

Parenting Tips for Different Ages

Understanding Your Child's Behavior: Discipline That Works

Parenting is hard work. All parents get angry from time to time. Take a few minutes to calm down. If you stay calm, you can help your children learn better behaviors and keep a difficult time from getting worse.

Most children learn better from positive messages than negative ones. When children act up, it's important to help them learn better behavior in a way they understand. Children can understand more complicated ideas about their own behavior and how to change it as they get older.



Babies



Toddlers

Remember
All parents get angry but it's important to breathe and take time to calm down.



School Age Children




Tweens and Teens


Babies - Birth to 18 Months Old

Babies learn by using their senses – tasting, touching, smelling, hearing and seeing. Exploring the world is an important part of your baby’s growth, but sometimes it means that they make a mess or can even get into danger. Here are some ways that you can help them learn and stay safe.

Tips:

- **Distract your baby** when they get into things – try to get them interested in something else.
- **Baby proof your home.**
(Home Safety: Tips for Families With Young Children - [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org))
- **Keep a schedule** with them – try to stick to the same times every day. Babies feel safe when they have a routine. 
- **Take a break** when you need one - put your baby in a safe place like a crib or ask someone else to watch them for a little while.

When your baby cries:



- **They may be hungry** – See if they need a bottle or a healthy snack.
- **They may be tired** – Wrap them in a blanket, put them in their crib, and lower the lights; give them a warm bath to help them settle down.
- **They may be sick** – Hold and comfort them, and call your doctor if that doesn’t help.
- **They may want attention** – Hold them, play, talk or sing with them. 
- They may need a **diaper change**.
- **They may be hot or cold.** Wrap them in a blanket or take off some of their clothes.
- **Never spank or shake your baby!** This will not help them learn, and you can cause permanent damage. Shaking can even kill a baby. [Learn tips to soothing a crying baby here.](#)



Toddlers – 18 Months to 3 Years Old

Toddlers learn by exploring and copying other people.

Tips:

- **Praise them** when they are being good.
- **Be a role model** – show them how you want them to do things and behave. 
- **Give clear directions**, and try not to expect more than they can do.
- **Let them be independent** when you can – let them pick out their clothes, or choose a bedtime story.
- **Distract your toddler** when they are doing things you don't want them to do – try to get them interested in something else.
- **Child proof your home** – make sure any place they can get into is safe for them.
- **Keep a schedule** with them – try to stick to the same times every day. Children feel safe when they have a routine. 
- **Take a break** when you need one – Ask someone else to watch them for a little while.

When your toddler acts up:

- **They may be tired or hungry** – help them rest, or give them a snack
- **They may be bored or need comfort** – Give them something fun to do. Remember they can't pay attention to anything for very long – you may have to have a few different things ready to do. Or give them a hug.
- **Sometimes toddlers bite** when they are frustrated. If your toddler bites, take them away. Tell them that biting is not OK.
- **Messes are a part of life** – clean up together so that they learn how.



- Sitting still or being quiet can be hard for a toddler – **give them chances to be active** when you can.
- Toddlers become **toilet trained** at different ages. **Accidents are normal.** Never shame or scold your toddler if they have an accident – be patient.
- **Do not hit or spank them** – children who are spanked are more likely to become depressed and act in angry ways towards others. Talk to them in a way they can understand, and take them away if needed.
- **Never spank or shake your baby!** This will not help them learn, and you can cause permanent damage. Shaking can even kill a baby. [Learn tips to soothing a crying toddler here.](#)



School Age Children – 5 to 10 Years Old

School age children learn by being with friends. They want to do some things by themselves.

Tips:

- **Show your children** how you want them to act by the way you act. This includes not using swear words you don't want them to use.
- **Give clear directions.**
- Make sure that any **guns are unloaded and safely stored out of reach.** If you leave your children in someone else's home, make sure that that home is also a safe place for your children. (Guns in the Home: Keeping Kids Safe - [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org))
- Try to have **regular family routines**, like having meals together.
- **Be a good listener** – this teaches your children how to respect others. It shows them that you want to understand how they are feeling. Praise or reward good behavior.
- **Don't openly compare your children** to other children – encourage them to be their best.
- When children fight, **let them try to work it out themselves** as long as no one is being hurt.
- When your **children misbehave**, make them sit quietly in their room or take away a privilege for awhile. **Do not hit or spank your children.**

Tweens and Teens – 10 to 18 Years Old

Older children are more independent, but aren't yet fully grown, and they may not always think before speaking or acting.

Tips:

- **Show the values and behaviors** that you want your children to have.
- **Set reasonable rules.** Keep your rules and your expectations the same.
- **Be a good listener**, and let them know that you're interested.
- Try to make time to **do fun things together.**
- Make sure that any **guns are unloaded and safely stored out of reach.** (Guns in the Home: Keeping Kids Safe - [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org))
- Talk about **healthy relationships and safe sex.** Teach them about the dangers of online sex talk and pictures (Dating & Sex - [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org))
- Talk about the **dangers of alcohol and drugs.** Remember that even legal marijuana can cause permanent damage to a young person's developing brain.
- Have a **secret code** that your children can text to you if they need help getting out of an unsafe situation.



No Hit Zone

Parenting is hard. We are here for you.



No Hit Zones create places of comfort and safety for parents, families, and staff. A No Hit Zone sets an example within our community and shows UNM's commitment to effective parenting.

- More information about No Hit Zones and choices other than spanking can be found [here](https://nohitzone.com) (nohitzone.com).
- If you are struggling with your child's behavior or would like more information about parenting, you can also call Child Safety and Well-Being Clinical Services at [505-272-6849](tel:505-272-6849).

Children actually learn better from positive messages. UNM Children's Hospital and Pediatric Clinics are official No Hit Zones.

This means that:

- No adult shall hit a child
- No child shall hit another child
- No adult shall hit another adult
- No child shall hit an adult

Did you know?

- Spanking your child does not teach them how to behave well and can actually make a child's behavior worse.
- Spanking can lead to physical and mental health problems as adults.
- Children learn best when you show them good ways to get along in the world.

Remember:

- **Be realistic:** expect your child to act like a child.
- **Do the same things every day:** build structure and routine in your child's day.
- **Show positive ways to solve problems:** children learn by watching you.
- **Catch them being good:** praise your child when they show positive behavior.

