



Inappropriate Behaviours in Children:

There are many things that can cause a child to have temper tantrums, emotional outbursts, and general “bad” or unexpected behavior. These can be caused by being hungry or overtired. They can also include emotional reasons, like not being able to describe their feelings. Their environment can also influence inappropriate behaviors like being locked up inside and not able to go outside to get fresh air.

What is normal behavior for a child?

Normal behavior in children depends on the child’s age, personality, physical and emotional development. A child’s behavior may be a problem if it doesn’t match the expectations of the family or if it is disruptive. Normal or “good” behavior is usually determined by whether it’s socially, culturally, and developmentally appropriate. Knowing what to expect from your child at each age will help you decide whether his or her behavior is normal.

What can I do to change my child’s behavior:

Children tend to continue a behavior when it is rewarded and stop a behavior when it is ignored. When you think your child’s behavior might be a problem, you have choices:

- Decide that the behavior is not a problem because it’s appropriate to the child’s age and stage of development.
- The best way to stop unwanted behavior is to ignore it.
- However, ignoring an unwanted behavior works best over a period of time.
- When you want the behavior to stop immediately, you can use the time-out method.

How do I use the time-out method?

Decide ahead of time the behaviors that will result in a time out (usually tantrums, or aggressive or dangerous behavior). Choose a time-out place that is uninteresting for the child and not frightening, such as a chair or playpen. When you’re away from home, consider using a nearby seating area as a time-out place.

When the unacceptable behavior occurs, tell the child the behavior is unacceptable and give a warning that you will put him or her in time-out if the behavior doesn’t stop. Remain calm and don’t look angry. If your child goes on misbehaving, calmly take him or her to the time-out area. If possible, keep track of how long your child’s been in time out. Set a timer so your child will know when time out is over. Time out should be brief (generally one minute for each year of age) and should begin immediately after reaching the time-out place or after the child calms down. You should stay within sight or earshot of the child, but don’t talk to him or her. If the child leaves the time-out area, gently return him or her to the area and consider resetting the timer. When the time out is over, let the child leave the time-out place. Don’t discuss the bad behavior but look for ways to reward and reinforce good behavior later on.

One way to encourage good behavior is to use a reward system. Children who learn that bad behavior is not tolerated and that good behavior is rewarded are learning skills that will last them a lifetime. This works best in children older than two years of age. It can take up to two months to work. Being patient and keeping a diary of behavior can be helpful to parents.

Choose one to two behaviors you would like to change (for example, bedtime habits, tooth brushing, or picking up toys). Choose a reward your child would enjoy. Examples of good rewards are an extra bedtime story, delaying bedtime by half

an hour, a preferred snack (only use this on special occasions or when away from home) or for older children, earning points toward a special toy, a privilege, or a small amount of money.

Explain the desired behavior and the reward to the child. For example, tell the child, “if you get into your pajamas and brush your teeth before this television show is over, you can stay up a half hour later.” Request the behavior only one time. If the child does what you ask, give the reward. You can help the child, if necessary, but don’t get too involved. Because any attention from parents, even negative attention, is so rewarding to children, they may prefer to have parental attention instead of a reward at first. Use Transition statements, such as, “in five minutes, play time will be over,” are helpful when you are teaching your child new behaviors. Try to avoid situations that can make your child cranky such as becoming overly stimulated. Don’t criticize your child in front of other people, praise your child often when he or she deserves it. Touch him or her affectionately and often. Children want and need attention.

