

BACK TO BASICS

Child guidance: Preschoolers

Between ages 3 and 6, children begin to learn about making behavior choices. But because their brains typically cannot handle abstract concepts, they don't understand *right* and *wrong*. In their minds, adults are right because they're bigger.

Preschoolers tend to judge behavior by what happens afterward. Hitting is bad, for example, because it makes adults angry. Preschoolers typically don't feel guilty after misbehaving because they have not yet developed a *conscience*. If bad behavior is followed by punishment, such as spanking, a child may conform out of fear, or feel a need to get even.

An effective way to help children get in the habit of acceptable behavior is to use *consequences*.

Use natural and logical consequences

A *natural* consequence is what happens without intervention. When Carey plays at the water table without an apron, she gets wet and has to change clothes. She learns through a natural event that she must protect her clothes. Natural consequences are usually preferred, except when a child's safety is threatened or property may be damaged.

A *logical* consequence is one we create. When Carey bangs an audiotape against the table, for example, we take it away. "Banging a tape can break it, and you won't be able to play it anymore. If you handle it gently tomorrow, you may play it then."

To set logical consequences, make them related to the deed, reasonable, and respectful of the child. When Manuel slings mud on the tricycle, for example, he cleans it up. He should not have to scrub all the tricycles (not reasonable), listen to a five-minute lecture (not respectful), or run laps around the playground (not related).

Use positive guidance

- Give more attention to acceptable behavior and less to misbehavior. Catch children doing things right.
- Listen reflectively. Give your full attention, and glean what the child is saying from body language as well as words.
- Treat mistakes and accidents as learning opportunities. "How can you keep from spilling glue next time?"
- Set clear limits. To a child, "Put away the blocks" may mean pushing them into a corner. "Put the blocks on the bottom shelf" is specific.
- Explain the reasons behind limits. "All the puzzle pieces must go back into the box, so the puzzle will be ready for the next person who uses it."

Rethink time out

Many experienced caregivers don't use time out. First, it doesn't work with all children. Second, other guidance techniques are more effective. Third, it may help stop certain behavior, like hurting another child, but it doesn't teach a replacement behavior. If you use time out, make sure it's only as a last resort and never lasts more than five minutes.

Remember that the goal of guidance is to help children learn to take responsibility for their own behavior.

Next: Guidance for school-agers



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This is the third of several pages of development information. Look for each one, printed on cardstock for durability, in our upcoming newsletters; we encourage you to collect each one for your files.

Child Guidance for Preschoolers

Ideas to Help Stimulate Preschoolers Active & Eager Minds

The developmental skills of preschoolers require less space for sleeping, eating, and toileting and more space for play and discovery. Preschoolers are active, eager learners. They need to be constantly exploring, manipulating and experimenting with their environment. They need real materials to manipulate to meet their developmental needs. Children who are challenged and busy, rarely need discipline. If you are constantly having to discipline preschoolers, then maybe you need to look at your environment and provide more materials that will challenge their abilities.



Blocks

- Unit Blocks
- Hollow Blocks
- Cardboard Blocks
- Human Figures
- Animal Figures
(farm, forest, jungle, ocean)



Music

- Music Tapes
- Rhythm Instruments
- Gongs, Bells
- Gourds, Drums
- Musical Toys

Art

- Crayons, Markers
- Chalk, Colored Pencils
- Variety of Paper
- Scissors, Glue
- Collage Materials
- Brushes, Water Colors, Paints
- Clay, Play Dough, Sculpting Tools
- Printing Stamps
- Colored tapes



Science

- Prisms
- Magnifiers
- Scales, Pulleys, Levers, Locks, Wheels
- Egg Timers, Clocks, Hourglass, Stopwatch
- Flashlights
- Gardening Items
- Pets and Pet Supplies
- Magnets, Compass
- Thermometer



Dramatic Play Props

- Florist Shop
- Restaurant
- Post office
- Train Station
- Vet or Doctor
- Barber Shop
- Space Play
- Camping
- Fire Fighting
- Grocery Store



Outdoor Play

- Balls, Hoops
- Balance Beam
- Tunnels
- Sand
- Ladders
- Tires
- Wagon
- Tricycles
- Scooters
- Water Table
- Garden Tools