



Setting Your Child Up For Success

Babies and young children are not able to control their emotions and behavior—it is learned over time—from the way they are treated and from watching the family members in their life.

Difficult behaviors often have an underlying reason. Throwing temper tantrums and biting are often how toddlers show their frustration or anger. They don't have the words to tell you that they miss their daddy who went away or that they are scared of loud noises in the night. Understanding your child's emotional needs often stops "problem behaviors." You and other loving adults can help put words to their feelings, provide reassurance, and teach them better ways to express frustration.

Stick to a familiar routine

Children thrive with regular routines—eating and sleeping at the same time each day. Young children can get really cranky when the schedule gets off—when they don't get a nap or when dinner is late. Stick to a predictable routine as often as possible and let her know what's next. "After lunch it will be time for your nap."

Reduce distractions

Babies and young children can be easily distracted or over-stimulated. Try to remove distractions from the places where children need to do a particular activity (getting dressed in an area where there aren't toys close by) or where your child takes a nap (making sure there are shades to help block light) or turning the TV off during dinner time.

Reducing meltdowns

You can often prevent tantrums by recognizing your child's cues that tell you he is hungry or tired. Feeding your child at first signs of being hungry rather than waiting will reduce the likelihood he is going to have a meltdown. Don't schedule appointments during nap time; take an extra bottle or snack near mealtime; avoid going to the grocery store when he is hungry and tired.

"Time-In" rather than "Time-Out"

Reassure and comfort your child when he is upset. Sometimes a "Time-In" rather than a "Time-Out" works wonders. You could say, "Seems like you need a hug right now. Do you want to sit on my lap?" Have comfortable spaces for your child to go if he is angry, scared, or having other strong emotions. It might be a place to sit with an adult or, for an older toddler, maybe it's a place where he can sit by himself while he calms down. The space might have a favorite blanket, stuffed animal, or soft pillow to cuddle. You might say "I can see you have some 'big feelings' today. Let's go sit down a minute.' Would you like some 'calm down' toys?"

Label child's feelings

"You are crying and rubbing your eyes. I think you are feeling tired." "You are angry that your friend took your toy, what should we do next?" This shows that you understand how he feels and helps him learn the right words for his feelings.

Label adult's feelings

Instead of saying "You are driving me crazy right now," try to express your actual feelings: "Mommy is really frustrated right now." Instead of "you're being a bad boy" say, "You seem really angry. Let's talk about it."



Provide a secure base

Babies start to crawl and toddlers love to explore – it helps them learn and become more independent. They move around a lot, but will look to a familiar adult for reassurance, to figure out what is safe, or for comfort, or to delight in what they've discovered. You and other familiar adults are the secure base to which your child will return to recharge and then go out and explore again. Your child needs you to stay close by—both to keep him safe and to feel secure. Don't sneak out. Announce when you are leaving and when you will be back. This provides a "secure base" that gives your child the confidence to explore his world and learn.

Have realistic expectations for your child's age

When adults expect children to do a task or behave in a way that they are simply not capable of doing at their age, it can be frustrating for both of you. No matter how many M&Ms you give an 18-month old, potty training is not likely because their bodies are not yet fully developed.

Toddlers are still learning self-control

When toddlers see something they want, they grab it. If they don't like something, they throw it down. Be patient. Young children can be quiet and sit still for a few minutes—not 30 minutes. Have toys for your child to play with if out running errands. Sometimes they get out of control and need that quiet place to regroup or to sit in your lap. When you stay calm, you model self-control for your child.

Young children need to be shown... and don't rush!

You have to tell them what to do (rather than what NOT to do) over and over again. Tell them and show them how. And tell them when they get it right! That said, toddlers don't like to be hurried. Plan for extra time. Prepare them for changing activities. "One more time and we need to go."

Give Choices

Give your child the option to make a good choice. For example, if he is resisting going into a car seat, you could say "To be safe, you need to sit in your car seat. You have the choice of bringing your bear or truck to ride with you—which would you like?" Try to help him learn what is and what is not acceptable behavior. "You can bang on this bowl or this pot but not on the table." Saying no all the time doesn't teach him the behavior that you want him to do.

Give your full attention

It is so easy to be distracted—by your cell phone, the television, and all the things life can throw at you. Young children need and deserve your full attention, first and foremost.

You and other loving adults can help put words to their feelings, provide reassurance, and teach them better ways to express frustration.

