

How to Encourage Positive Behaviour in Very Young Children – A Guide to Positive Parenting

As parents we can help young children understand how to behave. Giving young children lots of praise and positive attention when they are being co-operative and following home routines, helps to guide their behaviour. Positive parenting works for all children. It involves emphasising the positive, planning ahead, and using everyday routines to create learning opportunities that motivate children to do their best.

Here are some tips on how to encourage positive behaviour in very young children:

- Create a safe and interesting environment where children are kept busy and are engaged without the risk of being hurt. With lots of interesting things to do, children will have the opportunity to explore, remain curious, and develop their skills. Parents will also benefit from knowing their children are safe and stimulated.
 - Be a role model – set the ground rules and be prepared to follow them too e.g., quiet voice when we're inside; we all tidy up after we finish playing; we put away our screens and sit down when we're eating.
 - Spend time with your child. It is important to give children frequent amounts of quality time when they have your attention. By simply watching, commenting, or smiling when they are playing nicely, tells them that you are pleased with how they are playing. Take an interest in what they are doing, especially if they want to share something with you.
 - Use descriptive praise. Not only is it helpful to “catch” times when your child is behaving, it is also important to describe the behaviour that you are praising, e.g., “Wow, I really like how you remembered to pack all your trains away”.
- Keep instructions clear and simple, and focus on the positive, e.g., saying, “quiet voice please” instead of, “stop shouting!”. Using a calm but firm tone also helps children to understand that you mean what you are saying, and what the expectation is.
 - Have realistic expectations of a young child's behaviour. Children will test the boundaries. That's normal. It is important to remain calm and be consistent and to choose your battles. Aim to create a positive environment where everyone knows the family's rules and where there are fewer opportunities for conflict and negative feedback.
 - Stick to routines as much as possible. Children feel safe when they know what to expect. Routines also give children the opportunity to develop self-help skills such as dressing or brushing their teeth. This helps them to feel good about themselves and motivates them to co-operate. Remember to let children know if the routine is going to change or be a bit different.



- Help children to feel empowered by offering them equally acceptable choices at different times of the day, e.g., “would you like to wear your yellow socks or your blue socks?” or “would you like to use your sippy cup or your straw cup?” etc.
- Plan ahead when tackling more challenging situations such as shopping, or long car trips. Children might benefit from a visual strip or pictures to understand what will happen. Remember to take along a few interesting distractions and snacks, praise any efforts the child is making and give plenty of warning of any changes. You may consider practising with shorter trips.
- As your child gets older you can give them more responsibility and help them to learn the natural consequences of their behaviour, e.g., if they don't wear their jacket, they will feel cold.
- Above all, maintain a sense of humour. Humour enhances connection and breaks down a negative mood. Singing a silly song or being playful, can disarm a toddler's tantrum. It can help children to develop their own sense of humour and to build resilience. Of course, aim to laugh with your child but not at their expense.



When to seek help

If nothing seems to be working and you are really struggling with your child's behaviour, then talk to your Start Strong Pathways provider or your child health nurse.

Other parenting support services include:

- **Karitane**
1300 227 464
- **Tresillian**
1300 272 739
- **Parent Line**
1300 1300 52

References

- [The benefits of laughing out loud](#)
- [Encouraging good behaviour](#)
- [What is 'good' behaviour in toddlers?](#)

