

# Using Positive Discipline with Young Children

## 6 TO 12 MONTHS OLD

Babies want to touch, taste and play with everything they can get their hands on. While this curiosity is vital to their overall development and should be encouraged, babies should not be allowed to hurt themselves or damage things.

Here are some techniques that really work!

- **Distract and redirect.** If your baby is playing with something she shouldn't be, find something else that will attract her attention. When she becomes interested, remove the other object. For example, if your baby begins playing with an electric cord, say "no" and remove her from the situation and interest her in another activity.
- **Be consistent.** Do this every time your baby does something that you don't want her to.
- **Act in a timely manner.** Timing is important! As soon as you see your baby getting into trouble, you need to react. Your baby's memory is short at this age. If you wait to discipline, he won't understand.
- **Praise.** Respond positively to your baby's good behavior. Praise helps your baby learn self-control. Much of your baby's good behavior will come from trying to please you.

Punishing babies does **not** work. They do not understand cause and effect and their brains are not developed enough to understand things such as time-out.

## 12 TO 24 MONTHS OLD

A toddler does not understand "good" and "bad" or rules and warnings. Instead, he acts on impulse. A toddler needs encouragement to become independent, but also needs guidance and discipline. It will take years of firm but gentle guidance before he understands what you expect from him and has the self-control to meet those expectations.

- **Distract and redirect.** These methods continue to work well with toddlers.
- **Ignore.** Unless your child's safety is an issue, ignore his temper tantrums.
- **Use routines.** Routines will help your child learn what you expect. For example, prepare for bedtime using the same predictable order each night (bathe, brush teeth, read story, turn lights out). Moreover, predictable routines are comforting to children.
- **Use "transition warnings."** These warnings will enable your child to know she will need to end her activity soon, rather than having an abrupt ending.
- **Establish rules using simple words.** Children begin to understand family rules at around the age of 2. Make sure to use simple, age-appropriate words to explain rules and why you have them.
- **Use time-out.** You can begin using time-outs at about age 2 – one minute per year of age. Have your child sit in a quiet, non-scary place. End the time-out by explaining to your child what he should have behaved.
- **Praise.** When you observe your child using good behavior, praise her!

## 2 TO 5 YEARS OLD

The young child continues to need a lot of guidance and discipline. It is important to keep in mind that children age 2 to 5 experience a great deal of frustration as they seek to be more independent. Temper tantrums are common and are often the result of being overtired or frustrated.

- **Use time-outs.** The continued use of time-outs enables your child to regain self-control in the situation.
- **Continue to redirect.** For example - "You cannot do X, but you can do Y."
- **Use "Grandma's Rule."** "When you have done XXX, then you can do YYY."
- **Beat the clock.** For example, set a timer and ask your child if she can pick up all her toys before the timer rings.
- **Use "1, 2, 3."** Let your child know he needs to begin doing what you have asked him to do by the count of "3." If he fails to do this, give a time-out and then request again that he do what you asked him to.
- **Praise!** Catch your child being good and praise her for what you see. Praise her every day.
- **Remove privileges.** Warn your child that if such and such behavior continues, he will lose a privilege. Keep the lost privilege realistic and one you can live with.
- **Use "consequences."** If a child continues to throw blocks, for example, put the blocks away for a day.
- **"Try it again."** It is important to give your child the opportunity to try again using more appropriate behavior.

## A WORD OF CAUTION

A toddler will sometimes break his parents' most important rules. When this happens, the parent or other caregiver should let him know they are unhappy by the look on their face and the sound of their voice. Then move him to a different place. Sometimes this will be enough, but just as often, other measures may be needed. It is best for parents to decide how they will respond now while their child is still young. Plan how you will respond to misbehavior before the misbehavior occurs.

Parents should never use punishments that physically or emotionally hurt their child. While they need to let their child know that she has done something wrong, this does not mean they have to inflict pain. **Spanking, slapping, beating and screaming at children of any age does more harm than good.** Here are some of the main reasons why:

- Physical punishment can seriously hurt or injure a child, both physically and emotionally.
- Physical punishment makes the child angry at the parent. Instead of learning self-discipline, the child is more likely to try to get back at the parent by continuing to misbehave.
- Physical punishment does not help a child learn self-discipline. Instead it teaches children to use aggression to solve problems.

For more information on using positive discipline, we recommend the following books:

[\*Active Parenting: A Parent's Guide to Raising Happy and Successful Children\*](#), by Michael Popkin

[\*What to Expect the Second Year\*](#), by Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel

[\*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk\*](#), by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

[\*Positive Discipline\*](#), by Jane Nelsen

[\*Setting Limits: How to Raise Responsible, Independent Children by Providing Reasonable Boundaries\*](#), by Robert MacKenzie

[\*Without Spanking or Spoiling: A Practical Approach to Toddler and Preschool Guidance\*](#), by Elizabeth Crary

[\*Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age Five\*](#), by Penelope Leach