



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you react when your child is misbehaving?

Ages & Stages

PRESCCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

Preschoolers are just learning how to behave and sometimes, they choose to do the wrong thing at the wrong time. Children need guidance from their parents to help them learn which behaviors are okay and which are not. Remember that preschoolers aren't trying to be bad, they are just learning what the rules are and how to control themselves.

When your child is misbehaving, keep the following tips in mind:

- Determine why they are behaving this way. Are they acting out to get attention, or are they not aware of what they are doing?
- Teach your child what they can say and when they can say it. Your child is seeing and noticing new things all the time, and often wants to talk about them.
- Establish clear family rules. Determine what is important to you and what sort of behaviors are not allowed in your house. Make sure everyone in your house sticks to these rules.
- Model the behavior you want from your child. They learn from you, so teach them how you expect them to act in different situations. This means you must watch what you say about others, especially when your child can hear.
- Have a plan to deal with your child's behavior. For example, every time your child curses try saying something like, “I don't like those words. Please use other words.” If you have a plan in place ahead of time, you will be more likely to stay calm when a thing happens.
- Let your child know what they can do instead. If it is not all right to share their ideas about the person in line in front of you with everyone in the grocery store, tell them they could whisper in your ear or squeeze your hand.
- Remain calm when your child does something inappropriate. Many times, they are just talking about what they see and don't understand that they are being rude.
- Refuse to react. Your child might be trying to get your attention or to get a reaction out of you. If you refuse to react, they might stop misbehaving on their own.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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