

KEYS TO GREAT PARENTING



Fun and
Learning
with Your
Baby or Toddler

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Preventing Misbehavior with Very Young Children

One of our top concerns as parents is the behavior of our children. Patterns of behavior start to form at a very early age. Researchers tell us that children begin even as babies and toddlers to decide how to express feelings and relate to other people.

A strong, close parent-child bond, built on trust and respect, is the foundation for discipline that teaches self-control. Build on this foundation by having realistic expectations and setting up your home for harmony. Both mothers and fathers can use preventive discipline to significantly reduce the need for saying “no” and using other negative forms of discipline. As you strive to prevent misbehavior, here are a few reminders and suggestions you may find helpful.

Your baby or toddler is watching you and learning from you all the time. Your everyday example is a powerful teacher. So, as much as you can, be an example of warmth, patience, calmness, firmness, and self-control. Be trustworthy and consistent in meeting your child’s basic needs for food, dry diapers, rest, clothing, and play.

Stay tuned to your baby’s or toddler’s feelings. Trust your sense about what he is feeling and respond promptly to his cries. Particularly for a young baby, crying is an important way of communicating his needs, fears, and discomforts.

To help give your child a stronger sense of control over his world, share your power. Give him frequent chances to choose between two equally desirable choices, then accept what he chooses: “Do you want to read the farm animal book or the angel story?”

Keep your expectations realistic by understanding what is normal behavior for young children. For example, babies cry when they need help. They have no other way of letting you know they need to be fed, changed, cuddled, put down to sleep, or rescued from tight spaces into which they have crawled. They are not trying to bother you. Toddlers often are awkward as they practice new skills. They may spill milk, miss the toilet, or forget your instructions. They need your patience, understanding, and encouragement.

Set your home up for harmony so that your little one will have fewer unnecessary problems to contend with. Child-proof your living area by removing unsteady furniture, breakable

knickknacks, and slippery throw rugs. Put safety gates across stairs and plastic covers on electrical outlets. Close doors to rooms that should not be entered.

Physically, your child is growing in strength and mobility, and mentally, her brain is growing by leaps and bounds. When you put the two together, you have one of the world's most active explorers. So, it's really important that your little explorer has room to check out her world and find out what her body can do.

Rearrange furniture to give your baby as much free space as possible to wiggle, squirm, roll, crawl, or toddle. Find outdoor spaces that are safe for her as well. She needs lots of fresh air and active play each day. Find a few interesting playthings for your little one. It is not necessary to buy expensive toys. The key is to challenge her mind and body just a little beyond where she is at the moment.

Announce a change in activity before it happens. Reduce angry outbursts from your child by announcing a coming change ahead of time. Talk enthusiastically about the coming event. Your toddler still may protest, but the jolt will be less severe.

Many behavior problems with young children can be prevented by focusing on the positive. Make it a point to catch your little one behaving well, and encourage him with your smiles and loving touch. You are likely to see more positive results if you pay the most attention to those behaviors. Use words often that express your appreciation, such as "Thank you" or "Good job."

Raising a child well is not only demanding, it is also one of the most important jobs there is. You are helping create both your child's future and the well-being of society. Be patient and listen carefully to your inner guidance as you use your creativity to prevent unnecessary misbehavior. Your wisdom and love make all the difference in the world.