

## Positive Parenting of Preschoolers

# Disobedience in Preschoolers

***When parents have reasonable expectations and set fair limits, children are more likely to be cooperative and well adjusted. Children need limits and simple rules for their own safety and to get along with others. Parents who teach their children to accept limits and follow instructions often find the task of parenting easier. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your preschooler to accept limits and follow your instructions.***

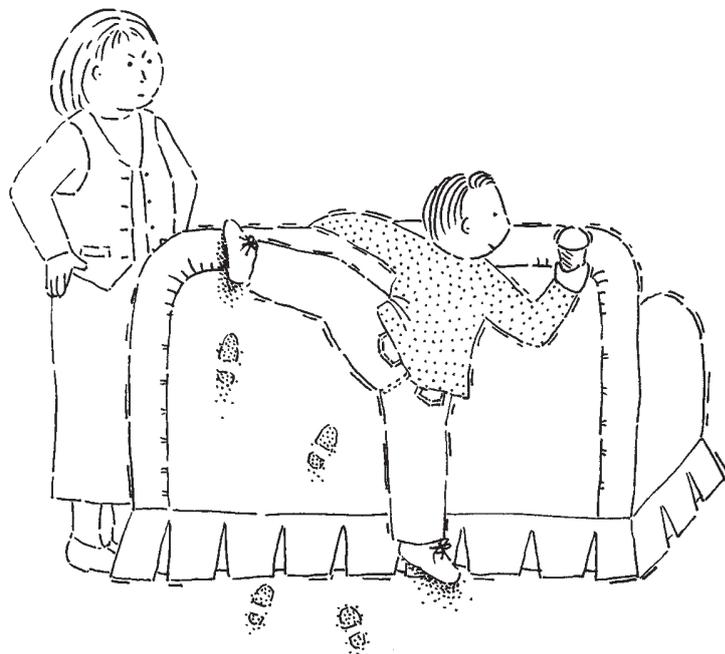
It is unrealistic to expect children to always do as they are told. Preschoolers are becoming more independent and want to make some of their own choices and decisions. Disobedience only becomes a problem when it occurs frequently, for example when a child follows less than half of the instructions given to them.

## Why Don't Children Do As They Are Told?

Disobedience is likely to occur if it gets children what they want. Parents may sometimes accidentally reward children by giving them extra attention when they do not do as they are told. Children may also learn to be disobedient if it gets them out of doing something that they do not want to do.

The way in which parents give instructions can influence whether or not children do as they are told. Some common problems with instructions include:

- *Too many.* Every time an instruction is given there is an opportunity for children to be disobedient. Children may feel picked on when there are too many instructions.
- *Not enough.* Children sometimes seem disobedient because no-one has taken the time to give them clear instructions about what is expected. For example, a child may have poor table manners because they have not been given enough instructions on how to use a knife and fork.
- *Too hard.* Children may be disobedient when parents expect too much and give instructions that are beyond their child's abilities.
- *Poorly timed.* Instructions given when a child is busy in an activity, such as watching a favourite television show, are likely to be ignored.
- *Too vague.* Children may not follow instructions that are unclear—*Don't be silly*—or instructions that are expressed as questions—*Would you like to go to bed now?* If you give your child a choice, be prepared for them to say *No*.



- *Body language.* Sometimes a parent's body language says something different to the instruction, such as laughing or smiling while telling a child to stop what they are doing. This can confuse children. Also, instructions given from one room to another are often ignored because parents are not there to back them up.

## How To Help Children Do As They Are Told

### ***Let Your Child Know What You Expect***

Try to reduce the number of instructions you give by only giving instructions that are necessary and that you are prepared to back up. To give your child more independence, give them options to choose from when possible. However, make the difference between choices and instructions clear. Try not to give too many choices about everyday routines.

### ***Try Not To Encourage Disobedience***

Reasoning with a child who is refusing to do as they were told is unlikely to work. Reasoning gives children extra attention and may accidentally reward disobedience. Parents do not need to explain all of their instructions to children.

Do not allow disobedience one day and then expect your child to follow instructions the next day. If children learn that you do not back up your instructions, they are less likely to do as they are told. Be consistent and take action when your child is disobedient.

## ***Give a Clear Instruction To Start a New Task***

Where possible, let your child finish what they are doing or wait for a break in their activity before giving an instruction. Stop what you are doing and move to within an arm's length of your child. Bend down to their eye level and use your child's name. Be specific and tell your child exactly what you want them to do—*Brooke, it's nearly bedtime. Go and put your pyjamas on please.* Stay close and watch your child. Pause briefly to give your child time to start doing what you have asked. After about five seconds you can repeat the instruction once if necessary.

## ***Give a Clear Instruction To Stop a Problem Behaviour***

Act quickly when you see a problem behaviour occurring. Get close to your child, gain their attention and tell them what to stop doing—*Frank, stop climbing on the furniture*—and what to do instead—*sit on the chair to watch television please.* It is best not to repeat an instruction to stop problem behaviour.

## ***Praise Cooperation***

Praise your child if they do as you ask. Smile or touch your child and say what they did that pleased you—*Rosie, thank you for doing as I asked straight away* or *Ezra, thank you for remembering our tidying up rule.*

## **How To Manage Disobedience**

### ***Use Logical Consequences***

If your child does not do as you ask within five seconds, choose a logical consequence to fit the situation. Where possible, remove the activity or toy that is at the centre of the problem. Explain why you are doing it—*Frank, you have not done as I asked. TV is off for 10 minutes.* Do not debate or argue the point with your child. Act as soon as the problem occurs. Keep to the agreement and return the activity at the set time to give your child the chance to practise behaving well. If the problem behaviour continues or occurs again within the next hour, repeat the logical consequence for a longer period, such as the rest of the day. If you cannot use a logical consequence, take your child straight to quiet time.

## ***Use Quiet Time or Time-Out***

Tell your child what they have done wrong—*You have not done as I asked*—and the consequence—*now go to quiet time.* Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them sit quietly on the edge of the activity for a short time. Sit your child on a chair away from others. Tell your child that they must be quiet for two minutes before they can come out of quiet time.

If your child does not sit quietly, say something like—*You are not being quiet in quiet time, now you must go to time-out.* Time-out involves taking your child away from the situation where a problem has occurred and having them be quiet for a short time. Take your child to an uninteresting but safe room or space. Tell your child they must be quiet for two minutes before they can come out of time-out. Give this reminder even though your child might be upset or angry.

## ***Return Your Child to Where They Were and Repeat the Instruction***

When your child has been quiet for two minutes in quiet time or time-out, return them to where they were. Once again, tell your child what you want them to do—*Now Frank, please sit on the chair to watch television.* Praise your child for doing as you asked. If they do not do as you ask within five seconds, take them straight to quiet time as described above. You may need to repeat this routine a number of times before your child does as you ask.

### **Key Steps**

- Try to let your child finish an activity before giving an instruction.
- Get close to your child and tell them exactly what you want them to do.
- Praise your child for doing as you asked.
- Act immediately when your child is disobedient.
- Use logical consequences, quiet time or time-out.

***See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.***



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