

# Purposeful Parenting and Discipline



Your child is learning all day – through play and everyday experiences – you are helping them make the most of each moment. You can help your child grow as a person who cares for others, who respects and listens, and who is responsible, by teaching them about what they can and can not do and by re-directing their misbehavior.

## Birth to One Year

**It is important for children to have guidance from their parents at every age but babies require a more gentle approach!" Here are some tips:**

- Use a calm voice when you re-direct your baby.
- Don't slap or yell – your baby will copy what he/she sees.
- Explain the rule in short sentences and tell him/her what to do – "We are gentle with the dog – pet her like this." "Gentle pats."
- Babies cannot be spoiled – if your child is crying or upset, comfort him/her.
- You must physically move your child as you tell him/her "no" if you want her to really understand – even if he/she protests – don't react to the protest. You may eventually have to move into a different room or put a toy on a shelf if he/she is not listening.
- Don't threaten or bribe, just distract your child and don't ever give candy for listening.

## One to Two Years

**Providing guidance helps your child feel safe and learn to recognize their feelings and respond appropriately. This is a great age – toddlers are very active and are growing and learning constantly – quickly. It is important to start the habit of consistent guidance, re-direction, and follow-through! Children feel safe when they have limits, so always provide limits for them.**

- Don't just say "no!" Give a short, simple explanation like "Stop, that is hot!" and "No, that will hurt you!"
- Do not talk for a long time (like a lecture) about why your toddler should or should not do something – just keep it short and re-direct.
- Children at this age get into everything and move fast – you have to help him/her find something else to do.
- Be sure to give a warning before it is time to leave or change activities. When it is time to go – go!
- If you have to leave your child – say goodbye, give a hug and kiss, and leave
- You have to stick around after you re-direct – your toddler may go right back to what he/she was not supposed to do! Keep sending her back! Discipline is ineffective if it is not followed up!
- Tantrums – this is the age where tantrums are likely – be patient! Don't scold your toddler for a tantrum – just make sure she cannot hurt herself (bang head on hard floor) or hurt someone else. If he/she does not settle down in five minutes on her own, you should try to get close enough to rub or pat her back. See if you can give her a big hug when she settles down.
- A tantrum (at this age) happens because your child does not know how to control him/her emotions or express herself with words – that is why you need to let him/her settle down without punishing him/her or you should help them settle down – if your child will let you get close enough to hold him/her.
- Help your toddler label their feelings and frustrations. "You were really mad when I took that toy away. I can't let you throw your toy. It could hurt someone.

## Two to Three Years

**Providing guidance helps your child feel safe and learn to recognize their feelings and respond appropriately. Feelings – they are a part of all of our lives! As adults, we have learned how to manage our behavior when our feelings are strong or we are very upset about something. It is our behavior that would get us into trouble—not the actual feelings. Children are not able to do this; it is our job to help them learn to label and understand their feelings, and then we have to help them learn what to do about them! A main thing we want to encourage is for children to TALK about how they feel – to say, “I am so mad!” or “I really wanted to play some more!” Always emphasize communication!**

- Children need to be able to recognize their feelings – know the word for how they are feeling (knots in your stomach, heart beating fast, clenching a fist...) we have to give them names to use for their feelings.
- Young children will react physically to their feelings (yelling, hitting, running away...) – it is our job to help our children learn how to cope with their feelings without hurting themselves or anyone else! Show them what they can do (“I like the way you told me you were mad. When I get mad I count to ten or take deep breaths, like this...”)
- When we are dealing with their misbehavior, it is usually a feeling that they are acting on (jealousy—taking someone’s toy; anger—slapping someone...) That is why helping them identify and label their feelings, and finding acceptable solutions, are all very important!

## Three to Four Years

**Providing guidance helps your child feel safe and learn to recognize their feelings and respond appropriately. We want our children to make decisions based on what is right and wrong. We often try and influence children through extrinsic rewards and punishments, using bribes and threats. This is sometimes effective but does not teach them how to make decisions independently.**

**As children grow and spend more time away from their parents it becomes critical that they base their behavior on their internal values and knowledge of what is right and wrong. We don’t want them to make decisions according to what their peers are telling them or if they feel they will be caught and punished. Children must be given opportunities to make choices throughout their childhood so when they are in situations away from us, where the consequences can be severe, they are empowered with the skills to consider their options and make responsible decisions for which they will have to be accountable.**

**Limit-setting with preschoolers is a safe, effective way to help them become competent individuals, demonstrate self-control, make decisions based on reasoning and experiences and teach them how to be accountable for their behavior.**

### Setting Limits

- State the rule or expectation – we can’t assume children know what we don’t tell them!
- Tell them what you want them to do (use walking feet, sit in the chair, use kind words)
- You are responsible for enforcing the limits; follow through!

### Feelings

- Important to acknowledge, label (you are feeling sad because we have to leave the park. I feel sad too.)
- Don’t Deny –socially unacceptable feelings (hate, anger, jealousy, greed...) – does not mean the child is bad.

*(Three to Four Years continued)*

## Choices

- Empower Children
- Provide opportunities for critical life skills – examining consequences, choosing, or living with consequences of those decisions.
- Put responsibility on the child instead of the parent.
- Find opportunities for choices they can make—choices that are inconsequential in the real world (what shirt to wear, hair up or down, blue coat or red...).
- Don't give them choices when they should not have any (ride in a car seat, go to school...).

## *Four to Five Years*

**Providing guidance helps your child feel safe and learn to recognize their feelings and respond appropriately.**

**At this age it's important to point out the consequences of your child's behavior and how it impacts others. Your child needs to realize that other people exist and have feelings, wants and needs – he/she needs to learn about consequences of his/her behavior so eventually he will start to weigh those consequences when he makes decisions.**

- If you see your child do something he/she shouldn't – DON'T ask if he did it! "Did you just hit your brother?" "Did you just throw your toy?" You are shifting the issue to lying if he answers no. Just address the behavior
- If you see something, go back to acknowledging what you saw or what your child is feeling, stating the rule and giving choices. "I saw you throw your toy. Toys are for playing. Do you want to play with it or should we put it away?"
- Don't dismiss negative feelings or what they say. "You don't hate your brother; you are not tired; you can't be hungry, you just ate!"
- Children can be unhappy or angry – they just have to learn to control their behavior, "I can see you are mad, but hitting hurts. You can only touch gently."
- Remember, it is critical to point out how his behavior impacts other people, "Do you see his face? He looks mad; he doesn't like it when you take his things." "Can you see him crying? He is very sad because you yelled at him."
- Many kindergarten teachers agree impulse control and following directions are as important as knowing your letters and numbers when you come to kindergarten. Research supports this, suggesting children that can self-regulate may have greater success in school.