activity with your child (e.g. dolls, blocks, play-dough, drawing, pretend games, etc.). This is a time not to be interrupted by phones, tv, or other distractions. Follow your child's lead and just do whatever they are doing. Try not to criticize, suggest, or question, just follow along. This makes your child feel valued and like they have good ideas.
 - o Active, Active, Active – There is a very wide range of activity level that is considered normal for this age group. If you feel like you are always telling your preschooler to sit down or hold still, they likely need more physical activity. Take them outside, go for a walk, create an obstacle course in the house, have them help you with chores, go to a restaurant with a play area if the weather is bad. Just get them moving. You will have to tell them to sit down a lot less.
 - o Hugs – Children need to be reminded that they are loved, and an easy way to do this is through hugs, high-fives, and other appropriate physical contact. A good quote to remember is "The kids who need the most love will ask for it in the most unloving ways" – Anonymous
- Commands – Giving children commands is unavoidable, but you want to come across as the boss, not just bossy.
 - o Give options as much as possible (e.g. "Would you like eggs or waffles for breakfast?", "Do you want to wear your green or blue shirt today", "Would you like to put on your shoes or brush your teeth first?"). These options give your child the feeling like they have a say in things and increase the odds they will cooperate.

- Keep commands short and simple – When you have to give a command, be calm, short, and clear (e.g. "Please put on your coat" instead of "Get ready to go", "Put the blocks in this box please" instead of "Clean up this mess")
- Praise compliance – As soon as they follow directions, provide specific praise.
- Time-outs – Often parents use time-outs as the first line of discipline, but time-outs are best reserved for serious misbehavior. Try the first few tips before using time-outs.
 - Use redirection and/or ignoring of undesired behavior first, if possible.
 - Check to make sure that one of the "usual suspects" is not the cause for misbehavior (hunger, thirst, tiredness, and overstimulation). Physical states can often be a cause for misbehavior.
 - If the behavior is one that you feel must result in a time-out, then warn once, and give a time-out on the second occurrence.
 - Walk the child calmly to a quiet safe place (e.g. a chair in their room)
 - Tell them calmly and firmly why they are there (e.g. "You are in time-out because you hit your sister").
 - Tell them how long they have to be there (usually a minute for every year, so a 3 year old gets 3 minutes in time-out).
 - Set a timer right in front of them.
 - When the timer goes off, ask them why they were in time-out, remind them that is not "ok" behavior" and have them apologize.

Books & Web Sites

"Positive Discipline for Preschoolers: For Their Early Years--Raising Children Who are Responsible, Respectful, and Resourceful" by Jane Nelsen, Ed.D., Cheryl Erwin, Roslyn Ann Duffy, Available through: Amazon, your local book store

Center for Disease Control – Child Development and Positive Parenting:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/preschoolers.html>

Local Resources

Daily Behavioral Health, 14538 Grapeland Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44111, 216-252-1399,
www.dailybh.com Offices in West Cleveland and Avon

This Guide Provided By:

