

How to challenge your child's behaviour

For many parents, children seem to challenge them every day. They demand their way every time and throw a fit when they don't get it. If you can relate, don't worry, it's not too late. You're not "stuck" with challenging children for years on end. But it'll take a shift in thinking about parenting, being firm but with empathy and encouraging values you want your child to uphold. Many parents admit they see the warning signs of raising a challenging child and have asked "What do I do?" Here are a few ideas:

Limit Materials and Focus on Experiences

Studies have shown that giving children experiences over material items provides more happiness. If your child asks for the latest toy or extra Christmas gifts, give experiences instead. Rather than the latest toy, take them to the park and instead of 10 Christmas gifts, give a few and create family traditions instead that they will remember throughout their lives.

Foster Gratitude for the Little Things

At the same time, even outings can get out of hand however despite your child's protests (eg Can we go to Legoland??) children don't need a lot to feel happy. Remember when they were babies and they'd bat the balls dangling from the play mat? Sometimes they didn't even need a play mat—you'd just sit them down on the grass and they'd be content looking at the leaves.

Children don't need to go to every new theme park or see every new film. You might hear a few groans, but the more you value these simple, special moments, the more they'll need extravagant experiences to feel happy. The best way to foster this gratitude is to practice it yourself. Say out loud how grateful you are to spend time with them at the new playground. That the best part of your day is picking them up and having a snack after school. These are the little joys that make life richer.



How will Gratitude help to Improve my Child's Behaviour?

Do model gratitude: Model gratitude, and your children will likely follow. Highlight the simple things, such eating breakfast as a family on a Sunday or the beautiful weather. Read with your children about different cultures. And just as important, **thank** your children for everything they've given you. This might mean thanking them for the impromptu hug in the morning, or the artwork they drew for you. This helps them to appreciate the people and attention surrounding them and make them less likely to disturb the peace unnecessarily.

Expand your child's knowledge of the world: Make sure that your child understands how to appreciate the world around them:

- Read books about people's differences, cultures and unique traditions.
- Encourage a variety of friends.
- Volunteer at local food banks, pet shelters and non-profit events.
- Share family stories and histories about perseverance.

- Discuss the environment, the news (appropriately) and community events.

Do create a tradition of what you're thankful for: Draw a tree on a poster or write your thanks on paper leaves and glue them together to make a wreath. Every night can be a tradition of giving thanks as each person says what they're grateful for.



Redefine Discipline

What comes to mind when you hear the word “discipline”? Most likely, you thought punishment and consequences, what we do when our children misbehave, or the parenting style you chose. **Discipline is more than that—it's teaching.** When we discipline, we teach our children how to behave, regulate their emotions, calm themselves down, and think of other people's feelings. These are the skills we want them to have when they grow up. Think of yourselves as being on the same side. Forget power struggles or parent-child battles. You are teaching them how to behave and giving them the skills they need as an adult.



Encourage Empathy

Explain how their actions can make others feel. Tell them how you feel when they say hurtful words, or that their sibling/friend cries because they do not like getting hit. Then explain that they wouldn't want those actions done to them.

Always remind your child how out how others feel (whether by their actions or someone else's). Label emotions you might see, both positive and negative. They will become more aware of others' feelings and how their words and actions affect them.



What to do when your child says Hurtful Words

Don't take it personal: Hearing your child say hurtful things is hard to stomach, especially when they're offensive. This isn't the time to internalise what they notice about you or whether they love you less. Do not focus on what they said but rather on their **behaviour**.

Don't say hurtful things back: If you're just as reactive as your child, you might feel tempted to blurt terrible words right back. Don't. Hold your temper, take a few breaths, walk away. On so many levels, saying hurtful things back is wrong. And with both of you upset, you'll spiral into chaos instead of calming down and being productive.

Acknowledge their emotions but set a penalty: As hurtful as it is to hear insults hurled at you, these are still your child's emotions. Although they expressed them poorly it is normal and okay for children to feel frustrated, annoyed or sad. Don't chastise them for not feeling happy all the time however you must react and address challenging behaviour. Don't be afraid to ask your child why they reacted in a certain manner eg “I'm sorry you feel that way” but ensure that you set a penalty for your child not reacting in an appropriate manner to a situation eg taking time out, removal of reward system/favourite activity – depending on the seriousness of the outburst.

Explain how words and actions can hurt: Even though your child has a right to feel frustrated, they still have to learn to do so in a respectful way. But instead of pointing out where they went wrong, state it from your point of view: “I feel hurt when you say things like that.” Your child might get upset, afraid that they have hurt one of the most important

people in their life however explain how they have upset someone by lashing out physically and ensure that they apologise to the people affected by the attack.

Even if your child does not have a substantial vocabulary at present they will understand that you are unhappy by ensuring that you use a firm tone when explaining the situation but do not shout

Show your child better ways to express emotions: You've acknowledged their emotions and pointed out how words/actions hurt. Next, show your child other ways to express themselves. They can walk away, take a few deep breaths, or say, "I'm mad right now." Let them know it's okay to feel frustrated. It's just better to do so without hurting other people's feelings.

Praise behaviour you want to see: Praise your child when you see them handle frustration well, such as when they choose better alternatives instead of hurtful words or actions. Acknowledge behaviour you want to continue so they know this is behaviour you encourage. Make it clear what behaviour you do not want to see eg It's wrong for your child to push their brother, but praise them for having admitted and apologised for it.

Reflect on your own actions: After you calm down and discuss the emotions, turn inward and ask yourself: What lessons can I learn from this? It's so easy to focus on the children and what we need to teach them but parents also have lots to learn. Take a few moments to find the triggers that led your child to feel angry. How is the stress levels in your home? What changes are they going through that might contribute to their frustration? Are your responses aligning with their temperament? Dig deep and ask yourself questions to learn from this experience as well.

Follow through with Consequences

How often have you given empty threats without following through? Let them know what will happen if they continues to misbehave, then follow through with it. For example, you told them to stop throwing the wooden blocks because they could hurt people or break things - you've even acknowledged the joy of throwing and redirected them to the foam balls. Except... they keep doing it. You can say, "It looks like you're not ready to play with the wooden blocks correctly. If you keep throwing them, I'll have to put them away for today. You can have them when you're ready to play without throwing." Say this in a matter-of-fact tone. You are not holding anything against your child - you are just letting them know what happens if they do a certain action. And of course, the most important part: if they do throw another block, put them away until tomorrow. Don't let them have one more swing with a block, and don't give them back to them after five minutes of crying. Explain that they kept throwing them, so it's time to find something they can play with that won't hurt others.

How to handle a Disrespectful Child

It's never too late to improve your relationship with your children but make sure you always do something to handle disrespectful behaviour. Here's what to do when your child disrespects you or others:

Don't tolerate rudeness: Your child yells at you, ignores you, closes the door, mouths something disrespectful, hits someone in spite you should make sure you are both calm, address their behaviour and set the standard of respectful interaction, no matter the circumstances. Raise a child who knows it's not acceptable to act disrespectfully.

Ask why they are upset: Want to know the secret to curbing bad behaviour? When our children act up, we react so quickly we forget we should ask why they are upset. Asking children what is bothering them forces us to empathise with their emotions. We can see why they are upset and acting the way they are.

Model the behaviour you want to see: Ask yourself, Would I want my children to say or act like this? If it's not, then be careful about saying or doing something which your child may copy – it gives them permission to mimic those behaviours.

Praise and thank your child for being respectful: Let's say your children were playing trains together, except your younger one keeps knocking the tracks down, even by accident. It happened so many times you were expecting your older child to blow up and say something mean but they didn't - they responded with patience and rebuilt the tracks. Look for these moments so you can praise your child for their behaviour. Teaching respect is more effective through positive reinforcement than negative ones.

Explain it's okay to disagree, but not to disrespect: We sometimes mistake disrespect with disagreement. We think if a child doesn't do what he's asked to do, then they must be disrespecting their parents. But children have a right to disagree—they just have to do so with respect. You can even encourage them to disagree and praise them for questioning but they can't insult, yell or treat people with disrespect just because they don't agree. And if your child blurts something disrespectful, show them an appropriate way to say it. First, acknowledge it's fine to disagree, then give them the exact phrases to say instead of what they had just said.

Remember You are the Adult

As exhausting as your child can be, remember that you are the adult. You're the one who makes the best decisions for your family. Bowing down to her demands doesn't do anyone any good. After all, children need an adult to guide them through these formative years. They don't like feeling upset or throwing a tantrum and feel scared when they happen. After all, if even their parents can't stand up to these tantrums, then who will?

Your job isn't to make your child happy. Happiness is a result of the many factors that make up their childhood and something you'd want them to have, but that's not your job. In fact, they need to experience feelings beyond happiness— disappointment and humility, for instance. Your job is to raise future adults. One who won't grow up to become an adult who feels they are entitled to everything, who knows that hard work, not complaining, will yield better results.