

# Discipline without hurting

Information for parents of young children

## Ways to prevent misbehaviour from happening in the first place

### Getting started

- Make your home a safe place for your child to play in and explore.
- Keep forbidden and dangerous objects out of the reach of young children.
- Take toys and snacks when going out.
- Don't let your child get too hungry, tired or bored.
- Make fair and simple rules.
- Set clear limits on your child's behaviour with a few simple rules.
- Focus on safety. The rules should allow children to explore and learn in a safe way.

### Communicate

- Make sure your child understands what you expect.
- Explain the reason for the rule if the child is old enough to understand.
- Listen to what your child tells you.

### Be positive

- Focus on what to do, instead of what not to do.
- Positive language makes it more likely that children will respond positively. Instead of saying "You can't watch television until you finish your schoolwork," try saying "You can watch television after you finish your schoolwork."

- Teasing, name-calling and insults can hurt as much as hitting. Don't compare your child negatively to other children.

### Give children time to respond

- Children don't like to stop doing things they enjoy. Give children a chance to prepare for change. For example, "In five minutes, it will be time to turn off the television and start your schoolwork."

### Reward correct behaviour

- Praise and encourage your children when they behave. For example, "I like it when you help your little sister."
- Show your approval with hugs, kisses and smiles.
- Make sure that good behaviour gets more of your attention than bad behaviour.

### Be a good role model

- Live what you teach. For example, it doesn't make sense to hit a child for hitting someone else.
- Ignore minor incidents.
- Learn to accept some noise, clutter and attention-seeking behaviour.
- Remember, mistakes happen.

## What to do when your child misbehaves

### Think before you act.

#### With babies

- Never shake or toss a baby, even playfully. A baby's neck is weak and shaking can result in brain damage or death.

- Respond to your baby's crying. Babies cry to communicate their needs, such as for food, comfort or a clean diaper.
- Develop a daily routine around feeding, sleeping and play to help your baby feel safe and secure.
- Encourage your baby to trust you. Show your love and affection. Cuddle, talk and sing to your baby.
- Babies are too young to understand limits and rules.



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## With one- and two-year-olds

- **Remind** – Young children have short memories. Gently remind them about the rules to help them learn.
- **Distract** – Give your child a toy or another activity to do.
- **Gentle touch and tantrums** – If your child begins to lose control, move close and put your arm around the child. (This is also a good way to deal with hitting, biting or kicking.)

If necessary, gently hold your child with just enough force to keep the child from getting hurt.

If holding makes the child angrier, then let go, remain calm and wait until your child calms down. This may be hard to do but it often works.

Tantrums are frightening for children. Be ready to comfort your child when the anger turns to tears.

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## With two- and three-year-olds

- **Redirect** – If your child is frustrated and unable to solve a problem, try a different activity.  
  
For example, take a restless child outside for some physical activity.
- **Consequences** – Let children experience the consequences of their actions if it is safe to do so. For example, “If you can’t play with the blocks without throwing them, the blocks will be put away.” Then follow through and put the blocks away if the child continues to throw them.  
  
If your child is doing something that is unsafe, you can explain the consequences later, but remove your child from danger immediately.
- **Time out** – “Time out” is when a parent removes a child from a situation for refusing to follow the rules. It can be effective with children between the ages of two and 12 years.

1. Take your child to a safe, quiet place where the child can calm down and regain control.
2. Briefly explain that you are having a time out because of the child’s misbehaviour. Do not argue or discuss at this point.
3. Bring the child back to play when the child feels ready to try again or when an adequate time has passed. (Generally, the time out should be no more in minutes than the child’s age.)
4. Praise the child’s first acceptable behaviour after time out.

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## With older children

Problem solving and making choices help prepare children for their teenage years.

- **Offer choices** – Choices help children learn how to make decisions. Offer simple choices, but don’t threaten. For example, “You can wash the dishes or dry them. You decide.”
- **Teach problem solving**
  1. Help your child to define the problem. Ask questions, such as “What would happen if you tried to...?”
  2. Together think of some solutions.
  3. Choose the best one.
  4. Try it.
  5. Afterwards, talk about what worked and what you could try next time.

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## Solve problems together

As children approach the teen years, they still need clear limits but parents should be willing to negotiate a little.

When children start thinking for themselves, their talking back may anger

you. However, to keep communicating, parents must do more listening and more explaining with older children.

Talk to the parents of your child’s friends about reasonable limits on clothing and curfews.

Work with your children to solve problems together.

You can download a free copy of this brochure from <http://www.cwlc.ca>.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

You do not have to try to solve all your family problems alone. Everyone is entitled to use the services in the community.

Many schools, community centres, family resource programs and public health units have information and services designed to help parents.

Many immigrant and multicultural service organizations also have programs to help families to adapt to life in Canada.

Ask the agency that provided this brochure about information or services for parents.

Free, confidential information about parenting and services in your community is available from the **Parent Help Line** at **1-888-603-9100**.

