



## American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

### Keys to Effective Discipline

You will have days when it seems impossible to get your child to behave. But there are ways to ease frustration and avoid unnecessary conflict with your child.

- **Be aware of your child's abilities and limitations.** Children develop at different rates and have different strengths and weaknesses. When your child misbehaves, it may be that he simply cannot do what you are asking of him.
- **Think before you speak.** Once you make a rule or promise, you will need to stick to it. Be sure you are being realistic.
- **Remember that children do what "works."** If your child throws a temper tantrum in the grocery store and you bribe him or her to stop by giving candy, your child will probably throw another tantrum the next time you go. Make an effort to avoid reinforcing the wrong kinds of behavior, even with just your attention.
- **Work toward consistency.** No one is consistent all of the time. But try to make sure that your goals, rules and approaches to discipline stay the same from day to day. Children find frequent changes confusing and may resort to testing limits just to find out what their limits are.
- **Pay attention to your child's feelings.** If you can figure out why your child is misbehaving, you are one step closer to solving the problem. Often it helps to let your child know that you understand. For example, "I know you are feeling sad that your friend is leaving, but you still have to pick up your toys."
- **Learn to see mistakes — including your own — as opportunities to learn.** If you do not handle a situation well the first time, don't despair. Figure out what you could have done differently, and do it the next time. If you feel you have made a real mistake in the heat of the moment, wait to cool down, apologize to your child, and explain how you will handle the situation in the future.

### Tips To Avoid Trouble

The first thing to remember is to avoid power struggles whenever possible. Instead, address only those issues that truly are important to you. The following tips may help:

- **Offer choices whenever possible.** By giving choices, you can set limits and still allow your child some independence. For example, try saying, "Would you like to pick up your toys yourself, or should I help you?"
- **Make a game out of good behavior.** Your child is more likely to do what you want if you make it fun. For example you might say, "Let's have a race and see who can put his coat on first."

- **Plan ahead.** If you know that certain circumstances always cause trouble, such as a trip to the store, discuss with your child ahead of time what behavior is acceptable and what the consequences will be if he or she does not obey. Try to plan the shopping trip for a time when your child is well rested and well fed, and take along a book or small toy to amuse your child if he or she gets bored.
- **Praise good behavior.** Whenever your child remembers to follow the rules, offer encouragement and praise about how well he or she did. You do not need any elaborate system of rewards. You can simply say, "Thank you for coming right away," and hug your child.