



## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Parenting can be an overwhelming responsibility. During tough economic times, the responsibilities of keeping a job, paying the bills and dealing with children's behaviors can add to the pressures of daily life.

As we celebrate April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, here is some helpful information for all parents that face stressful days and many child rearing questions.

You may see a question here that you've always wanted to ask – *good news, we've provided an answer!*

Information below provided by: [www.preventchildabusenc.org](http://www.preventchildabusenc.org) or [www.parenting.org](http://www.parenting.org)

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**Q: My daughter just turned 13-months-old. She is climbing on everything and I am afraid she will climb out of the crib and hurt herself. When is a good time to move her to a toddler bed? And if we move her now, how do we keep her in the bed?**

A: The switch to a bed from the crib can be an exciting event in a child's life. It usually occurs around the age of 2 or when the child is about 35 inches; or when the guardrail is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the child's height. Preventing accidents can be achieved by good timing, lowering the mattress, removing objects that can be used as stepping stones, and padding the floor where a fall may occur—just in case.

**Q: Our school nurse always sends children home if they have pink eye. Is it always contagious, and for how long?**

A: The most common cause of pink eye is conjunctivitis, a bacterial or viral infection of the lining of the eyelids and front of the eyeball. The infection is contagious but the child is no longer infectious after 24-36 hrs. of treatment and when the redness and signs of illness are disappearing.

**Q: What's the safest car seat? When can my 5-year-old child ride in the front seat with the car's lap and shoulder straps?**

A: Do your homework. Do not prematurely transition to the car's seat belts. Recommendations are to use infant and convertible child safety seats for children less than age 4 years, then belt positioning booster seats from age 4 until the child can fit safely into the car's seat belts, usually between 8-10 years. Adults should set a good example- no exceptions.

**Q. My children come home late every night, even though I tell them to be home by 9:30 p.m. They don't care if I use a consequence. What should I do?**

A. Try changing the consequence and always follow through. It's quite possible that the consequence is trivial compared to the reward or fun of staying out past curfew. You need to

adjust the size, importance and immediacy of the consequence you're using. This is also a good time to use some Preventive Teaching. Remind your children what they need to do to be home on time. For example, you can say, "Friday night's curfew is 11 p.m., know how long it will take you to get home from wherever you are and leave in time to make curfew. If you know you're going to run late, always call home."

**Q. When we go somewhere, I tell my children exactly how I expect them to behave before we leave the house, but I just know they aren't going to do it. How can I make them?**

A. The truth is you can't. What you can do is encourage your children to make good decisions. You need to praise your children the moment that they do follow your instructions. You should set very clear expectations or rules about behavior. When your children misbehave, teach them an alternative positive behavior. And finally, always follow through with a consequence if they disregard your rules or expectations. Sometimes, parents fall into the trap of threatening to use consequences, but never really do.

**Q. What are some negative consequences I can use when my child:**

A. Comes home late? (Tell your child he or she has to be home an hour early the next day.)

Fights with his brother? (Have both of them do chores together.)

Sleeps too late in the morning? (Make your child go to bed early the next night.)

Won't listen? (Your child is really not following instructions. Take away a privilege or add an extra chore.)

Won't stop hitting or kicking... (Teach your child self-control strategies, including deep-breathing, stretching and positive self-talk exercises. Have your child repeat a positive comment, such as "I can get myself under control" or "If I stop now, things will get better.")

**Q. My son just doesn't seem to care. Why won't consequences change his behavior?**

A. If your child's behavior hasn't changed after you consistently used a consequence, your child is probably telling you that the consequence doesn't mean anything to him. Try taking away a privilege that he will notice. If he is younger, take away his TV privileges or a favorite toy for a day. If he's a teenager, take away phone or e-mail privileges for a weekend. It's important to also remember that even though consequences are a powerful tool, when used alone, they won't always change behavior. Consistent teaching and modeling positive behavior works best over the long run.

**Q. Is my 2-year-old daughter too young to be disciplined?**

A. No, she is not. However, the discipline you use with your 2-year-old is much different from what you would use if she were 5 or 6. Giving your toddler more attention is a good way to reinforce positive behaviors. Make sure your daughter sees that her good behaviors result in positive responses from you. When her behavior is bad, try to redirect her behavior or have her practice an opposite, positive behavior. Don't expect immediate results right away; learning takes time. Just try to be consistent, firm and fair.

**Q. My daughter enjoys getting my attention by doing bad things. Consequences don't seem to work. What's the best way to handle this?**

**A.** Kids crave any kind of attention, positive or negative. If you pay more attention to misbehaviors than to good behaviors, your child will probably misbehave because that's how she gets your attention. Try to recognize your daughter's good behavior more often and minimize the attention you give to her negative behavior.

**Q. My son does more bad things than good things. Is it okay if I correct him more than I praise him?**

**A.** No child should be criticized more than he or she is praised. First of all, you may be too selective. Don't withhold praise until an outstanding moment occurs. Take a closer look at the little things he is doing, and praise his efforts. Create opportunities for him to succeed, and praise his accomplishments. Try to spend more time doing fun things with your son and point out the good things he does.

**Q. When my daughter does something right, I praise her. However, the praise doesn't seem to be enough to create lasting change. What should I do?**

**A.** Be patient. Praise is sometimes like water on a rock - over time, the persistent flow of the water changes the shape of the rock. She may need just a little more time to respond. Perhaps you need to communicate your feelings better by being more enthusiastic and affectionate. If you're not already doing so, occasionally give her a small reward (longer playtime, a favorite snack, etc.) as reinforcement.

**Q. Shouldn't kids do some things because they're supposed to? My parents never rewarded me for doing chores - they just tanned my hide if I didn't!**

**A.** Maybe kids should do what we expect, but sometimes they don't. Consequences, either negative or positive, can have a positive affect on their behavior. Use a positive consequence when you want to reinforce or increase a behavior. Use a negative consequence when you want to stop or decrease a problem behavior. Negative consequences should NEVER involve hitting, punching, slapping, ridiculing or belittling children. The emotional and physical pain can be devastating. If you use inappropriate punishment, there's a good chance your kids will respond with unpleasant behavior, too.

**Q. What positive consequences would work best for my kids, ages 6 and 8?**

**A.** Young children like attention (hugs and time spent together) and activities (reading books, playing games). Be sure to give the consequence immediately after the behavior that you want to reinforce. This will help your children make a connection between the reward and the appropriate behavior.

**Q. What positive consequences work best for older teens?**

**A.** Teenagers like attention. They also like to have extra time to spend with friends, talk on the telephone, go places and use the car. You can motivate teens by having them earn future privileges, such as money for new clothes or special activities (movies, concerts, etc.).

**Q. Am I supposed to give my children a reward every time they do something right?**

**A.** Not necessarily. Praise and positive consequences can be used to increase behaviors that our children do not routinely do. You may need to use positive attention and rewards frequently to get children into the habit of doing a certain behavior. When the behavior becomes routine, then specific praise and rewards for that behavior can be less frequent.

**Q. Isn't all this praise stuff really nothing more than bribery?**

**A.** Actually, it's more like a reward for doing something well, much like a paycheck you would receive from an employer. If praise motivates your children to do more positive things, it's valuable. A bribe is when you reward your children for their negative behavior. A prime example is parents waiting in a store checkout line who give in and buy candy for their whining children. This misguided attempt to stop the whining only reinforces the behavior. The children learn that whining gets them candy so they'll use the behavior in the future to get what they want.

**Q. My young daughter already goes to bed on time. Why should I praise her for that?**

**A.** Praise your child for going to bed on time to let her know she did exactly what you wanted. You may not need to praise her every time she makes it to bed on time, but occasional praise will help her understand that you appreciate when she does.

**Q. I keep praising my son every time he does something right, but it doesn't seem to reinforce the behavior or change anything. Am I doing something wrong?**

**A.** You may need to alter the way you show approval, or make your praise more specific. You may have to provide different reasons for why he needs to change his behavior, or you may have to add another positive consequence, along with the praise, to jump-start the change. (Think of something your son really enjoys but doesn't get to do that often.) By praising your son, you are building a positive relationship with him. The relationship itself will encourage better behavior, but it can take time. Don't give up!

**Q. My 3-year-old has started to cling to me whenever I try to go somewhere without him. Is this normal? Is there something I can do to prevent it?**

**A.** The answer is "Yes" to both questions. Clinging behavior is part of the natural bonding process between a parent and a child. You provide your child a sense of security and your absence can be frightening. To encourage independence in your 3-year-old, give him small tasks that you know he can accomplish. Praise him when he plays by himself or with others. Teach him what to do when you leave. For example, tell him to find his favorite toy and ask the sitter to play along. You can also create little rewards for your son when he doesn't cling to you. Keep in mind that it can take awhile for him to feel secure. There will probably be some crying and whining, so please be patient.

**Q. Is it okay for my son to play with dolls?**

**A.** It's quite common for young boys and girls to want to play with all types of toys, and that's great. Adults often view toys as gender-specific, but toddlers don't think that way. They simply love to play. You should provide your son with a variety of activities and games so he becomes socially well-rounded.

**Q. What can my child learn during playtime?**

**A.** Play is a wonderful way for children to learn social skills, including how to share and cooperate. You can encourage your toddler's social development by playing games such as "Simon Says." The game is a fun, easy way to teach your toddler how to follow instructions.

**Q. When my toddler is playing with other children, what should I expect in terms of his behavior?**

**A.** Toddlers between the ages of 2 and 5 will initially have trouble playing well with others. The skill of sharing is not usually learned until 3 or 4. Be sure to praise your child when you see him playing nicely with others. Most children learn play behaviors by imitating other children, especially older siblings. Eventually, your child will begin to share certain objects and learn to cooperate during playtime.

**Q. Can my 4-year-old really understand everything I say?**

**A.** Young children are capable of understanding many concepts. However, they understand simple, concrete words and phrases best. That's important to remember when you want to correct a bad behavior or encourage a good one. Use words to describe the action or behavior you want, and show your child what you mean. Understanding will come from the child frequently using the behavior and seeing its results.

**Q. My son is easily distracted and can hardly sit still for any instructions. What should I do?**

**A.** Before you start talking, eliminate any distractions such as toys or TV. Kneel down to his eye level, and use words he will understand. Because he has difficulty sitting still, keep whatever you say simple and brief.

**Q. My son doesn't take anything I say seriously. What should I do?**

**A.** Let your son know when you are serious and when you are joking. Young children don't always know the difference. When you are serious, mean what you say and say what you mean. Young children respond to actions more than words. Make sure you follow through on what you tell him. Your vocal tone, facial expressions and body language should reinforce the words you say.

**Q. When is it okay to let my toddler make his own choices?**

**A.** Choices are the decisions you allow your child to make that will help him become more responsible and independent. One example is letting your toddler choose which outfit to wear. It's best if you give your child a choice between two options. Too many choices can cause confusion and create power struggles, especially if you're trying to get your child to follow a routine.

**Q. My daughter always wants a reason for why she has to do what I ask. Does she need to hear a reason everytime I ask her to do something?**

**A.** No. However, it is quite natural and developmentally normal for young children to ask questions. Providing reasons will help your daughter see the connection between positive behaviors and positive results and negative behaviors and negative results. When giving a reason, try to focus on positive outcomes. She will be more likely to follow your instructions when she understands the benefit. For a child, potential rewards are better motivators than threats or demands.

**Q. When I tell my son the reasons why we will, or will not, do something, he keeps asking why. What should I say?**

**A.** Start by giving your son one brief, specific reason. If he still has questions, ask him to repeat what you said. If he repeats the reason and understands it, praise him for being a good listener. If

he doesn't understand the reason, try rephrasing it. If he still asks why, but you feel he's just being difficult, redirect his attention toward something else.

**Q. What's the difference between a reason and a consequence?**

**A.** A reason explains why your child should or should not engage in a particular behavior. A consequence is the reward or punishment that your child earns when he or she engages in the behavior.

**Q. If my kid is lazy, what's wrong with telling him he's lazy?**

**A.** One problem with a comment like that is that it's unclear. What do you mean by lazy? Is he not cleaning up his room? Does he have bad study habits? Do you think he has a general attitude of indifference? Calling your son lazy doesn't tell him anything about what he is doing wrong or even how to change his behavior.

**Q. My son is old enough to know how to clean his room. What's the point of telling him how to do it?**

**A.** If he already knows how to clean his room, and he does a good job, you may not have to. However, specific instructions provide kids with a clear understanding of exactly what you want. If you expect your son to pick up clothes off the floor, dust the chest of drawers and make the bed every time he cleans his room, say so. When you're specific about the behavior you want to see - or not see - your child is much more likely to understand and follow through. If you're unhappy with his cleaning effort, show him how to make the bed (sheets tucked under the mattress) or pick up his clothes (dirty clothes go in the hamper; clean clothes hang in the closet).

**Q. How can I correct my kids for yelling at each other when my wife and I yell at each other and them?**

**A.** Make a conscious effort to model good communication skills to your children. It's really hard to change old habits and sometimes you will make mistakes. When you do yell at your wife or children, it helps to apologize. Let your children know that you don't want anyone to yell. Practice with them how you wish you had handled the situation. Breaking the habit won't happen overnight, but if you really try, you and your family will hear improvement.

**Q. How do I respond if my son swears at me?**

**A.** Try empathy. Empathy is a statement that shows you understand how he is feeling. For example, you might say, "I know you're upset about not being able to go to your friend's house, but stop swearing and calm down. I'll come back in a few minutes to talk with you."

**Q. How do I teach my children not to use drugs?**

**A.** The best course of action is prevention. Teaching your children that they have the power to say "No" is the first step. Show your children how to say "No" assertively when someone offers them drugs, alcohol or tobacco. Here are the basic steps to that skill...

- Look at the person.
- Use a clear, firm voice tone.
- Say "No, I don't want..."
- Ask the person to leave you alone.
- Remain calm, but serious.

- Possibly remove yourself from the situation.

You must also be willing to talk often to your children about the dangers of drugs, keeping the communication lines open. Effective communication means that you're an active listener, too. Your children should know that they can talk to you about any subject, no matter how sensitive.

**Q. My daughter ignores everything I say when I correct her. How can I keep her from walking away from me?**

**A.** How do you act when correcting her? If you're angry and go on about things unrelated to the situation, your words can get lost. Try to stay calm and be brief. A calm, positive approach can produce better results.

**Q. What can I do when I am pretty sure my child is lying, but I can't prove it?**

**A.** If you think your child is lying, interrupt him or her. Ask your child to think about what he or she is going to say next and to make sure it's the truth. Tell your child that there will be negative consequences for lying.

**Q. My child argues about everything I say. She never admits anything, even if I'm very specific, and she lies. What's the point of trying?**

**A.** Don't give up on your child. Just try not to get sidetracked by her arguments or lies when you're correcting her. Deal with one problem behavior at a time. If you are reasonably sure she did something she wasn't supposed to, give her a consequence. Here's a scenario that might help you:

- State the problem: "Darlene, you came home 30 minutes late and didn't let me know that you weren't going to be on time."
- Give a consequence: "Tomorrow night you have to be home an hour earlier."
- Describe what you want: "When you're going to be late, call and let me know. Depending on the situation, you can either stay later if your ride is leaving later or I'll come and get you. But you have to call and let me know that you'll be late. Okay?"

Practice what you want: "Darlene, how are you going to handle this situation next time?"

End the practice situation by having your child explain to you what he or she plans to do the next time he or she is running late.