

Encouraging good behaviour

This is a transcript of the Raising Children Network video available at http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/encouraging_behaviour_video.html. It demonstrates how to encourage good behaviour in children, including strategies to avoid tantrums, whining and hitting.

1. Children Do As You Do

Narrator: Mimicking you is the way they learn most things, so if you want to encourage them to do something, then you do it too.

Bek: Chewing – yuh yuh yuh. Good boy. You want to chew on this a bit?

2. Show Her How You Feel

Narrator: Tell them how their behaviour makes you feel by saying it as an 'I' statement. 'I don't like it when you jump on me' helps them see things from your perspective. They'll recognise how *they* would feel if the tables were turned, and this empathy will convince them to do the right thing.

[background] **Gavin** [*father of five*]: Harley don't. You are hurting my back, mate.

Troy [*father of Matilda*]: I tried a few times in the last couple of days to explain to her that I feel things just as much, and it really works, it really makes her understand that what she's doing is hurting me or, you know, all those kinda things, just switching the perception so she understands that I've got feelings too.

3. Catch them being good

Narrator: Children are constantly getting things wrong because they are just learning. They will remember criticism more than encouragement, so we have to overdo the positive to get the balance right. Try catching them being good because they need to hear six positives for every negative.

Rebekka [*mother of Samson*]: That's very good helping, Samson.

Kathy [*mother of Ethan and Thomas*]: You watch that they've been behaving quite well for a period of time and you say, 'Wow you've been sitting there nice and quietly for so long, that's great.'

Peter [*father of four*]: It's so much easier to notice when they are doing something bad and then make a big hullabaloo about that. But I try if I can and see her doing something really cute, like this where she's just playing by herself. She can sit here for ages and play by herself. I try and grab those moments and say something that makes her feel really good about doing it.

Peter: Hey, Elsa, that's so great how you're playing.

Elsa: That much and that much!

Peter: Ok.

4. 'I hear you'

Narrator: Young children still have trouble expressing themselves perfectly, which can be very frustrating.

Matilda: Daddy

Troy: I know you want to go outside, Bunny.

Narrator: You can avoid a lot of tantrums by active listening where you repeat back to them what you think they might be feeling.

Troy: I know you want to go outside.

Matilda: Daddy.

Troy: Can we get ready then go outside?

Matilda: Go?

Narrator: They tend to relax just knowing that you understand.

5. Keep promises

Narrator: One of the most important things to preserve with young children is trust.

Stacey [mother of Matilda]: We make a deal with her and it's generally because she wants to go for a walk at 8 o'clock at night and it's bedtime. Instead of saying just no, you make a deal and say, 'If you stay here and sleep all night and go to bed, then tomorrow we'll go for a walk', and she generally accepts that.

Narrator: If you are honest with them and keep your promises, they can trust you, and that will make all the difference.

6. Reduce temptation

Narrator: Children learn best by exploring. Let the cupboard latch be the bad guy so you don't have to.

Belinda [*mother of four*]: You don't want them to be told no all day. You know the glass vases that used to be out have to go up high and the DVD player that they can get their fingers jammed in has to have a little cover over the top.

Stacey: The kids want to be where you are and if you're in the kitchen, she can actually open this draw, and she pulls out, you know there's all sorts of things, but nothing that can really hurt her.

Rebekka: Don't have anything you couldn't afford to get broken and if you do, you put it away for the time being, because this is kind of their world and they will only learn from exploring it.

7. Choose your battles

Narrator: You don't have to win every point. Give them a bit of breathing space and only pull them up on things that really count.

Gavin: Put it in the pencil case, in the pencil case, good boy, in the box. Thanks.

Rochelle [*mother of four*]: You need to pick your fights, some things don't matter, let them go, and focus on the things that do matter, and then they'll respond because we are not always at them, barking things at them.

Colin [*father of three*]: Sometimes if you just wait another 30 seconds, they'll stop what they are doing anyway. So that's kinda good, that's a good lesson just, if they are doing something that is not that dangerous, but is kinda giving you the shits, maybe just wait another one or two minutes, and they'll get bored with it and they'll move on and then you would have alleviated the problem without actually having to do anything.

8. Avoiding whining

Narrator: Children don't want to be annoying. Sometimes we accidentally train them to whine by giving in at the last minute. Hold your ground and she'll come around.

Peter to Madison: Big girl voice.

Madison: Can you put that like a ice block?

Peter: That's still whining.

Peter: When she gets like this I try and wait a little moment 'cause it's kind of a big transition from crying to, ah, to being ok. I just wait for a second and don't give her any attention.

Peter to Madison: Now you tell me in a big girl voice, what does an ice block look like? You mean it's just sticking out, the ice?

Madison: Yes.

Peter: Do you actually want to see the ice? Is that what you mean by an ice block?

Madison: Yes.

Peter: It was so tempting just to grab the ice block and give it to her and run out of the room. But I tried really hard, I do try really hard to get them to come down, give them a few moments if they need it, and then solve it, with her, with her explaining, using her fingers if words aren't working. And hopefully leaving the interaction having rewarded her for stopping crying and saying it in a normal sounding voice.

9. Keep it simple and positive

Peter: Use the other end of the pencil.

Narrator: When giving instructions, use a simple and positive statement rather than a question or negative statement. They'll process it faster if you say, 'Please shut the gate', as opposed to 'Can you shut the gate?' or 'Don't leave the gate open!'.

Stacey: What we try and do, is if she's doing something that we don't want her to do, tell her what she should be doing. So if she's at the oven door, we don't say, 'Don't touch', we say, 'Keep your hands away', so it's in a more positive light.

10. Responsibility and Consequences

Narrator: As children mature, you can agree together on some responsibilities and related consequences in advance.

Kathy: Ethan, no bike, I'm sorry, no bike. You'll come up here and pack your Playdoh away please.

Gavin: Are you gonna pack up after you draw? Are you gonna put all your rubbish in the bin after you've finished drawing? What happens if you don't? You say, 'I won't get to draw again'. Go on, say, 'I won't get to draw again, Daddy'.

Oldest boy: I won't get to draw again.

Gavin: Ok, so you're going to pack up everything after you finish drawing, ok? Good boy, now let's draw.

11. Make her feel important

Stacey: Oh that's so clever Tills!

Narrator: Children need to feel like they are an essential member of the family too. Giving her a few challenges and chores can help develop her feeling of self-worth.

Stacy: You can put them in that one.

12. Transition time

Narrator: Young children still need to take baby steps from time to time, especially when you need them to move from one activity to another.

Gavin: Now listen, I'm going to count and you guys go and hide and I'm going to find you, ok?

Gavin: We've gone from wrestling around and absolute mayhem to settle down a level and hide and seek, so I'm counting for 10 seconds. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7...

Narrator: It helps to give them some advance warning that you'll need to leave the playground soon or get ready for dinner in five minutes.

13. Prepare for Challenging Situations

Narrator: Sometimes you have to prepare them ahead of time with what to expect, especially if you want to avoid those tantrums in the shop.

Gavin: We are going to the shop but you are not allowed to have any junk food, ok. So no junk food, right?

Kids: No

Jennifer [*mother of Olivia and Ava*]: That's the thing with kids, you've got to prep them mentally. You have to say to them, 'We are going to Toys R Us now and we're going to look for two birthday presents for another child, we're not getting you anything'. And I'll say that, like, five times – 'We're not getting you anything, we're gonna go in there, we'll be quick, we'll look at this, you know, you can have a look at the bikes and then we'll go.'

Gavin: You put that back. I said no junk food, didn't we?

Oldest boy: Is that junk food?

Gavin: Yes, that's junk food.

Oldest boy: Which is not junk food?

Gavin: Darling, all the drinks are junk food at the moment. This is not junk food, look at this, water, it's not junk food. I'll give you a sip of this.

14. Keep your sense of humour

Narrator: Sometime a bit of humour can take the edge off and help them out of a rut. Teasing can hurt their feelings, so keep it sweet.

[Youngest boy is whinging] **Gavin to boys:** Listen to your brother whinging [*all laugh*].

[*Madison crying*] **Peter:** What did you do? Give me a look. I'll give it a kiss? One kiss and one blow, and one kiss and one blow? [*Madison laughs*]

15. Offer two choices

Narrator: Young children like to exercise some control over their world. It makes it easier to get them to put a pair of shoes on if you are engaging them with a choice.

Rahnia: Which shirt do you want to wear, the Superman shirt or the Spiderman? Which one do you want to choose?

Child: The Superman.

Narrator: Giving them two reasonable choices makes them feel respected and it works for you too.

Rahnia: Here we go, Superman.

16. Put boring tasks before something fun

Narrator: If you feel like you might have to struggle to encourage them to do something, like put on PJs & brush teeth, set them up on a path to something fun at the end, like reading a story with you.

17. Bribe vs Incentive

Narrator: Some people wonder whether an incentive is a bribe and therefore not a good idea.

Jenny: It is a fine line between a bribe and an incentive really.

Tony [*father of Declan and Angus*]: It's a minefield, because you don't want to be..., you want them to be able to do things because they want to do it, not because you want them to do it.

Narrator: The reality is that all behaviour is driven by incentive, whether that's feeling good about helping someone or accomplishing something. Whether it's having fun, getting praise or recognition, or even some pocket money.

You can decide how you might want to encourage or reward your child for being helpful, but avoid using food or sweets as a reward or incentive, as that can complicate things.

Tony: What we've tried to do as a family is praise when praise is justified.

Rahnia: They like praise more I find. Allira will get more out of me praising her than giving her an item.

Gavin: Good boy Harley. Geez, you're a good boy, I'm very proud of you.

Onscreen tip: Go to raisingchildren.net.au/articles/encouraging_good_behaviour.html to print out the Encouraging Good Behaviour tips.
