

CAREGIVERS HANDOUT ON CHALLENGING CHILD BEHAVIOR

To be used independently or together with the FAST-B Workbook for Caregivers

QUICK SUMMARY

When is child behavior a problem?

All children get distracted, argue, or don't follow instructions at times. If your child's misbehavior causes problems at home or at school, makes it hard to get along with others, or makes life hard for you as a parent, we want to share some strategies that can help.

First, what causes child behavior problems?

Normal differences in how kids grow, in their personalities, and in their mental health can all affect behavior problems. Stress, life experiences, and different parenting styles can make a difference too.

How can parents help change child behavior?

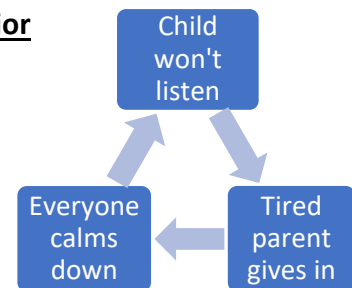
Children aren't often interested in changing their own behavior. But, parents can help shape child behavior by trying these skills:

1. Discussing clear expectations for behavior ahead of time
2. Giving extra attention and praise to good behaviors
3. Responding calmly and consistently with consequences for misbehaviors

This helps children learn that good behavior "works" better than bad behavior.

Behavior Patterns: How Kids & Caregivers Shape Each-others' Behavior

When kids don't follow instructions or act out, parents may feel like they must give in to avoid a tantrum. But, if kids learn that misbehaviors *sometimes* get them what they want, they will do it much more. This is how behavior can get worse over time. When parents stop giving in to misbehavior, kids often push extra hard at first, but eventually come to accept the limit.



COMMON TRAPS QUIZ

Are You Falling into Any of These Common Traps?

- Criticizing:** Telling your child all the things you don't like about their behavior, but not paying as much attention when they're being good.
(Example: "I've told you a million times and you still haven't put your shoes on".)
- Threatening:** Telling your child there will be a consequence, but not following through
(Example: Saying they're grounded for a month, then deciding to skip it)
- Lecturing:** If you are repeating the same lectures and explanations constantly, your child is probably not learning from them.
- Avoiding:** You stop spending positive time with child because it is too frustrating
- Yelling:** Feeling so upset that you yell at your child. This does grab their attention, but it can lead to bigger, hotter arguments, and it can train kids to yell more at other people.
- Withdrawing:** Feeling so helpless to change your child's behavior that you stop trying

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GET IDEAS

SET CLEAR GOALS: *Think of your child’s most challenging behavior. What would you like to see them do instead? (E.g., instead of “not following directions,” “follow directions with 1 reminder.”)*

Behavior I want to see more of: _____

PICK SMALL REWARDS: *List some privileges or small rewards your child would be motivated to earn when they do the good behavior you wrote above. (These could be extra playtime, an activity with you, later bedtime, or extra screen time)*

TRY IGNORING: *Some attention-getting behaviors are rewarded by a reaction from parents. If you stop responding, they can get worse at first. But with time, your child will learn that this behavior doesn’t “work” to get your attention. Try ignoring one annoying or attention-getting behavior your child does that gets a reaction from you. (Pick something that is not dangerous.)*

- Whining
- Arguing
- Being sassy or rude
- Complaining
- Making annoying noises
- Other: _____

STRATEGIES THAT WILL HELP

Ideas to Try with Your Child:

Special Time: Set aside one-on-one time with your child for just 10 minutes per day. Research shows this positive connection improves behavior.

Praise the Good: Tell your child exactly what you like about their behavior. Your attention is a powerful reward. Ex: *“Thanks for sharing so nicely with your sister.”*

Reward Boring Tasks with Fun Stuff: Let your child know what fun thing, like play time or an outing, will happen after they finish a task they don’t like. Ex: *“When your homework is done, then you can have screen time.”*

Model Coping for your Child: When your child is pushing all your buttons, show them it’s OK to take a moment to calm down, take a breath, and make a plan before responding.

Don’t Forget:

Expect Push-Back! When misbehavior stops “working” for your child (because you stopped giving in), they will often push harder for a reaction. This is normal! When parents are consistent and don’t give in to the push-back, children will learn to change their behavior.

Start Small: Start with praising and rewarding smaller, easier behaviors (like getting dressed) and work up to bigger and harder behaviors (finishing the whole morning routine)

Stick with it!: Behavior change takes time. Remind yourself: *“Consistency is key. My child is learning that good behavior “works” better than negative behavior.”*

If you need support, ask your primary care provider about finding a local mental health expert who can help with parenting strategies to manage challenging child behaviors.