

Minor Misbehavior

What to do about it

Children misbehave in many ways. Sometimes the problem behavior is serious, such as hitting. Sometimes the behavior may only be annoying to others. Either way, children need to be taught the proper way to behave.

Discipline means education. And there are several ways to discipline. For serious misbehavior, giving your child a time out is a good way to teach right from wrong.

But many times, the problem isn't serious enough for a time out. Young children, for example, often do annoying little things, such as singing loudly at the dinner table or interrupting you while you're talking to someone else. And accidents do happen. A child might innocently break something while playing.

Most children do not misbehave on purpose. Most young children, for example, don't know that singing loudly at the dinner table is annoying. And if you have told them not to sing, perhaps they have forgotten.

In this case, you shouldn't get angry. But you should help your child learn what to do and what not to do.

On Back

How to deal with minor misbehaviors.

A publication of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development made possible with help from the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund For Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

For more Parenting Guides and other information, visit the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development on the Internet at www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/familyissues/guides

You & Your Child may be reproduced for non-profit use only.



You & Your Child



What to do about misbehavior

Was the misbehavior deliberate or innocent?

Deliberate misbehavior is when your child knows not to do something but does it anyway – even if you have warned him or her not to do it. That is defiance, which is serious and should be dealt with seriously, perhaps with a time out.

Innocent misbehavior is when your child does not understand that doing something is wrong or has trouble remembering it is wrong.

You don't need to get angry about innocent misbehavior. But you still need to teach your child what to do.

Behave the way you want your child to behave

If you want your child to use polite language, then you should use polite language when talking with your child or to other adults.

Many irritating child behaviors are behaviors they pick up from their parents.

Don't yell at your child. Don't call your children "stupid" or any other name that is not their own.

Respond immediately and consistently

When your child misbehaves, respond immediately. And respond every time your child does something he or she shouldn't do.

If you respond only sometimes, your child won't know when it is OK and when it is not OK to sing at the dinner table or interrupt you when you're talking. Ask your child to stop.

Be polite, calm, and simple.

Only ask once

Ask your child to stop. If he or she won't stop, take action. What you do depends on the problem.

- If your child won't stop throwing a ball in the house, take the ball away.
- Behavior done at the wrong time or place should be encouraged to be done at the right time or place. Loud singing may be fine as long as it is not done at the dinner table.
- Bad behavior should not be allowed to be successful. If you give in and let your child have a cookie when he or she whines for one, the whining was successful.
- You can ignore many irritating behaviors. Try to ignore a little sniffing and whining. But be consistent. If you ignore minor misbehavior, ignore it every time. For example, if you ignore your child when he or she is whining, be sure to ignore your child if he or she starts to whine louder.
- If your child can't behave, end whatever activity he or she is doing. For example, if your child continues to throw sand, then sand play is over.
- Most minor misbehaviors are not done deliberately.
- Poor behavior that is done deliberately should be handled differently than bad behavior that is done innocently.
- Keep your anger under control.
- Punish when necessary. But remember, it is also your job to teach proper behavior.

