

Parenting

8

Series

Discipline Your Toddler in a Positive Way



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Department of Health

Knowing Your Child

Being able to walk and talk **after his first birthday**, your toddler becomes more independent. He will **rush headlong into exploring and experimenting with his new abilities**. However, your little scientist is still not capable of thinking comprehensively. Thus it looks as if your baby, once totally dependent and compliant, has become a bit out of control. you might find him frequently testing your limits, opposing to your commands and upsetting you. But he is **not doing it intentionally** to challenge you. This stage may **last until he goes to kindergarten**. At this time, it is most important for you to help your child learn what he can and cannot do.



Using Positive Discipline

Positive discipline builds on a close parent-child relationship including the mutual understanding and trust between you and your child. Positive discipline means using **constructive and nonhurtful** ways to **promote the development of social behaviours and positive self-concept** in your child. It involves awareness of your child's feelings, understanding his developmental needs, recognizing and encouraging his desirable behaviours and setting and keeping sensible limits. It helps you **deal with your child calmly** and helps your child grow up to be a cooperative and happy child.

Giving Attention and Praise

Does praise spoil children?

Children are not spoiled by praise. In fact, only those who have received little praise or rewards from adults tend to be easily carried away by praise. They also tend to demand a reward before complying with requests.

Your toddler needs your **attention and praise** to build up self confidence in exploring and learning. Children who are frequently praised by their parents on specific desirable behaviours develop **high self esteem**. This eventually makes them **less dependent** on approvals and external rewards in order to behave well. They will be more likely to **see others in a positive light** too when they grow up.

😊 **Be generous to attend to and praise your child**

Praise your child whenever you catch her being good. Everyday behaviours that we often take for granted, such as sitting down quietly to play or leaving alone the things she could not touch, are **positive behaviours** that **deserve your attention and praise**. Your prompt attention to her positive behaviours will increase her chance of repeating them.

😊 **Giving attention to your child by:**

- ♥ Looking and smiling
- ♥ Touching gently
- ♥ Embracing and hugging
- ♥ Applauding
- ♥ Putting up your thumb
- ♥ Getting down to her eye level while talking



😊 **When praising your child:**

- ♥ Be **positive**. Say, 'What a good girl playing by yourself!' 'Thank you for staying in your seat while eating.' 'It's great for you to leave it alone.'

- ♥ Be **straight forward, brief** and **specific**.
- ♥ **Avoid criticisms or shaming** which may undermine your praises and confuse the child. e.g. 'That's a good boy, but no more of those mischiefs please.'
- ♥ Be **prompt** to let your child know what you are praising her for.
- ♥ **Praise on her effort** instead of the achievement to sustain her motivation and shape her behaviour in the desired direction.

😊 **Quality Time and Engaging Activities**

Your active toddler demands a lot of your attention and time. Try your best to **spend some special time**, even though it may be brief, to play and talk with him every day. This 'quality time' you enjoy together will **strengthen your bond** and **deepen his trust** on you, setting the **basis for effective behaviour management**.



Sometimes you may be too busy to spare even a brief moment with him. Make sure there are **activities to engage him** at such time so that he will have less chance to get into trouble. The activities should be **interesting** to him and **appropriate to his developmental level**. Other than toys, empty boxes, containers or durable household utensils can be fun and creative. You may retain the novelty of the activities for your child by **putting away some of them periodically for rotation**. Do not forget to encourage him by giving him brief attention and praises, when he looks or walks close to you, while he keeps himself engaged in such activities.

Setting Limits and Managing Misbehaviours

Your toddler often engages in active exploration but he may not know what he should or should not do. He is not doing it intentionally to challenge you.



Is a toddler too young to have rules?

Your child needs **clear and consistent limit setting** to help him understand the demands from adults. If you allow your child to do whatever he likes with few clear limits, you will find it more difficult to exercise control when he has developed unacceptable behaviour patterns. Helping him **achieve rule following and self control** by limit setting will make parenting easier and happier.

Will limit setting make children too dependent?

Your toddler's ability to think logically and make judgment is still developing. He needs **your supervision to ensure his safety**. More importantly, your guidance can help him **understand what the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours are**, and adjust and cope successfully with the demands on him.



Children can be overwhelmed by too many rules and limits. There are times you can encourage your child to develop autonomy and problem solving by allowing him to **make age-appropriate decisions**. For example, you may let him explore different ways in play within reasonable limits, or choose his preferred clothes or snacks from choice of a few.

Is spanking or threatening more effective?

Spanking or threatening may stop your child from misbehaving immediately. However, the **effect is short-lived**. A toddler's memory is still short and he may soon forget this unpleasant consequence. He needs to **learn from you the acceptable way** to behave, otherwise, he will only repeat the undesirable behaviour. Using **constructive and nonharmful** ways of positive discipline will be more effective in teaching your child to behave.



Steps in Behaviour Management

1. **Set 2-3 simple house rules**, e.g. 'Leave the seat only after finishing the meal'. Define clearly **areas** in the house your toddler **cannot enter** (e.g. kitchen).
2. The rules set have to be **consistent** and **firmly** followed through by all the caregivers.
3. Giving **clear instructions**.



- 😊 When your child does not follow the rules, **keep calm**. Try to name his feeling and needs. Then **firmly** say 'no' to her with a 'no no' gesture. **Praise** her if she stops. If she does not stop, guide her to follow your command such as by picking her up and putting her back onto her seat or leading her away from the 'restricted area'. Then **keep her engaged in some interesting activity** or by making the activity she has to do interesting.



😊 If she is committing a **dangerous act**, **stop her immediately** and **tell her clearly** what she should do

instead. For example, 'Don't touch the socket. Come here to play with mummy.' 'Stop climbing. Get down to play with the ball.' Then **praise** her for complying and **engage her in another interesting activity**.

4. If your toddler remains non-compliant, or even scream or lie on the floor to protest, you may use the following to help regulate her emotions and cooperate:

😊 Young toddlers are self-centered and their abilities to regulate emotions and tolerate

frustration are limited. When they are upset, they may act out easily, which are often labeled as “temper tantrums” by adults. They rely on parental guidance to regulate their emotions. When your child's emotional reaction is strong, you can stay with her, gently soothe or hug her, and recognize her feelings and express her needs in simple words, such as: "you are angry because you can't have it now." Try to guide her to cooperate when both of you feel better.

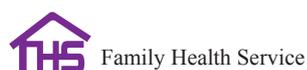
😊 Sometimes they may **seek attention** such as by yelling and rolling on the floor to see how you would react or to test whether you would do as you said. If her inappropriate behaviour is mild and both of you are in a safe environment, you may use **'planned ignoring'**, i.e. give her no attention whatsoever, not even looking at her. When correctly and firmly applied, these inappropriate behaviours will soon disappear. But if you give her any attention in any way, including smiling, talking, or shouting to her, the inappropriate behaviours will be reinforced by your attention and continue. When withdrawing your attention during planned ignoring, be prepared that her inappropriate behaviour will get worse initially. However if you persist, she will cease performing the behaviour. As soon as she stops the inappropriate behaviour, you can then attend to her immediately and direct her to another activity.

5. If she continues to protest or throw tantrum to the extent that others may be affected, you may need to **remove her from the site. Keep calm** and act in a **matter-of-fact-manner**. Embrace your child from the back, holding her upper arms and body to lessen her struggle. Do not give other responses until she calms down. In this way, she can be helped to calm down by being away from the distressing situation. Through nonhurtful restraint and removal of her from the scene, you are giving her protection and a feeling of security. At the same time, your firm manner tells her that you will follow through with the rules.



6. When she calms down, **praise her** for being quiet and cooperative. Then **return her to an engaging activity**.

Every toddler is unique. It is possible that your child may need a longer time to understand and follow your discipline. As long as you persevere consistently with positive discipline – nourishing your child with positive attention and encouragement, and managing him calmly, firmly, and patiently within clear limits – he will learn to follow social rules, gain self control, and build up self esteem in the course of his development.



Website: www.fhs.gov.hk
24-hour Information Hotline: 2112 9900