

PARENTING

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TIPS

Encouraging good behaviour: 12 tips suitable for 1 – 8 year olds

By Raising Children Network

Try these tips to encourage the behaviour you want in your child.

1. **Children do as you do.** Your child watches you to get her clues on how to behave in the world, so, as a **role model**, use your own behaviour to guide her. What you do is often much more important than what you say. If you want your child to say 'please', say it yourself. If you don't want your child to raise her voice, keep your voice at a reasonable level too.
2. **Keep promises.** When you **follow through on your promises**, good or bad, your child learns to trust and respect you. So when you promise to go for a walk after she picks up her toys, make sure you have your walking shoes handy. When you say you will leave the library if she doesn't stop running around, be prepared to leave straight away if she continues. No need to make a fuss about it – the more matter of fact, the better.
3. **Get down onto their level.** Kneeling or squatting down next to children is a very powerful tool for communicating positively with them. Getting close allows you to tune in to what they might be feeling or thinking. It also helps them focus on what you are saying or asking for. If you are close to her and have her attention, there is no need to make her look at you.
4. **'I hear you.'** [Active listening](#) is another tool for helping young children cope with their emotions. They tend to get frustrated a lot, especially if they can't express themselves well enough verbally, so when you repeat back to them what you think they might be feeling, it helps to relieve some of their tension and makes them feel respected and comforted. It can diffuse many potential [temper tantrums](#).



**Caring, consistent coaching
curbed Brad's bad behaviour**

5. **Catch her being 'good'**. This simply means that when your child is behaving in a way that you like, you can give her some great positive feedback, for example, 'Wow, you are playing so nicely. I really like it when you keep all the blocks on the table'. That works better than 'waiting' for the blocks to come crashing to the floor before you take notice and bark, 'Hey, stop that!'. This positive feedback is sometimes called '[descriptive praise](#)'. Try to say six positive comments (praise and encouragement) for every negative comment (criticisms and reprimands). It also pays to remember that children will seek out negative attention if the only alternative is no attention at all.
6. **Choose your battles wisely**. Before you intervene in anything your child is doing, ask yourself if it really matters. By keeping instructions, requests and negative feedback to a minimum, you create less opportunity for conflict and bad feelings. [Rules](#) are important, but reserve them for the most important things.
7. **Keep it simple**. If you can give [clear instructions in simple terms](#), your child will know what is expected of her. ('Please hold my hand when we cross the road.')
8. **Responsibility and [consequences](#)**. As children get older, you can increasingly give them responsibility for their own behaviour and the chance to experience the **natural consequences** of that behaviour. You don't have to be the bad guy all the time. For example, if she forgot to put her lunch box in her bag, she will go hungry at lunch time. It is her hunger and her consequence and it won't hurt her to go hungry just that one time. Sometimes, with the best intentions, we do so much for our children that we don't allow them to learn for themselves. At other times you need to provide consequences for unacceptable behaviour. For these times, it is best to ensure that you have explained the consequences and that your children have **agreed to them in advance**.
9. **Say it once and move on**. Nagging and criticising is boring for you and doesn't work. Your child will just end up tuning you out. Try to **avoid idle threats**. Your child will very quickly work these out and ignore them. The best way is to let them know what you think once and then take action if you need to set limits or back up a rule.
10. **Make her feel important**. Children love it when they can contribute to the family. Start introducing some **simple chores** or things that she can do to play her own important part in helping the household. This will make her feel important and she'll take pride in helping out. If you can give your child lots of practise doing a chore, she will get better at it and will keep trying harder. [Safe chores](#) help them feel responsible, build their self-esteem and help you out too.
11. **Prepare for challenging situations**. There are times when looking after your child and doing things you need to do will be tricky. If you think about these challenging situations in advance, you can [plan](#) around her needs and talk to her about why you need her cooperation. Then she is prepared for what you expect.
12. **Maintain a sense of humour**. Another way of diffusing tension and possible conflict is to use [humour](#). You can pretend to become the menacing tickle monster or make animal noises. However, humour at her expense won't help; young children are easily hurt by parental 'teasing'. Humour that has you both laughing is great.

Source: For other fact sheets in this series visit: www.raisingchildren.net.au

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