

Stop behavior problems before they happen

Some days I feel like all I do is tell children, “Don’t do this, don’t do that.” It gets to me. I feel like a broken record. When will they ever learn to behave?

Do you ever feel the same way? Learning can take a long time. When children are busy playing, it’s easy to forget the rules. You may find yourself reminding them over and over again about the same things.

There are steps you can take to stop behavior problems before they happen. Try a few of the following ideas. They’ll make your days go better.

Make a few moves

Look around your house. Do you have special things sitting on the coffee table, end tables, or shelves? Do you feel like you always need to protect these things by saying, “Don’t touch?” Children are very interested in exploring pretty things. One way they explore is to touch them.

Do yourself and the children a favor. Move your pretty things up and out of the children’s reach. You’ll save yourself a lot of reminding and your pretty things will stay safe.

Set out reminders

If you often find yourself saying, “Don’t play on the stairs,” put a child safety gate at the top or bottom of the stairs. The gate will keep the children from climbing or playing on the stairs, so you won’t have to remind them.

Does your outdoor play area have a fence around it? If not, you may find that the children have trouble remembering how far they are allowed to go while playing. If you can’t afford a fence, use a piece of brightly colored rope. Have the children help you to lay the rope on the ground around the outside of the play area. The next time you go outside, remind the children, “We play inside the yellow rope to be safe.”

Tell children what you want them to do

Children often hear adults tell them what they shouldn’t do.

How often do you tell children what they should do? It takes some extra thought to say to a child, “Keep your feet on the floor,” instead of, “Don’t swing your feet in front of John.”

Children want to please adults.

It’s important to tell them what they can do to please you.

Think about changes you can make to stop problem behavior.

Give warnings

Change is hard for children. It's especially hard when they are playing to stop and do something else. Giving a five-minute warning to help children plan for the change. Say to children, "In five minutes we're going to put away the toys and wash our hands for lunch."

You may want to set a timer for five minutes. Tell the children, "When the timer rings in five minutes, we will go inside to play."

Have active times and quiet times every day

Children need both active play times and quiet play times every day.

Active times give them time to run, jump, climb, chase, dance, ride a bike, and use lots of energy. Weather permitting, plan active times for outside.

Do you ever feel like the children are climbing the walls when they need to stay inside on a rainy day? Be sure to plan for dancing, marching, moving to music, and other activities with lots of motion if you have to stay indoors all day.

Quiet times give children calm times to settle themselves during a busy day. Quiet activities include working on puzzles, coloring, listening to stories, and playing with clay, sand, or water. A quiet activity before naptime helps to calm children before they lie down.

Watch children and their behavior during the day. If they are getting excited, it may be time to take everyone outside to work off some energy. Plan quiet activities for times when they need to be calm.

Give choices

In a group of adults, it's unusual for everyone to want to do the same thing at the same time. The same is true of children. Give children lots of choices of things to do during the day. Make sure toys, books, and art supplies are stored so children can reach them if they choose.

If you would like more help in stopping behavior problems, call the Better Kid Care mentoring line, at 1-800-859-8340.

