



Texas Agricultural Extension Service
The Texas A&M University System

Parenting Young Children

Behavior Problems In Children... *Why do children misbehave?*

Children misbehave when they don't feel well. Children need plenty of sleep, nutritious food, exercise, and fresh air. When they don't get these things, they are often hard to get along with. A tired child can be a cranky child. A hungry child is irritable. A sleepy child becomes fussy, and a sick child can be cross.

Children misbehave when they feel rejected. Children who feel unloved and unwanted can become resentful, moody, and ill-behaved. When parents or other adults ignore children's thoughts and feelings, youngsters tend to think of themselves as unworthy.

Children misbehave when they feel unloved. Children want to please those who love them. Without a loving relationship, children have no reason to behave in acceptable ways - except to avoid punishment. It is not enough that parents love their children. That love needs to be shown and demonstrated.

Children misbehave when they lack knowledge and experience. Children are not little adults. They don't come equipped with information and wisdom. Mistakes and misbehavior are normal. Many acts that parents call "bad" are simply mistakes. They only need to be talked over and explained.

Children misbehave when they are upset and feel insecure. Children need constant attention and the security it provides. Change causes upsets. When Mother is sick, when a new baby arrives, or when the family moves to a new neighborhood, misbehavior is much more likely.

Children misbehave when they lack confidence. Feelings of inadequacy may cause children to brag, boast, or fight. Or they may be unwilling to try new things and withdraw. "Put-downs" make children feel worthless; encouraging words help children feel confident.

Children misbehave when they are discouraged. Children feel discouraged if they don't hear praise for the good and positive things they do. They may misbehave to get the attention and closeness of their parents that they need.

Understanding Misbehavior

- There is always a reason for misbehavior, and parents can deal with it better if they understand the cause. Children are children only a very short time.
- Children love encouragement, approval, and kind words - these reinforce good behavior.
- If children misbehave because they are tired or run down, change their schedules in order to develop good health habits. If misbehavior results from lack of confidence, try to use more encouraging and positive words and fewer "put-downs."
- If parents expect children to behave like adults, they will be disappointed. Love children as they are - noisy, energetic, and dirty. Children who feel loved will want to act the way their parents expect them to act.
- Separate the child from the behavior. You can love the child but reject the behavior.

Preventing Misbehavior

When you were a child, misbehavior probably meant one thing to you, another to your mother, and something else to your father-and so it is today. What misbehavior is depends upon what the child does and how the parent perceives that behavior. Depending on time and place, misbehavior can be just about anything. Sometimes it can be unintentional and at other times deliberate. It may be just the result of the age of the child. Much of what could be called misbehavior may be normal behavior for any child.

Many behavior problems are really parent problems. If you're having too much misbehavior, stop and examine your own behavior.

It is easier on parents and children to prevent misbehavior than it is to deal with it afterwards. You need a plan in order to prevent problems. Try some of the suggestions in this information sheet. Try only one new technique at a time, and give it a try for at least two weeks. It takes time to form new habits, for both parents and children.

Ask yourself —

- Do I use more "do's " than "don'ts"?
- Are my rules reasonable?
- Am I consistent in enforcing rules?
- Do I make it easy for my child to behave well?
- Do I let my child make choices?
- Do I give a few minutes' warning before stopping play?
- Do I provide interesting play things?

Ways To Prevent Behavior Problems

- **Change the setting.** Put dangerous items, breakables, and valuables out of the reach of infants and toddlers. For preschoolers, have safe and worry-free places to play.
- **Provide interesting playthings** to prevent boredom and misbehavior; these need not be expensive or store-bought.
- **Make clear rules.** The fewer rules you make, the better. Rules should be reasonable and enforced consistently.
- **Be flexible.** There are times when rules can be relaxed; rules need to change as the child grows in ability and responsibility.
- **Set a good example.** Children imitate those around them, and they learn by what they live.
- **Give choices.** When you can, give children a choice of several things to do.
- **Get the child's attention.** Say the name, touch, and look him/her in the eye before you talk to a child or give instructions.
- **Give warning time.** Tell children 5 to 10 minutes ahead of time that you want to change their activity. Let them get ready to go on to something new.
- **Spend time with your children.** Children need undivided, personal attention regularly from their parents.

This newsletter has been compiled and distributed to enrich and improve the lives of Denton County residents by —

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For more parenting information or if your organization would like to schedule a parenting program contact —

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