

Positive Parenting of Preschoolers

Visitors

Preschool children often get excited about having friends over to visit. However, having someone else in their home can lead to problems such as being silly or noisy, or showing off. Your child may become defiant, refuse to share, refuse to play with the visitor or constantly demand your attention. Many problems can be avoided with a little planning. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your preschooler how to behave when you have visitors.

Having visitors should be a fun time for your child to mix with others. It provides many opportunities for children to practise social skills, such as greeting visitors, being a good host, talking politely with adults, entertaining friends and thinking about things other children might like to do. These are complex skills that take time to learn. Do not expect your child to be perfect when you have visitors.

Why Are Children Difficult When There Are Visitors?

Problems can arise if children are left to amuse themselves without adult attention for too long. If children are ignored when they play well and only get attention when there is a problem, such as when one child starts crying, problems are likely to occur more often.

To avoid conflict, some parents overlook problem behaviour when they have visitors. If this is the case, children quickly learn that having visitors is a time when they can misbehave.

Difficult behaviour may also occur if visitors stay too long. Children may behave well for a few hours but then become tired and irritable if their usual routine is disrupted.

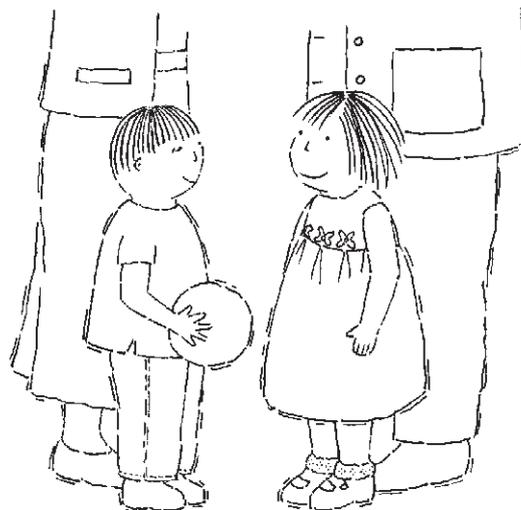
Before Visitors Arrive

Maintain Your Child's Routine

Try to plan visits around your child's usual sleep and mealtimes so that they are not tired or hungry when visitors arrive.

Prepare Your Child for the Visit

Tell your child who is coming and the reason for the visit—*Aunty Janelle and Ashleigh are coming over this morning. They will go home after lunch. I would like you to play with Ashleigh while I talk with Aunty Janelle.*



Explain to your child that you would like them to share some of their toys. Help your child choose some toys they are willing to share and that they would like to play with. Help your child to put away special toys that they do not want to share.

Explain the Rules

Decide on two or three simple rules for when visitors arrive and explain them to your child. After a while your preschooler will be able to say what the rules are. Ideally, rules should tell your child what to do rather than what not to do. Here are some examples:

- Play with the other children.
- Share your toys.
- If you need to speak to Mum or Dad, say *Excuse me* and wait until we are finished speaking.

Talk About Rewards

At first you may like to reward your child. Tell your child what they can earn if they follow the rules while the visitors are there. Suggested rewards include a special game with Mum or Dad, or a small treat after the visitors have gone.

Talk About Consequences

Decide ahead of time exactly how to deal with problem behaviour. Explain what will happen if the rules are broken and how you will use logical consequences (see overleaf).

Plan Some Activities

It may also be useful for you to think of some suitable things for your child to do. For example, you may choose some inside and outside games the children could play. You can also think of things your child might like to show their visitor.

When Visitors Arrive

Let Your Child Practise Greeting Visitors

Encourage your child to greet visitors when they arrive—*Steve, would you like to come and say hello to Sally?* Do not force your child if they are shy or unwilling to say hello. A battle at the beginning of a visit will only start things off badly.

Set the Children Up in an Activity

Before you start talking with other adults, check that the children have something to do. If necessary, spend a few minutes helping them to choose an activity and get started.

Praise Your Child

From time to time stop what you are doing and speak to and praise the children for playing nicely. Do this before problems occur. Ask a few questions about their activity. Say you will come back soon to see how they are getting on. Remember to check briefly on the children every ten minutes or so. Help them get started on a new activity if they are losing interest in what they are doing.

Offer a Snack or Drink

If possible, offer the children a snack or drink when they are busy playing well. This avoids the problem of accidentally rewarding children with food when they are being disruptive.

If a Problem Occurs, Act Immediately

Use your usual approach to discipline. In your home ask visiting children to follow your rules. If a problem occurs, get close to the child. In a quiet voice tell them what you want them to stop doing and what to do instead—*Oliver, stop throwing the cars like that. Keep them on the floor.* Praise the child if they do as you ask.

Use Logical Consequences

If the child does not do as you have asked, you will need to use a consequence to back up your instruction. Choose a consequence that is linked to the problem—*You are not keeping the cars on the floor as I asked, I'm putting them away for five minutes.* Five to ten minutes of missing out on the activity is usually long enough. Remember to do what

you said and give the toy or activity back to the child once the time is up. Let the child practise playing with the toy properly. If the problem behaviour occurs again within the next hour, repeat the logical consequence for a longer period, such as the rest of the day.

For more information on how to manage other problem behaviours which may occur when you have visitors, see the tip sheets *Sharing, Tantrums, Disobedience II, Interrupting,* and *Fighting and Aggression* in this series.

After Visitors Have Gone

Review the Visit

Tell your child what you liked about their behaviour during the visit. If necessary, briefly and calmly describe one rule your child forgot to follow. Set a goal for the next visit—*Leon, you were very good at sharing while you played with your cousins today. Next time they visit let's see if you can remember to say excuse me when you want to talk to me.* Spend some quality time with your child after the visitors have left.

Key Steps

- Try not to disrupt usual sleeping and eating routines.
- Remind your child of the rules for when visitors arrive.
- Make sure the children have interesting things to do during the visit.
- Encourage your child to greet visitors.
- Praise the children for following the rules.
- Offer a snack or drink while the children are behaving well.
- Use your usual approach to discipline.
- Act as soon as a problem occurs.
- Review the visit with your child.

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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Published by the Victorian Parenting Centre 2005.
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Code: PPT3006