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Behaviour & Sleep

Behaviour Troubleshooting

Sometimes children's behaviour can really challenge us; it is not easy. Remember to take a deep breath and try to ignore unwanted behaviour where it is safe to do so. It can help to say to yourself 'I am the grown up, you are a child.'

Distract your child into another activity and praise good behaviour. Whatever the behaviour, all children need a calm and kind response and some help to unpick the cause.

There may be times when the stress gets to you – this is not surprising. If you are with others and feel your own frustrations building up ask someone to take over.

If you are on your own make sure your child is safe, then give yourself a few moments of head space to breathe slowly and allow yourself to feel calmer again.

First Steps To Take

- If your child is distressed keep your own voice low and calm. Try and keep your breathing slow and steady.
- Be patient and realistic – if your child is not managing a situation it is OK for you all to leave. You and your child have done well to give it a go.
- Choose a few rules that are important to keep your child and others safe. Having lots of rules can mean more conflict and be confusing for your child.

- Try and keep to routines and family rules – most children (and especially those with behavioural difficulties) feel more secure when every day has an expected pattern.

Dive Deeper

Tantrums

Tantrums or meltdowns are part of growing up. We expect them in the toddler days – small children let us know loudly about their frustrations and attempts to be independent.

Often tantrums happen less as children develop the language to explain their feelings and find other ways to manage their emotions. It is common for children and young people to still have 'outbursts' from time to time though.

This can be affected by developmental stages and temperament, as well as a reaction to other difficult / stressful things happening in their life. It can also be down to things like tiredness or hunger. For some children with additional needs this can be an ongoing struggle for them and their families.

Tantrums & outbursts In Teenagers

You may well see the return of tantrums / meltdowns in the teenage years too. Young people are trying to cope with;

- Their urge for independence
- The hormonal and brain changes of puberty
- Frustration at the boundaries they need from parents, carers and trusted adults to keep them safe.



Responding To Tantrums

Regardless of age, your child will need a very similar response from the people who care about them.

- Help describing their feelings, 'I can see you are sad / cross / frustrated because ...'
- Valuing their feelings 'I know you really wanted to go to...'
- Time to cool down – either with you there (if they are little stay very close) or somewhere nearby
- Someone to stay calm, comfort and reassure them
- The chance to move on from the meltdown and start afresh knowing they are loved.

As children get older and have more language, take time to talk about it when they have calmed down. Help them make sense of their feelings

and how they could cope or react differently next time.

Tantrums and meltdowns are hard on everyone – keeping calm and being kind, but firm is a good approach.

Your own Feelings

When your child is having a meltdown it can feel embarrassing – especially if you are out and about. It can feel like everyone is watching. Remember every parent is likely to have experienced this, and are usually sympathising with you.

Try and keep calm, find a quieter spot until it has passed. If it is lasting a long time, and you are struggling you might decide to head home.

Friendship Struggles

Some children struggle to understand the 'rules' of playing and socialising with others. It can be hard to see them making mistakes and being misunderstood. Give your child lots of 'practice' to help them learn how to join in.

- Try and give your child the opportunity to watch other children and spend time with them. You may have to start very slowly – like watching children from a distance. Try just walking by the park to begin with. Talk about what the children are doing.
- Make your own story books using photos of familiar people and places. Use feelings words when you talk about them; 'You are excited when you see Grandad' or 'you sometimes get cross when you have to share with your cousin.'



When with other children and young people keep watch for signs that your child is feeling overwhelmed. Giving your child the chance to take a few minutes break to calm down, might enable them to avoid becoming distressed or behaviour to escalate.

Not Sharing

Sharing is hard. It is normal for children not to want to do it. They don't really begin to understand how to share until they are around three years old.

Remember – your child doesn't have to share their most precious things. Put them away when other children are around. If your child is upset that another child has something special of theirs say to the visitor – 'That is a very special teddy / blanket / car can I look after it so it doesn't get lost? – Tim would love to show you his train instead'.

If your child still does not like to share things as they get older;

- Practice sharing and turn taking games at home together.
- When you are going to meet up with others, talk and plan with your child the games they can play and agree what they will try and share.
- If your child gets upset take them to a quiet spot. Help them describe their feelings – 'I know sharing is hard, you feel cross when Jane has the blue car'.
- Try distraction 'there are so many lovely toys, I wonder what else we could find – I think I saw a lovely train.'

My Child Is Still Struggling?

Try not to worry most children will learn to share in time. It does not mean your child is not kind or is selfish. If your child often seems to struggle with playing and friendships;

- Talk to nursery / school and ask them for feedback – they may be able to spot what is causing the issue and offer your child and / or their friends some help.
- As your child gets older give them time to talk to you about when things go well and when things go wrong with friends. Encourage them to think about the other person's point of view and listen out for signs of [bullying \(/emotional-health/children-young-people-s-emotional-health/anti-bullying/\)](#).

Biting, Hitting & Kicking

Lots of children go through spells of hitting out, biting or kicking. For many this is a developmental phase that passes. For some children this continues to be a problem. It is not easy for parents. It can be upsetting and you might worry about how to make it stop.

Biting, kicking or hitting, like all behaviour, is the way your child is showing their feelings. Working out what the triggers are for your child will help you prevent the behaviour.

It might be;

- Frustration, jealousy, or over excitement
- Enjoyment of the sensation of biting, kicking or hitting
- They are copying behaviour they see from other people in their life or on TV or computer games.

A behaviour diary - where you think what happened before, during and after the action will help you work out what triggers this for your child. Remember to think what happened on the good days - when you didn't see the unwanted behaviour too.

How To React

If your child hurts you or someone else you need to respond straight away. It might not be easy but staying calm is really important. Children are fascinated by the reactions they get and can repeat the unwanted behaviour to see how you will respond.

- If you can see a bite, kick or hit is about to happen use the word 'stop' firmly and make a space between your child and the 'victim'. Children often respond better to 'stop' than 'no.'
- Keep your voice calm, low and firm. Say 'we do not bite / hit / kick, it hurts people.'
- Give attention to the person who was hurt, use feeling words. 'I can see that has made you sad. You are shocked your friend hurt you, I am sorry this happened.'
- Tell your child how the other person / you are feeling in the same way. 'I feel sad that I have been kicked, it hurt me', 'your brother doesn't understand why he was bitten when he just wanted to play.'
- You might have to take your child to a quiet place for a few moments. Keep your reaction to them a bit 'bored' and low key. Say 'let's go and play nicely now'. Then distract and move on.

It can be a message you need to repeat a lot of times before you see any change in the behaviour.

Try not to give yourself a hard time your child is not doing this to be mean, or to cause pain. They are showing that they are overwhelmed and haven't learnt how to cope with these feelings just yet.

Punishments rarely work because many children will struggle to make the link between their action and the consequences. In the past parents were sometimes told to bite, kick or hit their child back to 'show them' how it feels. This doesn't work as it gives a mixed message about the behaviour. It confuses and harms children when the people they love, trust and rely on do something to hurt them.

My Child Is Still Struggling?

If your child / young person continues to hurt others and lash out, this may be for other reasons and they may need extra help. It is not ok for you, or others you live with, to worry about being hurt by your child.

Talk to school or early years setting, or call Just One Number to speak to a health professional. There is help available for you and your child.

Rules & Boundaries

Having a few rules and boundaries that you feel strongly about and the family can stick to, is better than lots of rules that are not listened to.

Think about the language you use. Children and young people can struggle with 'no' but understand better when you tell them the behaviour you want to see;

- Instead of 'don't poke the dog' try 'we stroke the dog gently'.
- Rather than 'how dare you shout at me like that' try 'shouting upsets me and it makes it harder for us to listen to each other, try again using a quieter voice.'

As your child gets older you might discuss rules together and ask them for their ideas. If they feel involved and listened to it will be easier for them to stick to.

Choose family rules, just three or four and write them up somewhere you can all see them. Remember [rules \(https://b2a2aee4-a9b4-4927-94f4-4438a64148ee.filesusr.com/ugd/5e0ce4_a79e4a07db674341b2e43bd46a261179.pdf\)](https://b2a2aee4-a9b4-4927-94f4-4438a64148ee.filesusr.com/ugd/5e0ce4_a79e4a07db674341b2e43bd46a261179.pdf) can be updated as things change for your family.

Be Consistent

Stick to the boundaries you set. If you react one way one day and differently another day your child will get confused.

It is important that everyone in your family deals with your child's behaviour in the same way.

Have Realistic Consequences

Saying you will 'ground them for a month' or 'you can't see Granny on Tuesday' is pointless if you know that you can't stick to it.

Consequences should **never** include physical punishments like smacking. It is a sign you have lost control. This is frightening for your child and for you. Frightened children do not learn a lesson and their trust in you will be damaged.

If you feel like you may hurt your child walk away until you feel calmer.

Stick To Consequences

Once a consequence is in place don't let your child negotiate out of it unless there is a very good reason.

It is better to say 'You can't go out with Jane on Saturday' or 'You can't watch your favourite TV show this week' and be able to follow through on it.

Move On

Once you have pointed out the unwanted behaviour, talked it through, set a consequence and followed through – let it go.

Move on and be warm and loving towards your child. They need to know that everyone makes mistakes and your love and care for them is not affected.

Set a Good Example

Sometimes we need to remember that our children are watching and learning from us. If we manage our own feelings and frustrations calmly and keep to the rules ourselves our children will be more likely to do the same.

Ask for help

Some children and young people find any rules / boundaries or requests really difficult to follow. This can be exhausting and impact on your relationship with your child.

If you are finding your child struggles to cooperate with rules and you are finding their behaviour hard to manage speak to nursery / school or call us at Just One Number to talk to a health professional.

Pick Your Battles

It is normal for children to test limits and boundaries. It is part of the slow move towards independence. It can start when they are very small and continues right through to adolescence. Some children will kick back against rules more than others, some find it extremely difficult to do as they are asked or keep to boundaries. It can be very hard to manage.

Ignoring Unwanted Behaviour

During some developmental stages it feels like you could probably spend all your time trying to keep on top of all your child's negative behaviours

Also in this section...

Behaviour → (</child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/behaviour/>)

Understanding Your Child's Behaviour → (</child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/understanding-your-child-s-behaviour/>)

Behaviour Troubleshooting → (</child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/behaviour-troubleshooting/>)

Norfolk Positive Behaviour Strategies (PBS) → (</child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/norfolk-positive-behaviour-strategies-pbs/>)

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easier to cope.

Try and distract your child, or even choose to join in with the silly / noisy / messy behaviour!

Making Changes

If there are regular challenges, think how you could manage them differently. If you are worried about things getting broken or damaged you might decide to move them out of the way rather than spend all of your time asking your little one not to touch it.

If your teenager likes loud music you might agree a time when this is ok

Need More Information

Relate - Setting Boundaries for Teenagers → (<https://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers/behaviour/setting-boundaries-teenagers>)

Relate - Discipline for Teenagers → (<https://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-family-life-and-parenting/parenting-teenagers/behaviour/discipline-teenagers>)

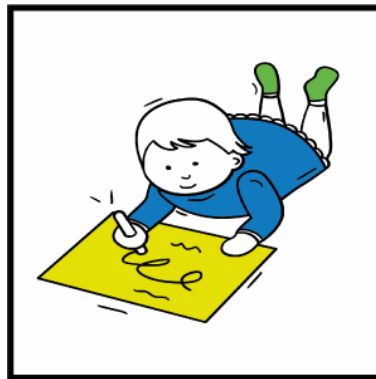
Action For Children - How Do I Set House Rules For My Teenager? → (<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/behaviour/using-rules-rewards/how-do-i-set-house-rules-for-my-teenager/>)

Other Useful Pages



Understanding Your Child's Behaviour

(/child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/understanding-your-child-s-behaviour/)



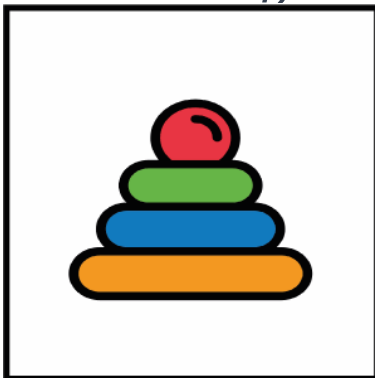
Understanding Child Development

(/child-development-additional-needs/supporting-development/understanding-child-development/)

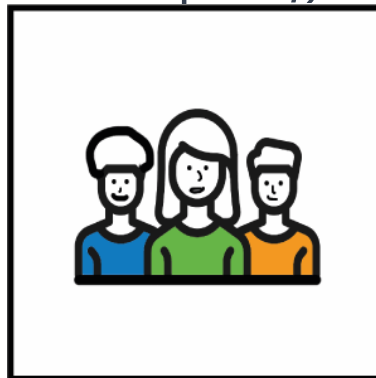


Puberty

(/child-development-additional-needs/supporting-development/puberty/)



Playing With Other Children



Children & Young People's Emotional



Coping With Stress

(/emotional-

(/child-development-additional-needs/supporting-development/playing-with-other-children/)

Health (/emotional-health/children-young-people-s-emotional-health/)

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Just One Norfolk has been created by Norfolk & Waveney Children & Young People's Services which is provided by Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust. This service is commissioned by Norfolk County Council.

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