

# Problems with behaviour? Let's talk.

Nobody can actually **control** someone else's behaviour - it is impossible! Fortunately it is possible to manage situations that the behaviour does not occur or to change one sort of behaviour for another.

The following ideas are tried and tested and they work. However it does take time and practice and the willingness to compromise/accept some initial failures.

1. "Keep calm" – children are very quick to pick up on our emotions and will respond in kind to our tone of voice, gesture and body language. Calm, quiet parents tend to have calm, quiet children; unfortunately the opposite is also true!
2. "Three times and you are out" – it is worth considering how many times a parent should have to ask or tell before there is the required response. Many experts think that three times is enough. Children need to understand that a failure to behave/respond appropriately after the third request means that there will be consequences – either now or later. Establishing this as a "family rule" is hard work but usually worth the effort.
3. "State the consequences" – these do not have to be severe but they do have to be certain. In other words a child needs to believe that his/her unsuitable behaviour does have consequences. Parents may consider consequences like going to bed early, not going out, missing treats etc, etc.

Sometimes a child is still defiant and will not accept a consequence. Rather than get upset/angry, try keeping calm and pointing out what will happen the next time the child wants something from you – and then stick to it! A consequence for, say, refusing to do jobs around the house could be a parental refusal to do something for the child – perhaps to wash/iron a favourite T-shirt in time for non-uniform day in school. A calm refusal, while reminding the child of the incident which led to the situation, is often very effective.

If the child promises to do better/apologises parents can choose to be persuaded – or not. The response will depend on the situation, but some children expect to be able to manipulate their way out of anything and they need to learn to accept the consequences of their actions.

4. "Emphasise the choices" – simple but realistic choices can be very effective. A child may say "You can't make me come in when I don't want to." to which a parent could respond "No I can't, but if you don't come in on time I will not take you to.....on Saturday. The choice is yours" Keeping very calm and pointing out the consequences can be very effective. However beware of making threats that cannot be delivered!
5. "Tune in on feelings" - Phrases like "I know you don't want to.....I understand how you feel but....." can be effective with most age groups. Also effective is to let the child understand how

her/his behaviour effects others – “When you shout at me in Tesco I feel.....” When you won't tidy your bedroom it makes me feel like.....because.....”

6. “Focus on the behaviour, not the child” – try saying things like “You are acting like a .....” Rather than saying “You are a .....” Equally negative phrases include “You always....” And “You never....” Both are rarely true and are equally ineffective.
7. “If you could start again/do it differently?” – this is a good way to pick up the pieces after a difficult time. This phrase also gives the parent room to apologies or to acknowledge that s/he could also have handled things differently. Then both parties can agree to be different next time and make friends again.