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Common Discipline Problems Of Preschoolers And How to Deal With Them

One of a series of Parent Guides from



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Discipline Dilemma #1: Public Tantrums

Smart Solution: The only thing worse than a child having a meltdown in the grocery store or at a restaurant is realizing that it's your child making the scene! And although you must be prepared to make a quick exit if your preschooler's in total tantrum mode, there are some ways to prevent the problem in the first place:

- Be clear before you go out. "We're just buying groceries today, not toys." Also, remind your child of the rules: "Stay with Daddy, no running, inside voices only."
- Be smart. If you're running several errands or will be out for a long time, arm yourself with distractions. Books, stickers, crackers and art supplies can help keep your preschooler busy and behaving.
- Offer lots of praise. Did your child do a good job picking out a box of cereal? Was he polite when the waiter brought more water? Let him know how well he's doing.

Real-Life Remedy: "Before you leave for a restaurant, have a talk with [your kids] about 'indoor restaurant behavior,' which means no screaming or whining," suggests a Massachusetts mother of three children under six years old. "Add a bit of fun by making a game of looking for the best behaved child (the 'B.B.C.') in the room. That always keeps them hooked."

Discipline Dilemma #2: Tantrums at Home

Smart Solution: Even if your preschooler has outgrown the flailing-on-the-floor-kicking-and-screaming tantrums of yore, she's probably still capable of staging an impressive scene when things aren't going her way. Here are some ideas for redirecting your little rainmaker before she huffs and puffs and blows the house down:

- Defuse the situation with humor. Is your child stomping? Ask her please not to shake up the whole neighborhood! Is she pouting? Remind her that she only has one bottom lip—if she pushes it out too much, it could get stuck.
- Ignore or distract her. Assuming she's not in danger of hurting herself or someone else, let her rant and rave (if it drives you nuts, have her do it in her room). Otherwise, shift her focus to something else: "I'm frustrated that the puzzle's so hard, too. Why don't we try putting this other one together instead?"
- Don't give in. If her raging and blustering result in your saying, "Okay, you can watch one more TV show," she'll learn an important (if unfortunate) lesson: Tantrums work.

Discipline Dilemma #3: Power Struggles

Smart Solution: Does your willful four-year-old sometimes remind you of a 14-year-old? It's probably because she's testing ways to assert herself (and doing it with more nuance than she could muster as a toddler). To head off battles of will, try these tips:

- Avoid the knee-jerk "No." If you refuse every request your child makes, she won't learn to compromise. Instead, give her options when possible. "We can stay at the park for five more minutes, but then we'll have less time to play 'Go Fish' tonight." This sidesteps a power struggle by giving both of you the power.
- Limit the power-sharing. Sure, giving your child options is important, but don't go crazy. You're the parent, and yours is still the final say (even if she believes otherwise).
- Make sure she understands the rules. If you have non-negotiable rules—no TV during dinner, lights-out at 8:00 p.m.—she may be less likely to throw down the gauntlet over an issue she knows she can't change.

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Educators,

Like the other 24 titles, this Parent Guide is a concise summary of the latest and best information on this topic as you help parents help their children to succeed in school and life. The topics were chosen based on the most frequently requested learning topics from educators and parents. Formatted for the busy parent in mind, they are full of no-nonsense, easy-to-implement, practical ideas that have been proven to work. The complete list of titles is below:

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