



## 15 Tips for Encouraging Positive Behaviour

**1. Children do as you do.** Your child watches you to get her clues on how to behave in the world, so, as a role model, use your own behaviour to guide your child. What you do is often much more important than what you say. If you want your child to say “please”, say it yourself. If you don’t want your child to raise his/her voice, keep your voice at a reasonable level too.

**2. Show how you feel.** If you can tell your child honestly how their behaviour affects you, your child will recognise their own emotions in yours, like a mirror, and will respond to you. By the age of three, children can show real empathy. So you might say, “I’m getting upset because there is so much noise I can’t talk on the phone”. When you start the sentence with ‘I’, it gives your child the chance to see things from your perspective.

**3. Catch your child being ‘good’.** This simply means that when your child is behaving in a way you like, you can give some positive feedback, for example, “Wow, you are playing so nicely. I really like the way you are keeping all the blocks on the table”. That works better than waiting for the blocks to come crashing to the floor before you take notice and bark, “Hey, stop that”. This positive feedback is sometimes called ‘descriptive praise’. Try to say six positive comments (praise and encouragement) for every negative comment (criticisms and reprimands) — the 6-1 ratio keeps things in balance. It also pays to remember that if left with a choice between no attention or negative attention, children will seek out negative attention.

**4. Get down onto their level.** Kneeling or squatting down next to children is a very powerful tool for communicating positively with them. Getting close allows you to tune in to what they might be feeling or thinking. It also helps them focus on what you are saying or asking for. If you are close to your child and have their attention, there is no need to make your child look at you.

**5. “I hear you”.** Active listening is another tool for helping young children cope with their emotions. They tend to get frustrated a lot, especially if they can't express themselves well enough verbally, so when you repeat back to them what you think they might be feeling, it helps to relieve some of their tension and makes them feel respected and comforted. It can diffuse many potential temper tantrums.

**6. Keep promises.** Stick to agreements. When you follow through on your promises, good or bad, your child learns to trust and respect you. So when you promise to go for a walk after your child picks up their toys, make sure you have your walking shoes handy. When you say

you will leave the library if the noise level doesn't come down and the running around doesn't stop be prepared to leave straight away if the behaviour continues. No need to make a fuss about it — the more matter of fact, the better. This helps your child feel more secure, as it creates a consistent and predictable environment.

**7. Reduce temptation.** Your glasses look like so much fun to play with — a child can hardly remember to stop themselves. Reduce the chance for innocent but costly exploration by keeping that stuff out of sight.

**8. Choose your battles.** Before you intervene in anything your child is doing, ask yourself if it really matters. By keeping instructions, requests and negative feedback to a minimum, you create less opportunity for conflict and bad feelings. Rules are important, but reserve them for the most important things.

**9. Whining: be strong.** Kids don't want to be annoying. By giving in to their annoying persistence we are unintentionally training them to do it more. 'No' means 'no', not maybe, so don't say it unless you mean it. If you say 'No' and then give in, they will be even more persistent with whining the next time, hoping to get lucky again.

**10. Keep it simple and positive.** If you can give clear instructions in simple terms, your child will know what is expected. ("Please hold my hand when we cross the road"). Stating things in the positive gets their heads thinking in the right direction: "Please shut the gate", rather than "Don't leave the gate open".

**11. Responsibility and consequences.** As children get older, you can increasingly give them responsibility for their own behaviour and the chance to experience the natural consequences of that behaviour. You don't have to be the bad guy all the time. For example, if your child forgot to put their lunch box in their bag, he/she will go hungry at lunch time. It is their hunger and their consequence and it won't hurt to go hungry just that one time. Sometimes, with the best intentions, we do so much for our children that we don't allow them to learn for themselves. At other times you need to provide consequences for unacceptable or dangerous behaviour. For these times, it is best to ensure that you have explained the consequences and that your children have agreed to them in advance.

**12. Say it once and move on.** It is surprising how much your child is listening even though they may not have the social maturity to tell you. Nagging and criticising is boring for you and doesn't work. Your child will just end up tuning you out and wonder why you get more upset. If you want to give your child one last chance to cooperate, you can remind them of the consequences and start counting to three.

**13. Make your child feel important.** Children love it when they can contribute to the family. Start introducing some simple chores or things that they can do to play their own important part in helping the household. This will make him/her feel important and they will take pride in helping out. If you can give your child lots of practise doing a chore, they will get better at it and will keep trying harder. Safe chores help them feel responsible, build their self-esteem and help you out too.

**14. Prepare for challenging situations.** There are times when looking after your child and doing things you need to do will be tricky. If you think about these challenging situations in advance, why you need their cooperation. Then he/she is prepared for what you expect.

**15. Maintain a sense of humour.** Another way of diffusing tension and possible conflict is to use humour. You can pretend to become the menacing tickle monster or make animal noises. However, humour at the child's expense won't help; young children are easily hurt by parental 'teasing'. Humour that has you both laughing is great.