

PORTLAND PEDIATRIC GROUP, LLP

Suggestions for Managing Challenging Behaviors at Home

Courtesy of Bright Start Pediatric Services

1. Provide specific choices for your child when possible (*e.g.*, “Would you like to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt?”). If your child should choose an option that was not originally presented as a choice, firmly state, “That is not a choice right now.”
2. Collaboratively create a list of house rules with your child. Ask him/her to help you brainstorm some important rules for all members of the family to follow (*e.g.*, no hitting, no hair pulling, use manners, take turns, share, say you’re sorry if you make a mistake, etc.). Use creative pictures to represent the rules, and display the rules in a place where your child can see them.
3. Use warnings and predictable consequences in response to inappropriate behaviors. Remind your child that it is his/her decision whether or not he/she has to endure a consequence (*e.g.*, “If you hit your sister, you will be placed in time out. If you don’t hit your sister, you can continue playing. What do you want to do?”).
4. Use a visual behavioral chart that incorporates highly motivating rewards for your child (*e.g.*, stickers, movies/television shows, etc.) in response to predetermined appropriate behaviors (*e.g.*, sharing, taking turns, using words to express feelings instead of physical means, etc.) Make sure that rewards follow desired performances only.
5. Be positive and enthusiastic when giving directions or interacting with your child. Provide verbal praise and attention when your child is behaving appropriately. Be specific and descriptive (*e.g.*, “I’m so proud of you for sharing your toy with your sister”). Try to avoid using reactive or frustrated tones when responding to inappropriate behaviors as these tones may serve to reinforce and/or escalate your child’s challenging behaviors. Avoid yelling and/or using threats of physical aggression.
6. When possible, state directions/commands positively. For example, instead of saying, “Don’t run” use “Walk, please.” Positive directions clearly state what you *want* from you child instead of what you *don’t* want.
7. Maintain consistency and follow through on household expectations, warnings, and consequences.
8. Use five- and two-minute warnings prior to transitions (*e.g.*, when transitioning from an outdoor activity to mealtime). Timers and/or visual cues may help with these warnings.
9. Provide many opportunities for physical, gross motor play both indoors and outdoors. Indoor gross motor play can include playing with balloons, playing “Simon Says,” etc.
10. Whenever feasible, pair demanding situations with preferred activities (*e.g.*, “After you finish your vegetables, then you can go outdoors and play with your sister”).

11. Reflect your child's thoughts and feelings even when he/she is behaving inappropriately (*e.g.*, "I see that you're angry, but it's not acceptable to..."). If your child knows that you are aware of his/her feelings, he/she may be less inclined to express his/her feelings in inappropriate ways. In addition, encourage your child to use words to express his/her feelings whenever he/she is angry, frustrated, etc.
12. Engage your child in problem-solving when possible (*e.g.*, "What made you angry? What can we do to solve this problem?").
13. Create a special mailbox for your child in which to deposit positive feedback each day. Provide praise for desired behaviors (*e.g.*, "I'm so proud of the way that you shared your toy with your sister").
14. Whenever possible, pair visual cues with verbal cues (*e.g.*, instead of just yelling "Stop!", hold up a small, red, cardboard stop sign and tell your child to stop his/her car.
15. Use social stories to help curb challenging behaviors. See the Web site:
<http://www.region2library.org/SocialStories.htm>
16. Keep in mind that temper tantrums are typical for children between the ages of one and four. Allow your child to have his/her temper tantrums in a safe place and provide as little attention as possible during them. Remember that it's easier to prevent temper tantrums than to manage them after they have started. Temper tantrum prevention strategies include:
 - a. Rewarding your child with positive reinforcement and attention when he/she is behaving appropriately
 - b. Keeping off-limit objects out of his/her sight
 - c. Distracting your child with other activities and/or toys
 - d. Changing environments (*e.g.*, leaving the house and going for a walk)
 - e. Providing warnings prior to transitions (*e.g.*, "We will be going back inside in five minutes.")
 - f. Making certain that your child is not hungry or fatigued in situations when temper tantrums are likely to occur