



DISOBEDIENCE I

Most parents first experience the problem of disobedience when their child becomes a toddler. At this time, children are learning to be independent and may become more assertive and start to resist their parents. Once children become more mobile, they may touch things they are not supposed to touch and refuse to do as they are told. Children need limits or simple rules for their own safety and to help them learn to get along with others. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your toddler to accept limits, do as they are told and to understand the meaning of the word 'No.'

It is important to deal with disobedience firmly and decisively when your child is a toddler rather than leaving the problem unchecked. Parents who have taught their toddlers to accept limits and follow instructions find raising preschoolers and school-aged children much easier.

WHY ARE CHILDREN DISOBEYENT?

Toddlers are known for testing their limits. Some children deliberately repeat what they have been told not to do, just to see what happens. When parents say *Stop*, it can be like a dare. The child does the same thing again, maybe even with a big grin. They may even see this as a game.

Children will continue to do things that get attention. Even negative attention, such as being reprimanded or smacked, can accidentally reward problem behaviour. Sometimes when a problem occurs, parents reason with their toddler or say *Don't touch* over and over. This gives the child extra attention and the problem is likely to continue.

Children can get confused when their parents are not consistent. If parents laugh at a behaviour one day and then try to set limits on the same

behaviour the next day, children find it difficult to learn what they are expected to do.

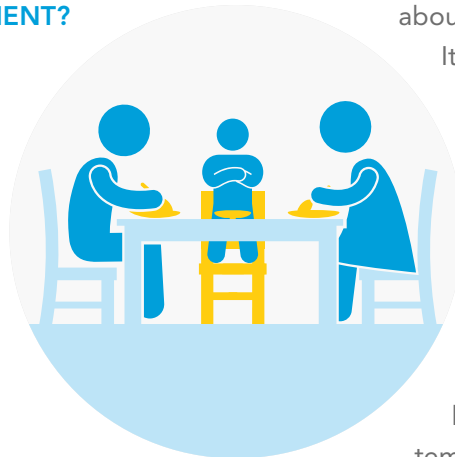
HOW TO HELP PREVENT DISOBEDIENCE

▼ Toddler-proof your home

There is nothing to be gained by fighting your toddler all day about minor matters.

It is better to set things up so there are few *Don't touch* areas in your home. By reducing the number of times you have to say *No*, you will make the limits you have more meaningful and your home environment happier. By making some temporary changes in your home, you can prevent many problems. Here are some suggestions:

- Put valuable and fragile things out of reach.
- If possible, put child-proof catches on cupboards (you may like to leave one open for your child to play in, such as the pots and pans cupboard).
- Close doors to areas at home where it is not safe for your toddler to be alone.
- Where possible, use gates or barriers to block your toddler's entry to areas that might be dangerous, such as stairs.



As your child grows, learns limits and can do as they are told, you can reverse these changes.

▼ **Have plenty of toys and activities available**

A toddler who is busy playing has less time to get into trouble. Make sure there are plenty of things for your toddler to play with. Toys and activities do not have to be expensive — toddlers can have as much fun with cardboard boxes and pots and pans as they do with expensive toys. Take a small bag of toys with you when you go out so that your child has something to do.

▼ **Encourage desirable behaviour**

Watch your child carefully. When they behave well, praise them. Smile or touch them and say what they are doing well — *Cathy, you are playing well with that puzzle.*

HOW TO TEACH YOUR CHILD LIMITS

▼ **Get close and gain your child's attention**

If a problem behaviour is occurring, stop what you are doing and move to within an arm's length of your child. Bend down to their eye level and use your child's name to gain their attention.

▼ **Say No in a firm, calm voice**

Hold your toddler's hands firmly and say *No* in a firm, calm voice.

When you say *No*, frown and shake your head from side to side. This will not hurt your child and is a good alternative to smacking.



▼ **Tell your child what to do**

Tell your child what you want them to stop doing — *No, stop touching the TV* or *No, stop pulling the cat's tail*. Say (and show your child if necessary) what to do instead — *Play with your own toys* or *Stroke the cat like this*.

▼ **Give your child time to cooperate**

Pause briefly to give your child time to start to do what you have asked. Around 5 seconds is enough. Stay close and watch your child.

▼ **Praise your child for cooperating**

Praise your child if they do as you ask — *Trent, thank you for doing as Daddy asked straight away.*

▼ **Ignore whimpering or crying**

Do not pay any attention to your child if they whimper or cry after being told *No*. Wait for a pause in their crying, thank them for being quiet and try to involve them in an activity.

HOW TO MANAGE DISOBEDIENCE

▼ **Back up your instruction with a logical consequence**

If your child does not do as you ask within 5 seconds, use a logical consequence. Choose a consequence that fits the situation. Where possible, remove the toy or activity that is at the centre of the problem. Explain why you are doing it — *Lisa, you are not being gentle with the cat, so you can't play with her for 5 minutes. I'm putting her upstairs.* Five to 10 minutes of missing out on the activity is usually long enough. Ignore protests or complaints. Do not debate or argue the point with your child. Simply carry out the consequence.



▼ **Return the activity**

Return the toy or activity once the time is up to give your child the chance to practise behaving well. If the problem behaviour continues or occurs again within the next hour after giving the toy or activity back, repeat the logical consequence for a longer period, such as the rest of the day or use quiet time (see below).

▼ **If necessary, use quiet time or time-out**

In situations where there is no logical consequence, or the problem behaviour occurs again within the next hour after using a logical consequence, use quiet time. Tell your child what they have done wrong — *You have not done as I asked* — and the consequence — *now go to quiet time*. Quiet time involves removing your attention from your child and having them sit quietly for a short time. Sit your child in a cot, playpen or on a chair. Tell your child they must be quiet for 1 minute before they can come out of quiet time.

If your child is over 2 years of age and does not stay quietly in quiet time, use time-out. Say something like *You are not being quiet in quiet time, now you must go to time-out*. Time-out involves taking your child away from the situation where a problem has occurred and having them be quiet for a short time. Take your child to an uninteresting but safe room or space. Tell your child they must be quiet for 1 minute before they can come out of time-out. Give this reminder even though your child might be upset or angry. This is an opportunity for you to calm down too — take some slow breaths if you find yourself upset.

▼ **Return your child to an activity**

When your child has been quiet for 1 minute in quiet time or time-out, set them up in an activity. Praise your child for behaving well. If the problem occurs again, repeat quiet time or time-out (the same consequence as the last time). You may need to repeat quiet time or time-out a number of times before your child learns to do as you ask.



KEY STEPS

- Toddler-proof your home as much as possible.
- Encourage behaviour you like.
- When you say No, use a firm, calm voice, get close and firmly hold your child's hands.
- Tell your child what to do.
- Praise your child for doing as you asked.
- Ignore whimpering or crying.
- Act immediately when your child is disobedient.
- Back up your instruction with a logical consequence, quiet time or time-out.
- Return your child to an activity and praise them for behaving well.