

Helping your child to behave well

Understand what is normal for your child

- Children under 3 years often use aggressive behaviours like pushing, grabbing, and hitting to get what they want. Positive behaviours like sharing, taking turns, and using words to express feelings are behaviours that your child needs your help to learn.
- It will take time for your child to learn positive behaviours. It is important for you to be patient. Children learn new skills by repeating them many times.
- Your child learns how to behave by watching how you act at home and with others. Your child will be more likely to use positive behaviours if he sees you using them.

Look at your child and his surroundings

- Notice when your child is behaving well. Some examples of behaviours to look for are:
 - talking with a friendly voice
 - playing well with others
 - being patient or staying calm
- Look at the behaviours you are role modeling in your home. For example, if you want your child to use words like “Please” and “Thank you”, are you using these words when you speak to your child?
- Look for signs that your child is ready to learn positive behaviours. For example, it will be easier for your child to learn to behave well when he is well rested, alert, and calm. It will be more difficult for your child to learn when he is tired, hungry, stressed, or sick.

Respond sensitively to your child

- When you praise your child’s positive behaviours, your child will use these behaviours more often. Praise your child with words, such as “Fantastic!” You can also praise with affection such as smiles and hugs. When giving praise, it is important to:
 - be specific and label the behaviour
For example, instead of saying “That was great”, try saying “Great job sharing your toy with your friend.”



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- praise your child as soon as you notice him behaving well
For example, if your child starts to pick up toys, praise right away. You don't need to wait until all the toys are picked up before praising.
- avoid following your praise with a negative comment
For example, "Good job talking in a friendly voice. Why can't you talk like that all the time?"
- Other important ways to help your child behave well are:
 - role modeling positive behaviours
Your child learns positive behaviours from watching you. Let your child see you showing concern for others, taking turns, and staying calm.
 - labeling your child's emotions to help him learn to express his feelings
You could say, "That made you really angry" or "Wow, you're really excited."
 - helping your child understand how others are feeling and guiding your child to respond appropriately
You could say, "Sarah feels sad that she doesn't have a puzzle to play with. Can she help you finish your puzzle?"
 - providing opportunities for your child to practice positive behaviours with you and with other children
Parks, play groups, Ontario Early Years Centres, and libraries are some places where your child can meet others and practice these new skills.

Grow as a parent

- Praising your child might feel uncomfortable at first. As you use praise more, it will start to feel more comfortable. Be patient with yourself.
- Notice when you have done something well and praise yourself. For example, "I stayed calm when my child was misbehaving." When you praise yourself, you will feel better about yourself and you will be more likely to praise your child.
- Taking time for yourself will help you cope as a parent. Get enough sleep and eat well to help you have the energy to care for your child.

