

Discouraging behaviour

This is a transcript of the Raising Children Network video available at http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/discouraging_behaviour_video.html. It demonstrates how to discourage bad or inappropriate behaviour in children. It covers strategies such as empathy, distraction, ignoring and using consequences.

1. Request or Instruction

Narrator: The first step in discouraging behaviour you want a child to stop, is to communicate clearly what you want them to stop and what to do instead.

Rebekka [*mother of Samson*]: No, that's hitting, no hitting. Be gentle with Mummy, be gentle.

2. Distraction

Narrator: One strategy which can work well with young toddlers is distraction, because they can get fixated on something and not understand yet why they can't do it.

Ricky [*father of*]: Don't touch, don't touch. Come and put your shoes on, come on.

Stacey [*mother of Matilda*]: I know you want to get into that, but we'll go play with bubba instead.

Belinda [*mother of four*]: Harley, why don't you just play with her toys instead of touching her? Get some of her toys out of the box.

3. Empathy

Narrator: Empathy is one of the most powerful tools for helping them overcome selfish behaviour because they do have an innate ability to feel for other people.

Heather [*mother of Declan and Angus*]: Hey Deccy, why don't you give it back to him and make him feel happy? Look Deccy he's crying, look, he's got real tears?

Tony [*father of Declan and Angus*]: Oh good boy, that's nice, that's a nice thing to do.

Tony: Toddlers don't have a lot of reflecting skills, I know, but if you can possibly get them to think about it a little bit, it does help build that level of understanding and empathy.

4. Ignoring it

Narrator: Because attention-seeking is one of a child's main drivers, withholding attention becomes the most powerful way of turning off behaviour we don't like.

Tony: It's a hard thing because not every situation you can cut and run and get them out of there, and sometimes you just have to deal with it, and the way that I found that works quite well is purely ignore it.

5. Explanation of consequence

Narrator: Make sure they understand what will happen if they keep doing something damaging, hurtful or dangerous.

Rebekka: That's pinching, that's owaa – no pinching Samson, or you'll go into time out. Do you want time out? No pinching.

Rita Princi [*psychologist, mother of two*]: Children at that age can't really rationalise with you so it's better to keep instructions or advice short, simple and sometimes even check that they've actually got those little statements so that way you know that they are on track.

Narrator: Sometimes they might seem like they are ignoring what you said, but it is usually a sign they are just testing it – they are trying to understand, Did you mean no throwing rocks at all, or just no throwing rocks on the wood or at people?

Troy [*father of Matilda*]: No throwing rocks. [*To self*] Damn rock throwing.

Stacey: Troy actually said to her, 'No throwing rocks'. So what's she's doing now is technically not throwing them, she was brushing them aside, but she's pushing that limit. So she'll brush them aside and we haven't said anything, so there you go, she's trying again and we haven't said anything, so it will get back to the point where she's throwing them again, and we'll say, 'No throwing rocks', and that'll be the line. She's gone, 'Ah, that's where it is'. So this, she's doing because we're not telling her no.

Heather: If you can't play nicely he goes away.

Narrator: Nagging is pointless, but if you want to give them one chance to cooperate, you can remind them of the consequence, once, before you remove them.

Stacey: Sweetheart, if you do that again, we're going to go down inside.

Narrator: When they know they can trust you to keep your word every time, they will respond much faster.

Stacey: Very well done, sweetheart.

Rebekka: Try and keep it simple, and then really quickly you say, 'if you do that – time out', and he'd not look happy or he'd frown and stamp his feet but he wouldn't repeat that behaviour.

6. Enforce consequences without a fuss

Narrator: The most important aspect of enforcing a consequence is to do it without any emotion or drama. And give them a few moments alone to process their thoughts before checking in on them.

Belinda: If I've asked them a few times to do something and they've been naughty or whatever, I'll just say, 'Well, you can sit down there and think about why you're sitting there and why you're in trouble.' And that usually works, you know, they might cry for 30 seconds and then they'll say, 'I'm sorry', and I'll say 'What are you sorry for?' And then if they tell me, then you know, then they are allowed to do whatever, but if they can't tell me what they did wrong then you have to sit down and explain it to them.

Gavin: I couldn't hear you properly.

Child: I'm sorry.

Gavin: You're sorry, OK, well how 'bout you give me a cuddle and a kiss?

Onscreen tip: *Tips for enforcing consequences:*

- *Agree them with your child in advance*
- *Plan ahead, make consequences realistic*
- *Natural Consequences*
- *Related Consequences*
- *Losing privileges*

Narrator: Some tips for enforcing consequences:

- Agree them in advance with your child (starting at around three years old.)
- Plan ahead and make sure the consequence is short and something you can stick to (no TV for a week might backfire if you can't enforce it.)
- Sometimes the best consequences are natural as long as it's not about safety. A natural consequence is something like hunger if they don't finish dinner, feeling cold if they refuse a coat or stubbing their toe if they didn't put their shoes on. The upside is that you don't have to be the bad guy.
- Another style of consequence is a related consequence for example, if siblings are fighting over a toy, the related consequence would be no one gets to play with that toy for a day.
- And finally there's losing a general privilege like TV or pocket money for the five-and-up crowd.

Onscreen tip: *Consequences that won't work:*

- *Physical punishment*
- *Teasing them*
- *Frightening them*
- *Embarrassing them*
- *Making them feel unloved*

Narrator: Things that don't work in the long run because they backfire:

- Physical punishment
 - Teasing them or laughing
 - Scaring them
 - Embarrassing them
 - Making them feel unloved
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