

## Positive Parenting of Toddlers

# Disobedience in Toddlers

*Most parents first experience the problem of disobedience when their child becomes a toddler.*

*At this time children are learning to be independent and may become more assertive and start to resist their parents. Once children become more mobile they may touch things they are not supposed to touch and refuse to do as they are told. Children need limits or simple rules for their own safety and to help them learn to get along with others. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your child to accept limits, behave well and to understand the meaning of the word No.*

## Why Don't Toddlers Do as They Are Told?

Toddlers are known for testing their limits. Some children deliberately repeat what they have been told not to do, just to see what happens. When parents say *stop*, it can be like a dare. The child does the same thing again, maybe even with a big grin.

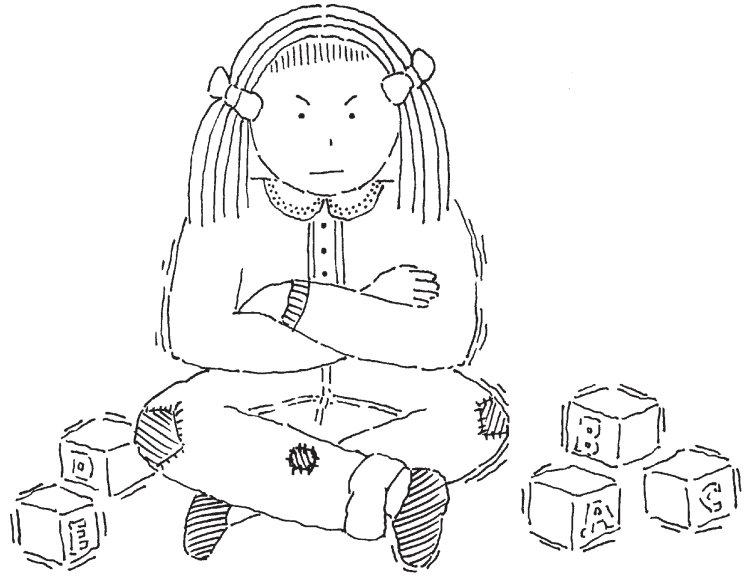
It is important to deal with disobedience firmly and decisively when your child is a toddler rather than leaving the problem unchecked. Parents who have taught their toddlers to accept limits and respond to instructions find raising preschoolers and school-aged children much easier.

## How To Help Prevent Disobedience

### *Toddler-Proof Your Home*

There is nothing to be gained by fighting your toddler all day about minor matters. It is better to set things up so there are few *don't touch* areas in your home. By reducing the number of times you have to say *No*, you will make the limits you have more meaningful and your home environment happier. By making some temporary changes in your home you can prevent many problems:

- Put valuable and fragile things out of reach.
- If possible, put child-proof catches on cupboards (you could leave one open to play in, such as the pots and pans cupboard).



- Close doors to areas at home where it is not safe for your toddler to be alone.
- Where possible, use gates or barriers to block your toddler's entry to areas that might be dangerous, such as stairs.

As your child grows, learns limits and can do what they are told, you can reverse these changes.

### *Have Plenty of Toys and Activities Available*

A toddler who is busy playing has less time to get into trouble. Make sure that there are plenty of things for your toddler to play with. Toys and activities do not have to be expensive—toddlers can have as much fun with cardboard boxes and pots and pans as they do with expensive toys. Take a small bag of toys with you when you go out so that your child has something to do.

### *Look for Behaviour You Like*

Watch your child carefully. When they behave well, be quick to praise them. Smile or touch them and say what they are doing well—*Cathy, you are playing well with that puzzle.*

## How To Teach Your Child Limits

### ***Try Not To Encourage Problem Behaviour***

Children will repeat behaviours that receive attention—even negative attention like being reprimanded or smacked can accidentally reward problem behaviour. Reasoning with a toddler when a problem is occurring also gives extra attention and is unlikely to be effective. Do not say *don't touch* over and over—either remove your child or the troublesome object. Do not laugh at your child one day and then try to set limits on the same behaviour the next day—this will only confuse your child. Remember to be consistent and take action when your child misbehaves.

### ***Get Close***

If your toddler does something that needs correction, move to within an arm's length and bend down so you can speak to them at their level.

### ***Say 'No' In a Firm, Calm Voice***

Hold your toddler's hands firmly and say *No* in a firm voice. When you say *No*, frown and shake your head from side to side. This will not hurt your child and is a good alternative to smacking.

### ***Tell Your Child What To Do***

Tell your child what you want them to stop doing—*No, don't touch* or *No, stop pulling the cat's tail*. Say (and show your child if necessary) what to do instead—*Play with your own toys* or *Stroke the cat like this*. Praise your child as soon as they do as you have asked.

### ***Ignore Whimpering or Protesting***

Do not pay any attention if your child protests or cries after being corrected in this way.

### ***Use Logical Consequences or Quiet Time***

If your child still does not do as you have asked, you will need to have a consequence to back up your instruction. Logical consequences generally involve having your child miss out on an activity that has caused a problem (for a short time—five to ten minutes is long enough).

Choose a consequence that is linked to the problem—*Lisa, you are not playing gently with the toy as I asked. I'm putting it away for five minutes*. Remember to keep to the agreement and give your child access to the activity once the time is up, so they can learn how to use it properly.

In situations where there is no logical consequence, or the problem behaviour occurs again within the next hour after using a logical consequence, use quiet time. Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them sit quietly for a short time. Sit your child in a cot, playpen or on a chair. When your child has been quiet for one minute find them something to do and praise them for good behaviour. If the problem occurs again, repeat quiet time.

### **Key Steps**

- Toddler-proof your home as much as possible.
- Pay attention to behavior you like.
- Try not to encourage problem behavior.
- When you say *No*, use a calm voice, get close and firmly hold your child's hands.
- Tell your child what you want them to do.
- Ignore whimpering or protesting.
- Praise your child for doing as you asked.
- Use logical consequences and quiet time as a backup.

***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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