

JANUARY 2010

## Positive Parenting & Discipline

Parenting can be one of the most satisfying jobs in life. Like all jobs, it has its ups and downs, challenges and rewards. Watching your child succeed, show respect or be polite are some of a parent's proudest moments. But along with those shining moments, come those times when you must handle misbehavior – tantrums in the grocery store or in public, talking back, not listening. While misbehaving is perfectly normal, that doesn't make it easy to handle. Understanding some of the typical reasons for misbehavior can help you manage a positive response to your child's less than positive behavior.

### Some of the most common reasons for misbehavior include:

- **ATTENTION:** The most common reason children misbehave is because they are seeking attention. Sometimes, especially when there are multiple children, a child believes that the only way to get a parent's attention is to disobey. Children who feel overlooked will often misbehave to get any kind of attention—even if it means getting yelled at or punished. Punishment can be perceived as a reward for attention-starved children. These children learn that there is a payoff for disobedience—they are getting what they want, even if it is not positive.
- **IT'S NATURAL:** Children copy anything their parents do. Infants learn to smile back at their mom or dad in response to being smiled at. As they grow up, children continue to copy what they see, both good and bad. Before becoming angry with your child when you see them exhibiting negative behavior, stop and evaluate your own behavior—are they imitating you?
- **TESTING THE LIMITS:** Children also misbehave to test whether their parents will follow through and enforce the rules. They want to check out the edges of their limits to see what their parents' reactions will be. Children are curious and want to know if what you say about your rules is really true: "Is the stove really hot?" "Will I fall if I run?" "Are these rules really rules or just suggestions?"

## FREE Parent Education Workshops

- **Strategies for Managing Your Child's Behavior – January 12, 2010**  
Community Connections, 325 E. Duval St., Jacksonville, FL 32202
- **Nurturing Child Development Through Play – February 9, 2010**  
Holy Rosary Catholic School, 4920 Brentwood Ave.,  
Jacksonville, FL 32206
- **Child Growth & Development – Caring for Your Infant & Toddler – March 9, 2010**  
St. Stephen Child Care & Learning Center,  
525 N. Davis St., Jacksonville, FL 32206

Remember that testing the limits is part of human nature and doesn't apply to just childhood. Adults push the limits and rules set for them all the time. When was the last time you drove over the speed limit just a little bit to see how much you could get away with?

- **INDEPENDENCE:** Some children misbehave because they are trying to assert themselves and demonstrate their independence. Their resistance to rules and limitations is a normal part of growing up. This is a behavior that continues throughout childhood and adolescence. As a positive, nurturing parent your job is to be a firm but gentle guide on this long path.
- **PROTECTION:** Children may misbehave when they are trying to protect themselves. A preschooler might hit another child when he takes her toy. A grade school child may take a swing at a classmate when he's tired of being picked on. As children develop emotionally, they need guidance to learn better ways to handle these important childhood frustrations.

Recognizing what's behind your child's behavior can help you to respond more positively to such negative behavior. Is your little one hungry, tired or sick? Is s/he scared? Before you get angry with your child and mistake their actions as bad behavior, ask yourself why s/he is trying to get your attention.

## Parent as Child's First Teacher Initiative

The “Parent as Child’s First Teacher” Initiative is funded by the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County and is designed to encourage, honor and support parents in their role as their child’s first teacher. Episcopal Children’s Services, Nemours BrightStart! and United Way of Northeast Florida team up to offer free parent training sessions at various sites across the community and family involvement for child care centers.

## FREE Parent Education Workshops

Make plans to attend Nemours BrightStart!’s free parent education workshops where you can meet with other parents and caregivers of young children, as well as child health and development experts from Nemours to discuss topics such as:

- **January 12, 2010 – Strategies for Managing Your Child’s Behavior**
- **February 9, 2010 – Nurturing Child Development Through Play**
- **March 9, 2010 – Child Growth & Development – Caring for Your Infant & Toddler**
- **March 30, 2010 – The Importance of Fathers & Single Dads – Joys & Challenges**

All workshops are held from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Reserve your space today, call Blair Blackard at (904) 697-3156 or e-mail [bblackard@nemours.org](mailto:bblackard@nemours.org). You may also register online at [Nemours.org/brightstart](http://Nemours.org/brightstart). **CHILDCARE IS NOT PROVIDED – please help us support the adult learning environment by making other arrangements for your children.**

## Born Learning Workshops

Make learning fun and take advantage of everyday moments for learning with your pre-school child with United Way’s Born Learning workshops. Workshops are free, and all participants will receive fun items such as a “Kids Basics” key ring and playbook to take home. For more information, call United Way of Northeast Florida at (904) 390-3225, or visit [www.aboutunitedway.org](http://www.aboutunitedway.org).

## Guiding Stars of Duval

Episcopal Children’s Services and the Jacksonville Children’s Commission are providing support and training in family involvement to child care centers in Jacksonville as part of the city-wide Quality Rating Improvement System for child care centers. Contact the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County to learn how you can find star ratings for local child care centers at (904) 208-2040 or visit [www.elcofduval.org](http://www.elcofduval.org).

## Limits & Boundaries

More often than not when we think of the word “discipline,” punishment comes to mind. Did you know that “discipline” also means “to teach” or “to guide”? Although discipline is necessary in developing a healthy child, *positive discipline* is much more effective.

While many people may be involved in taking care of a child (family members, teachers, child care providers, and neighbors), the bond between a parent and child is the strongest attachment. It is also where you as a parent have the strongest influence to set positive limits and boundaries.

Boundaries make kids feel safe and secure. They give children a firm foundation in a big and scary world. Although sometimes difficult for children to understand, boundaries demonstrate your love for them. A great way to establish boundaries and limits with your children is by having routines. Having set times for eating, sleeping and story time provide a sense of security. Below are some tips on how to create positive limits, boundaries and rules for your youngster:

1. **WHAT TO DO, NOT, WHAT NOT TO DO:** In setting up your limits or rules, explain up front to your child clearly what is acceptable and unacceptable. Don’t be vague about this—specific rules will make it easier for your child to comply. For example, instead of telling your child to clean up his room, tell him that you expect him to pick up his toys and put them in the toy box. Instead of saying, “I’m tired of you ignoring what I tell you to do,” tell your child that you will ask her to do something once and after that there will be a consequence.
2. **BE UP FRONT:** Setting up consequences ahead of time gives you the opportunity to act and not react to your child’s misbehavior. If your child refuses to eat his dinner, being hungry for the evening will be a powerful lesson. If she will not pick up her dirty clothes and put them in the laundry basket, her clothes won’t get washed and she won’t have her favorite shirt to wear to school. But don’t forget that consequences must be developmentally- and age-appropriate.
3. **KIND, BUT FIRM:** In setting and enforcing limits, parents must be kind but firm at the same time. After you have established the rules and limits, if your child still chooses to disobey, an effective approach is often a “consistent, yet nonchalant” attitude. For instance, try a calm response such as, “Either share the toy or I’ll take it away from

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you both.” Another effective method is to ask your child if she remembers what the rules are and to say them back to you. You may say, “I told you what would happen if you didn’t put your scooter away. Do you remember what the rule was?”

- 4. CONSISTENCY:** Most importantly, follow through with the consequence. Don’t threaten; do what you said you would do if your child disobeys. As parents we must be consistent, even when it is inconvenient or we’re too tired.

Consistency teaches children that they can count on you, which builds trust. It is confusing for children when you change the rules or don’t follow through. For example, stick to the same bedtime rules. Even if you are tired and it seems easier to let them fall asleep by the TV, don’t give in to your child’s requests or demands. Encourage your child through positive discipline and by setting boundaries. Remind him, “Bedtime is bedtime.” And follow through with your routine.

- 5. EXPECTATIONS:** Having appropriate expectations to go along with your limits is key to positive parenting. Children go through developmental stages and must master certain tasks before they can move on to the next. Parental expectations have a big effect on children’s growth and development. When expectations are out of line with a particular child’s abilities, he may feel like a failure.

But how do you teach limits and still demonstrate love and affection? A great way to strengthen the bond is by reading to your child. You can use this opportunity not only to improve your children’s literacy skills, but also to read books with messages that reinforce important life lessons you are trying to teach. Two great books to read are: *Bad Dog, Max!* by Marina Windsor and *Grump Groan Growl* by Bell Hooks. These books can be found at the library. Reading to your child is a soothing and nurturing activity—especially after sticking with your limits and consequences.

Parents: visit [www.nemours.org/brightstart](http://www.nemours.org/brightstart) or call (904) 697-3118 for more information, tips and resources.

## Positive Parenting: Praise & Rewards

Praise motivates everyone. Whether received from a boss or directed toward your child, praise encourages people to do what they are asked and lets people know they’ve done a good job. Using praise to support children helps them to feel successful in learning the right thing to do. As a parent, use praise to increase positive behavior. According to Dr. Stephen Bavolek and Juliana Dellinger-Bavolek, leaders in the field of parenting education, when it comes to children “*what you pay attention to, you get more of.*” Make it a point to “catch your child being good.”

**PRAISE SHOULD BE SPECIFIC.** Offer your child detailed feedback when she does something great. Instead of simply saying “great job,” tell your child exactly what you liked. For example, when your youngster hits the tee ball, you might say, “Way to keep your eye on the ball and follow through with your swing. That was a great hit!” Specific praise means a lot more to a child than a brief “way to go!” When you praise your child, it is important to separate him from his behavior. You can separate praise into two types: “praise for being” and “praise for doing.”

“**PRAISE FOR BEING**” can be thought of as unconditional love. The child is valued for who she is, not just what she does. For example, “You are so smart. I’m so glad you’re my daughter,” “You are really kind hearted,” or “That was brave.”

“**PRAISE FOR DOING**” is recognition for accomplishments. This is where you should be specific. “You cleaned up all by yourself without being asked,” or “I’m proud of you for letting Tonya play with your soccer ball.”

Rewards often go along with praise to encourage good behavior. Rewards can be tangible or intangible—both work as positive reinforcement. Tangible rewards can be anything like small toys, stickers, books, markers or candy. Intangible rewards may be special privileges such as getting to stay up later, an extra bedtime story, getting to go swimming or to the playground.

Lastly, use gentle touch along with your praise and rewards. Give your child a hug or a high five. Not only does it feel good, it strengthens the parent-child bond, nurtures your relationship, and will make your little one feel great!

