

# Teaching Your Child Positive Behaviors

Young children tell us through their behavior what they need and how they feel — for example, whether they need food, sleep, or to connect with an adult. Challenging behaviors can be prevented or reduced when you help your child learn how to manage their feelings. This can make a big difference in how they behave in the future. Here are some tips for coaching your child to make positive behavior choices.

## ■ Find joy with your child.

- Try playing, reading, singing, dancing, creating art, laughing, cuddling, and spending time outside.
- Let your child choose the activity.
- Limit distractions from cell phones, TV, or other electronics.

## ■ Notice your child engaging in positive behaviors.

- Say something when your child is behaving positively.
- What are they doing that you like? Tell them!

## ■ Make household rules and routines and review them with your child regularly.

- Set clear expectations about the behavior you want to see.

## ■ Let your child know about transitions ahead of time.

- Give several warnings before a transition to let your child know it is time to move on to something else.

## ■ Give clear directions.

- Get down to your child's eye level and use a calm voice when giving directions.
- Tell your child what to do rather than asking them to do it.

## ■ Help your child name their feelings.

- Let your child know that all feelings are OK.
- Help your child put words to the feelings they are experiencing.

## ■ Try to understand your child's behavior.

- Remember that behavior is one way your child communicates their wants, needs, and feelings.
- Consider whether the behavior is telling you that your child needs more of something (such as attention, connection, sleep, or food) or less of something (such as noise, touch, or stimulation).

***Stay calm, connected, and consistent when your child behaves in ways that challenge you.***



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# Strategies to Try

## Pay attention to your own feelings and thoughts.

**Instead of:** “She isn’t listening!”

**Try:** “I am very frustrated right now. What can I do to calm down?”

## Stay calm enough to respond.

**Instead of:** “Nothing I do to stop the tantrum works.”

**Try:** “A deep breath will calm me down a bit. If I feel calmer, it will help my child calm down.”

## Try to understand your child’s behavior.

**Instead of:** “Stop crying for the toy. Your sister was playing with it first.”

**Try:** “I see you really want that toy. You wish she would share the toy with you.”

## Give them a heads-up about what is happening next.

**Instead of:** “Stop playing and clean up now.”

**Try:** “In five minutes it will be time to clean up. We can set a timer to help us keep track of time. When we hear the timer, it will be time to clean up.”

## Make a statement instead of asking a question.

**Instead of:** “Can we clean up the toys now?”

**Try:** “It’s time to clean up your toys now.”



## Offer choices.

**Instead of:** “It’s time to leave for school. Come on! We must go now or we’ll be late. Ugh, you never listen.”

**Try:** “It’s time to leave for school. Do you want to close the door behind us, or do you want me to?”

## Speak up when your child behaves well.

**Instead of:** Saying nothing.

**Try:** “Wow, you cleaned up your toys the first time I asked you. What a good helper you are!”

## Set clear expectations and encourage the behavior you want.

**Instead of:** “I’ve told you a million times not to climb on the table.”

**Try:** “You’re keeping your feet on the floor. You are being so safe.”


## Connect with your child after a challenging behavior.

**Instead of:** Saying nothing after a challenging behavior.

**Try:** “That was really hard. We both felt angry. I am sorry I yelled. I want you to know I always love you no matter what.”

## Resources

- [Help Us Stay Calm: Strategies that Help You and Your Child During Challenging Behavior](#)
- [Reducing Stress](#)
- [How to Plan Activities to Reduce Challenging Behavior](#)
- [How to Understand the Meaning of Your Child’s Challenging Behavior](#)
- [Tucker Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think at Home](#)



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