

Common Behavioral Problems In Children

It is common for children to break the rules and go against the norm to 'test' authority. Only that way do they understand what behavior is appropriate and what is not. Read on to learn about the behaviors that kids tend to exhibit from time to time and how you can handle a child with behavior problems.

1. Disrespect and backtalk

When your three-year-old daughter talks back to you, it may seem funny and adorable. But when your seven-year-old girl shouts out a 'no' every time you tell her to do something, it can get on your nerves. If not handled properly, backtalk can lead to arguments between parents and children.

So what do you do?

- If your child **talks back but follows your instructions**, then ignore it. Ignoring backtalk may be okay if the behavior is not threatening or destructive.
- If the child follows instructions, even though he talks back, appreciate that they did what you asked, even if they didn't want to. You can then explain that it is okay to be angry, but not okay to speak to you disrespectfully.
- But if the child's responses are **threatening others or self**, then you need to pay attention to what they say and handle it carefully.
- Do not respond impulsively. **Let the child calm down** and then address what he or she said. Tell them calmly about what behavior is acceptable and what is not.
- **Set limits** and make them aware of the consequences. Do not threaten, just state plain facts that if they talk back, they won't get ice cream or go to the movie.
- Set expectations, but you can be **a little flexible** sometimes if it makes them happy.
- Finally, take a quick check of how you behave with the kids or others when the kids are around. Are you rude or disrespectful? If yes, you need to start by changing your behavior.

2. Abusive language

Children scream and yell when they are angry. But if they start swearing even before they are all of ten years old, you should be worried. They may start yelling or using abusive language to bring you into an argument or simply to get their way. When your child uses offensive language and swears, here is what you should do.

- Make sure you are **not using such language** in front of kids.
- Have **zero tolerance** for verbal abuse at home. There is no excuse for swearing or cursing. So if they use such language, there is a consequence.

- **Explain the consequences** clearly and ensure they are in place. So if your nine-year-old girl is grounded for one day for abusive language, she will have to miss her soccer practice or music class. There should be no two ways about it.
- If your toddler is using such language, **correct them** immediately. Tell them it is a “bad word” and people do not like that word or kids who use that word.

If you have used that word in front of your child, apologize immediately. You can even ask your child to remind you that it is a bad word, should you ever say it in front of him.

3. Aggressive or violent behavior

It is okay for children to get angry. But if that anger becomes violent or turns into aggressive behavior in children it is a problem. Mood disorders, psychosis, conduct disorder, trauma, impulsiveness or frustration can cause aggression in young children. At times, your child may resort to violence for self-defense.

Aggression can also be a learned behavior. How is the environment at home? Or is the child learning to be violent, at school? If your child tends to react to a negative response by hitting, biting or kicking, this is what you should do.

- The easiest way to respond to aggression in children is to yell back at them. But if you do so, you end up teaching them the wrong things. Your kids look up to you to learn how to control their impulses and emotions. So rather than raising your voice, **lower your tone** and tell them to calm down.
- Reflect their feelings, **empathize**, but make it clear that hitting or kicking or biting is not allowed. You could say something like “I know you are angry. But we do not bite, hit or kick. No hitting!”
- Tell them what the **consequences** would be if they turn violent. If you are dealing with a younger child, tell them what they can do instead. Give them an alternative, but don’t leave them hanging. For instance, teach them to use words and phrases like “I’m angry,” or “I don’t like it,” or “I’m not happy about it” when they are upset, instead of resorting to physical violence.

Most importantly, be a good role model and avoid giving them physical punishment. Also, reward positive, non-aggressive behavior.

4. Lying

It is common for children to lie. It is also common for parents to worry when they catch the kids lying. You may feel betrayed, hurt and even wonder if you can trust the child again. But here is what you should do to prevent your kid from lying.

- Do not take it personally. Think about it from your child’s perspective to understand **what compelled him to lie**.

- Kids may lie **when they are scared** that the truth might have negative consequences. Appreciate the positives rather than punishing negative behavior to prevent your child's need for lying.
- **Teach them to be honest.** Start by being a role model.
- **Have consequences** for lying. No arguments or discussions about it. Your kid lies, he gets to deal with the consequences.

5. Bullying

Bullying is a serious problem and could result in emotional and physical abuse of the victim. Children tend to bully others to feel powerful. Also, bullying resolves their social problems easily. When dealing with feelings becomes difficult, kids tend to take on bullying to fix things. If you find that your child has been bullying others, you should act immediately.

- Start teaching your kids from an early age that **bullying is wrong**. More importantly, explain to them what or who a bully is and give them examples of what bullies do. For example, you can say, "A bully is someone who calls people names, or does mean things to them, or takes their property by force."
- Set rules and standards in the house early on. Make a statement like "**we do not bully** in this house" or "You do not get away with such behavior in this house".
- **Watch out for signs** of bullying: see if your older kids are trying to bully the younger ones, and rectify the behavior immediately.

6. Manipulation

Manipulation is tricky and a very exhausting behavior to handle. Children tend to act out, lie, or cry to get what they want. If you give in to the bad behavior in children, your child feels justified. For example, if your child throws a tantrum in public for a candy bar and you buy her one, she has just manipulated you.

In simple words, when your child manipulates you, she has power over you. As an adult, you can always break the pattern and stop falling for your child's manipulative behavior.

- Expect your child to fight every time you say 'no'. That way, you can figure out how to deal with their behavior and not fall for manipulation.
- Make it clear that when you say 'no', it means no. You can give them a brief explanation of your position, but don't get into justifying it.
- Avoid discussion, but don't shut them off completely. Try to listen to their side of the argument as long as the child is respectful and not rude or abusive.

7. Lack of motivation and laziness

Your child doesn't seem interested in doing anything at all. Be it schoolwork, art or music practice or even playing, he refuses to participate. Motivating kids is not easy, especially if they are lazy and tend to find an excuse for not doing anything. When your son or daughter is unmotivated, here is how you can help.

- **Don't get anxious** by your child's behavior. When you do, you may be seen as pushy, and that can encourage them to resist you.
- You can **tell them the stories about your childhood** and share your experiences to inspire and encourage them to try something new.
- **Do not force** your child to take up a hobby. Give them options and let them choose. Kids are more interested in something that they choose.
- Take a **step back and check**: are you forcing your kid to do something? Ask what your child really wants and what motivates him? See your child as a separate person to identify what motivates them.
- Try to find ways to get your kids motivated on their own. Self-motivation is more powerful than being driven by others.

8. Behavior problems in school

"I hate school!" Is that something you hear your five-year-old say every morning? Kids often give parents a hard time by refusing to go to school or complete homework assignments in time. Children could refuse to go to school for many reasons: bullying, academic issues, resistance to authority and rules, or anxiety of being separated from parents.

- Start by **getting to the root** of the issue. Find out why your child hates school or refuses to do his homework. You may want to help him with his homework if he has trouble with it.
- Your child may take time to perform academically and be okay with school. Understand that the change will not happen overnight.
- Offer incentives, not bribes, to encourage positive behavior. For example, you can say, "you have earned an ice cream tonight because you did your homework without any reminders".

Behavioral problems are not always simple enough to deal. You would have to seek a professional's help in complicated cases.

When To Get Help

In case abnormal behaviors turn into something unmanageable at home, or if your child is making a mistake repeatedly, it is time for you to see a doctor. There could be a deeper reason for him to behave in a certain way.

