

Understanding Discipline and Guidance

birth to
6 months



In a nutshell

- Discipline means teaching. You are your child's teacher from birth.
- Your baby learns to trust when you meet his needs.
- When your baby trusts you, he will be more likely to follow your guidance later on.
- Young babies do not misbehave.

About Discipline and Guidance

You might not think that discipline and babies go together. Discipline is really teaching. You are your baby's teacher from birth. Discipline is not the same as punishment. It is teaching your child what to do in different situations. Discipline starts with trust.

Trust is the foundation for discipline. When your baby cries, she needs something. She may be hungry or tired or need to be held. When you meet your baby's need as soon as she expresses it, she learns to trust you to make her feel better. Children learn best when they trust the person who is teaching them.

When you are able to read your baby's cues and understand what he needs, you are getting to know your baby. This isn't always easy. Relax and focus on your child. You can start to build a trusting relationship now, when he is just a baby. When your child trusts you, he will be more likely to follow your guidance when he is older.

Young babies do not misbehave. They haven't developed the ability to think ahead or the memory to disobey their parents on purpose. That doesn't mean that you won't feel frustrated or get angry with your baby. Keep in mind that your baby isn't doing what annoys you on purpose. She is just trying to get her needs met and do things which drive her development.





Understanding Discipline and Guidance How-to's Birth to 6 Months

- Go to your baby and meet her needs as soon as possible when she cries. You can't spoil a baby less than 6 months of age.
- Learn to read your baby's cues so you will know what she needs. Be aware of when she gets hungry, or what calms her down when she needs to sleep. When you can anticipate her needs, you will be helping her to be calm and satisfied.
- Gentle touch works best with babies. They crave being held and cuddled. Never hit or shake your baby. Harsh physical punishment doesn't work because babies don't misbehave. Babies can be seriously injured when adults are out of control.
- If you begin to feel out of control while caring for your baby, put her in her crib or another safe place and take a few minutes for yourself. Talk to a trusted friend or professional if you feel out of control often. Call the ParentLink Warmline at 1-800-552-8522.

6 to 12 months

Understanding Discipline *and Guidance*



In a nutshell

- Babies are natural explorers!
- Set limits and stick to them, but with kindness and firmness.
- Baby proofing is easier than saying “No!”
- Distract your baby to encourage the behavior you want.

About Discipline and Guidance

If your baby is 6 or 7 months old, get ready! A big change is about to happen. Your little one will soon be mobile! Your baby is a natural explorer. Her developing curiosity makes her want to move around her world. Your baby will soon be creeping, crawling and then walking. And she will want to explore everything she can get to. She's not misbehaving; she's behaving like an explorer with a whole new world to conquer.

As your baby begins to move around, you may realize you need to set some limits to keep her—and your favorite possessions—safe. Limits work best if you are consistent about enforcing them. Your baby doesn't understand many words yet. He learns because the same thing happens over and over. Babies are confused and frightened by angry voices or harsh punishment. Your baby can't learn as well when you are angry. Consistently enforce the limits you set with kindness, firmness and patience.

It's easier to baby proof your child's environment than it is to keep saying “No!” Your baby learns by exploring. Make the places she plays safe by removing objects she could break. Hide electrical cords, plug wall sockets and block stairs. Get down on your baby's level and look at the room through her eyes. See that penny on the floor? He could choke on it. See how interesting the vase on the coffee table looks? Your baby will think so too. Check your library or an early childhood program for resources on baby proofing.

Your baby's curiosity makes her highly distractible. Anything new can catch her interest. If she is crawling toward something you don't want her to touch, show her a favorite toy or clap and sing to get her attention. By distracting your baby from what you don't want her to do, you can encourage the behavior you want.





Understanding Discipline and Guidance How-to's 6 to 12 Months

- Set limits to keep your baby safe. The limits should change as your baby grows and develops.
- Use limits consistently. Keep your voice and behavior kind and patient, but be persistent. Your baby learns by repetition.
- Baby proof the places where your baby crawls or walks. Remove things you don't want your baby to touch so you don't have to tell him "No!" all the time.
- Distraction is the best discipline technique for babies. Distract your baby from what you don't want her to do. Offer her a different toy or excitedly point to something else.

Understanding Discipline and Guidance



In a nutshell

- Saying “no” is common during this age.
- Toddlers experience stress too.
- Temper tantrums can happen when your child is overwhelmed.
- Build a positive, trusting relationship with your child through play.

About Discipline and Guidance

Is your toddler's favorite word 'no'? If it is, she is in good company. Saying 'no' often is common for a child this age. Your toddler is beginning to realize that she is a person separate from you. She is expressing her growing sense of independence by objecting to requests and suggestions. This is an important part of becoming independent and being able to stand up for her own ideas later in life. Take a deep breath. Go with the flow for now. Your child is not being rude or rebellious. Give her lots of chances to make positive choices. Let her show her independence in acceptable ways. Soon she will say 'no' less frequently.

Stress affects everyone in the family, including toddlers. If you are feeling stressed, your child may be too. Take care of your child by taking care of yourself. Try to change situations that make you stressed. If you can't, take steps to handle your stress. Exercise, dance to music, talk to a friend; just don't take your stress out on your child.

You may be surprised the first time your toddler throws a temper tantrum. Where did that come from? Temper tantrums happen when

your child is overwhelmed. Toddlers have strong wants and desires. Not getting what they want may feel like the end of the world to them. Your young toddler doesn't have many words to use when he is mad or overwhelmed. Instead, he throws himself down on the floor and wails. His developing nervous system has received too much input, and your child loses control of his behavior. Punishment doesn't help him get back in control. Help him find a quiet place to calm down. Stay calm yourself. Hold him if he'll let you, or just wait quietly until he can stop crying.

Discipline is teaching your child what to do in different situations. She learns best when she trusts you. Effective discipline requires an affectionate, trusting relationship between you and your child. When you play with your child in loving, positive ways, you build that kind of relationship. Share your attention with your child by looking at books together. Let her take the lead when you play with blocks. During pretend play take the role she wants you to play. This is the fun part of being a parent. It pays off in promoting positive discipline.





Understanding Discipline and Guidance How-to's 12 to 24 Months

- Give your toddler real choices in every day matters. Offer a choice between two outfits to wear, or between taking a nap before or after snack. Your child may say 'no' less frequently if he can make a choice.
- Keep choices to two or three options. Don't make everything a choice. Too many options or too many choices can be overwhelming.
- Help your child follow routines for eating, sleeping, dressing and other daily activities. Toddlers can control their behavior best when they know what to expect during the day.
- Routines help your child deal with stress, because they are predictable and reliable. When you establish and keep routines, your child is more likely to be well rested and nourished. When she is tired or hungry, she is more likely to have a temper tantrum. Routines also help you feel organized and in control.
- When your toddler has a temper tantrum, stay calm. She is not misbehaving or rebelling. She may be over tired or over stimulated. Help her find a quiet place to regain control. Make sure she's safe, but ignore the tantrum as much as possible.
- Avoid giving into the demands your child makes when he throws a tantrum. If you give in, you will teach your child that having a tantrum is the way to get what he wants.
- Play with your child every day. If you see your child beginning to lose control, stop what you are doing and play with him.
- Keep play positive; no pretend fighting or violent play. Follow your child's lead and look for ways to offer a new idea or fact. Most important of all, have fun with your child.

Understanding Discipline and Guidance



In a nutshell

- Set the stage for good behavior by thinking ahead.
- Temper tantrums are a result of your child's growing independence.
- Toilet learning is easiest when your child is ready.

About Discipline and Guidance

Teaching your child positive behaviors begins long before he misbehaves. Set the stage for your child's good behavior by thinking ahead. Keep in mind that:

- Busy two-year-olds are just beginning to learn about controlling their strong emotions and quickly changing moods. Your child needs your help to stay in control.
- Your child is more likely to do something you don't want him to when he is tired or hungry.
- Your two-year-old is so curious; he just can't resist something tempting.
- Too many rules will overwhelm his developing thinking skills and memory. He is learning so much. He needs you to tell him and show him the behavior you desire. Sometimes he needs you to gently guide him away from tempting situations. If you guide your child with patience and love, he will learn to act that way too.

Two-year-olds are known for being terrible! Actually, their strong emotions and temper tantrums are a sign that they are developing socially and emotionally. Temper tantrums are a result of your child's growing independence. She now experiences strong wants and desires. These overwhelm her ability to control her behavior. When your child has a tantrum, stay calm. Your exam-

ple will help your child calm down. Don't give into what your child wants. This may teach her to use her tantrums to get what she wants. Make sure your child is safe. Stay close by and ignore the tantrum as much as possible.

Learning to use the toilet can be stressful for both parents and children. Toilet learning is easiest when your child is physically ready. These are signs your child may be ready to learn to use the toilet:

- His nerves and muscles have to develop first. For some children that doesn't happen until well past their second birthday.
- He has to be aware of and understand the sensations that tell him he has to go potty.
- Your child may be ready if he has dry diapers for several hours, is dry in the morning or is dry after nap.
- He understands and can say words for bodily functions.
- He can sit for short periods of time.
- He can pull loose pants up and down.

When your child is physically ready, be patient, but persistent. Punishment does not work when you are teaching your child to use the potty. Your child isn't being bad if he wets or soils his pants. He is just learning a whole new life experience.



Understanding Discipline and Guidance How-to's 24 to 36 Months

- Read your child's cues to know when she's hungry, tired, sick or over stimulated. Behavior you don't like may signal that your child needs rest, a snack or some attention from you.
- Arrange the environment so your child isn't tempted to misbehave. Putting things you don't want him to have out of sight makes it easier on both of you.
- If your child is having a rough day, spend some extra time with her. Do quiet and calming activities like reading or listening to quiet music.
- Have a few rules and stick to them consistently. Make sure everyone who takes care of your child understands and uses the same rules. As your child gets older, you can have more rules.
- Tell your child what to do instead of what not to do. Many times young children make mistakes just because they don't know the behavior you expect.
- Stay in control when your child has a temper tantrum. Make sure he is safe, but ignore the tantrum as much as possible. Tell him you have confidence in his ability to calm down. Hug him and help him feel better when he does.
- Begin toilet learning when you are sure your child is physically ready. Help her understand what you expect and be patient and persistent while she learns.
- Punishment slows down the toilet learning process. If you feel yourself getting mad at your child, take some time to calm down and relieve stress.

Understanding Discipline and Guidance



In a nutshell

- Moving from one activity to another may be difficult for your child.
- Developing self-control is an important skill.
- Rewards and praise must be used carefully.

About Discipline and Guidance

When your child moves from one activity to another or from one place to another, she experiences a transition. Transitions are hard for young preschoolers. Sometimes your child is not ready to leave what she is doing. When possible, let your child focus on an activity as long as she wants. Give your child time to ease out of an activity by giving her a warning, such as "When I come back in the room, we'll clean up your puzzle." Daily routines for eating, sleeping, dressing and bedtime can help your child make transitions.

Developing self-control is an important skill. Your child must learn to control his actions, like not hitting his sister when she takes his toy or waiting until Mom gets off the phone to ask for a snack. Young preschoolers are just beginning to develop self-control. It will be many years before they master that skill. Help your child by explaining why he needs to delay his wants each time he acts impulsively. Young preschoolers are just learning to take another's perspective. Your child needs to hear you say that hitting hurts his sister. He doesn't know he

should not interrupt while someone is on the phone. Explain the reasons he has to wait in terms he understands.

Rewards and praise must be used carefully. If rewards, such as toys or food, are used to motivate your child's behavior, she might not understand why what you want her to do is valuable. She is only working for the reward. She may miss the feeling that desirable behavior is rewarding in itself, and when the reward is not offered, your child will still not have mastered the behavior you want. Also, when rewards are used, they oftentimes need to be increased to get the same level of motivation from your child. When you praise your child, you may be putting the focus on the outcome, not on her progress or efforts. Praise puts the focus on the outcome, and not on the progress or efforts. Praise can be addictive; your child may begin to feel inadequate unless you praise her. Be sure to encourage and praise your child's progress and efforts as they learn proper behavior.



Understanding Discipline and Guidance How-to's Young Preschooler

- Give your child one or two warnings before she must make a transition. Follow through and help your child move on at the end of the time you've set. Your child learns more easily if you are consistent.
- Establish and keep daily routines. Routines help your child transition from one part of the day to another. For example, establishing a bed time routine that you follow every night can help your child wind down and fall asleep.
- Clearly tell your child what you expect of him. Be firm, but gentle. Use words he can understand. Show him, in addition to telling him.
- Give your child responsibilities. Let her know you are confident that she can carry them out. Young preschoolers can do many things around the house. They gain self-confidence by helping. Be clear about what you want your child to do. Follow up to encourage her to do the task. Be sure to tell your child you appreciate her help.
- Be realistic about how long your child can wait for something. Explain why you want him to use self-control.
- Help your child take the perspective of others. Tell her how her actions make other children and adults feel. Include good feelings, such as how pleased her grandfather was when she said thank you for a gift.
- Instead of praising your child, tell him what you see. For example, if he picks up his toys, look around the room in amazement and say, "I don't see one toy on the floor!" Your child will gain a feeling of accomplishment.
- Acknowledge your child's efforts and progress, rather than the outcome. She may not achieve a goal, but she will know that you notice her efforts.

Understanding Discipline and Guidance



In a nutshell

- Power struggles can be avoided.
- Older preschoolers can understand the consequences of their behavior.
- Self-control is important for success in school.

About Discipline and Guidance

Your child wants to feel powerful. This can make him disobey the rules you have set. Try to avoid power struggles with your child. Remember he is learning about his own power at this age. Four- and five-year-olds enjoy superheroes or playing with toy guns because they are experimenting with being powerful through their play. Children this age are more aware of the world around them. At this stage of development they are aware of power in relationships. When you suggest that your child choose another way of doing things, he will learn to use his own power to control his behavior.

Older preschoolers are beginning to understand that their actions have consequences. Sometimes those consequences are enjoyable. Sharing a toy with a friend usually results

in fun. But sometimes the results of your child's behavior are not enjoyable. Remember, discipline is teaching your child what to do in different situations. You can use consequences that are connected to your child's misbehavior to help her learn what to do. Being firm and consistent will help your child learn.

Self-regulation means controlling your actions and emotions. It also involves delaying something you want until later. Self-control is important for success in school and life. Children this age begin to develop control over their behavior and emotions. When your child starts school, he will be expected to follow classroom rules and routines. He will need to know how to get along with other children. When a child develops self-control, he is able to take part in the learning in school.



Understanding Discipline and Guidance How-to's Older Preschooler

- Don't let your child draw you into an argument over limits and rules. Stay calm. Restate the limits or rule, and then let your child decide how to react.
- Help your child to feel powerful in positive ways. Let her make decisions that are appropriate for her age. One example is choosing between two breakfast options.
- Show your child how to do simple chores that help the family. Give him the responsibility of carrying them out. Show him you appreciate his efforts.
- Help your child learn to use the behavior you want. Make it clear how you expect her to behave. Talk about how to behave at a time when your child is calm and in control. If she's already misbehaving, she's probably too emotional to hear you.
- Children learn how to push our buttons! Know what your child does that makes you particularly angry. Plan what you will do when that happens so you can avoid blowing up at your child. When you are prepared, you can remain firm, but calm, and deal rationally with your child's misbehavior.
- Develop consequences for misbehavior that are related to what your child has done. This can help teach him the right thing to do the next time. For example, if he refuses to pick up his toys, give him a choice. He can put his toys away or you will put them away in your closet until the next day. This consequence is related to the misbehavior. (If your child refuses to pick up the toys, then he will not be allowed to play with them.) Let your child decide how to behave, then be sure you follow through right away with the consequence you have stated.
- Let your child know you appreciate his efforts. Point out to her the progress she is making in learning the right thing to do.
- It is your job to set the rules for your child. As your child develops feelings of independence—and all children will—it is her 'job' to test those rules and limits. That's how she learns what they are. Limits shouldn't be too flexible, or your child will have trouble learning what they really are. On the other hand, they shouldn't be too rigid or harshly enforced so that your child feels discouraged.
- Think about the rules you set for your child often. Are they still appropriate for his age and abilities? Limits and rules need to change as your child grows and learns.