



Dealing with Difficult or Challenging Behaviour

The key to managing challenging behaviour is to understand what has led to it – what might your child be feeling and what might have happened to make them behave like this?

- Children want and need attention; even negative attention is better than none. So pay as little attention as you safely can to behaviour that you don't want.
- Irritating behaviour such as whining and squabbling is often designed to get your attention. As long as no-one is getting hurt and nothing is being damaged or broken, take no notice.
- Biting or spitting may be a way of getting attention, copying what others do, a way of expressing frustration, or a mixture of all these. Your child is more likely to bite or spit during what is known as the 'oral phase', when they explore everything through their mouths. Don't ignore what's happening but pay as little attention as possible to your child's behaviour and make sure they haven't hurt another child. Distracting your child and leading them into a calming activity is a good idea. When your child is a bit quieter, give the message calmly, clearly and firmly: "Biting hurts, we don't bite". NEVER be tempted to bite your child back – children learn by copying what you do rather than what you say.
- Try to be a good role model. The most effective tool in coping with bad behaviour (and sometimes the most difficult one to follow) is to stay calm.

More information on Page 2

For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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The Start4Life Information Service for Parents provides free information and advice. Find out more at: bit.ly/1iC4rrO

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- As with biting: hitting or punching can't be ignored. But try to bear in mind that your child is unlikely to be able to think about what they have done or why, or to say sorry when their feelings are still running high. Make sure that other children are safe and looked after if hurt, and then take your child to a calm, quiet place for some 'time out'. This makes it clear to your child that this sort of behaviour is not acceptable without adding your own anger to the situation. The charity Family Links has created a helpful video about 'time out' which you can view on YouTube here: bit.ly/1uNUJYZ
- Play has an important role in teaching children social skills and helping them make sense of the world around them. Finding regular opportunities for playing with your child can help reinforce positive behaviour and provides an opportunity for you to give your child praise and let them 'lead' an activity. Give your child your full attention, show genuine pleasure and interest, get down to their level and use gentle touch as you play together.
- You can help your child feel more in control and reduce frustration by offering them manageable choices during the day, such as "Would you like to wear your green jumper or your stripy one?" or "Would you like milk or water to drink?"
- Sharing doesn't come naturally to a small child so it's important to help your child learn this life skill. Show your child how it is done and give your child praise when you see them put their new skill into action: "You and Rowen are playing well together with the trains", for example.
- Try not to interfere in your child's play with others but you can intervene if you can see problems arising. This helps your child to learn the skill of problem-solving as well as diffusing difficult behaviour, for example: "You and Sarah both really want a go with the bike. I wonder how we can work it out so that you both get a fair turn."
- We all want our children to grow up confident, independent and responsible - developing clear, fair, consistent boundaries helps them do this. But remember that children need to test boundaries in order to feel safe; when they do so it's important to be firm without being harsh. Boundaries are a family affair and everyone needs to agree with them and be prepared to stick to them. Bear in mind also that the boundaries you put in place need to be 'elastic' so they can stretch as your child grows.

Further help & advice

bit.ly/TgPiG4

The parents' section includes clear steps for using time out to calm down and other strategies.

bit.ly/TEigQg

Has a range of helpful advice, including sections on behaviour for toddlers, pre-schoolers and primary school-aged children.

There are also several books you may find useful, including the following:

The Parenting Puzzle: How to Get the Best out of Family Life

by Candida Hunt, published by Family Links

What Every Parent Needs to Know

by Margot Sunderland, published by Dorling Kindersley

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk

by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlich, published by Scribner

Raising Boys

by Steve Biddulph, published by Harper Thorsons

Raising Girls

by Steve Biddulph, published by Harper Thorsons