

Quick guide – challenging behaviour

The word, discipline means ‘to teach’ and it is important to remember that it is through observing their primary caregivers, that children can learn how to self-regulate, adapt, repair relationships, reflect and learn from mistakes. The goal of discipline is a long-term objective – through structured, clear boundaries, children understand the consequences of their words and actions. Behaviour is a form of communication and, if a child is misbehaving, we need to connect and get curious – what is triggering this? What is their unmet need?



Why are boundaries so important?

Boundaries are there to help instil our own values – they are there to help guide your child. These are family focused and unique to your household but how they are communicated is very important. By laying those parameters in a clear, concise manner, we can then praise when are children are working within these limits and making ‘good choices.’

Top tips and strategies:

Develop their skills of emotional self-regulation

All emotions are valid but not all behaviour is acceptable. When a child is in distress or is experiencing an emotional outburst – let’s reverse the roles. Consider, what does my child need from me right now? What kind of parent would I need if I were in her shoes? When a child is in a heightened state, there is very little point trying to communicate – this is not the time to teach. We need to support our children and provide them with tools to self-regulate. You could create a visual list of tools which may help them return to the ‘calm (green) zone’ e.g. putty, weighted blanket, wall push-ups, grounding exercises.

Acknowledge, validate, hold the boundary

Once the child has self-regulated, we can *then* address the behaviour. *“I can see that you were angry, I am sorry you felt like this. We all get angry but it is not acceptable to hit your sister. When you feel angry, what could you do instead?”*

Teach them the expected behaviour

You could use role-play here to explain exactly what is expected e.g. if your child is struggling to share, use this as a teaching moment. You could switch roles and pretend you’re the child and let your little one direct you through making better choices

Less ‘nos’, more ‘yeses’!

If we consider the language we use – have we made it explicit as to what we expect to see? Are our children prepared? We can rephrase our directions and enforce boundaries to really highlight what we want to see rather than what we don’t want to see e.g. Rather than, *“Don’t run in the shops”*, we could rephrase it *“We know we have to walk through the shops because we don’t want to hurt ourselves or others”* Rather than, *“No snatching”* we could say, *“If we want something, we need to ask permission first”*. Then of course when they make the good choice, lots of praise!

1:3 ratio

For every 1 ‘negative’ behaviour you have to address, highlight and share with them 3 ‘good choices’ they have made that day.

Logical consequences

We can highlight for our children that all actions have consequences. If they make a 'poor choice' then a consequence may come into force – however this needs to be relevant, respectful and realistic. For example, if your child refuses to complete homework, the logical consequence may be to send her into school and she may have to complete it in her own time. If, however, the consequence of not completing her homework is that she loses her phone for a month – we need to consider, is this relevant, respectful and realistic?

When-Then strategy

This tool helps motivate kids to complete the more mundane tasks. For example, we can say:

*“Connor, **when** you’ve brushed your teeth, **then** I can read you a bedtime story before bed.”*

*“Evie, **when** you’ve got your shoes on **then** you can pick the music for our car journey.”*

'I' statements

In order to encourage a child's emotional intelligence and literacy, teach them how to use 'I' statements to express their emotional state and also address their unmet need. E.g. *“I feel hurt when you ignore me because because I feel left out. I'd like us to have some time together.”*

If we ourselves model 'I statements' then our children are more likely to them use them e.g. Instead of, *“You are always arguing with me”*, we could say, *“I feel upset when you shout over me because I feel like you are ignoring me. I'd like us to take turns and speak to each other with our 'inside' voices please.”*

'Zoom out before we zoom in'

If a child is overwhelmed, take a minute to 'zoom out' and assess the environment and situation. Are they hungry? Tired? Over-stimulated? Bored? Sometimes a change of environment can help a child to take a break, pause and return refreshed.

Fill their attention bucket

If we don't keep that “attention bucket” full with positive attention, children may seek out any attention they can get – even negative attention. To spend quality time, without distractions may be a challenge (we are all busy parents!) but this time will be well-spent; think of this as an investment in your relationship with your children and in improving their behaviour. When you fill your children's attention buckets positively and proactively, your children will become more cooperative and less likely to seek out attention in negative ways.

Descriptive praise

It is important to explain to a child *why* they are receiving praise and acknowledgement. As tempting as it may be to respond to a child's good choice with a simple, 'Well done', by taking some time to really provide that positive reinforcement for that 'wanted' behaviour we are more likely to see it repeated. E.g. *“You were so patient then when I was on the phone - thank you for waiting.”*

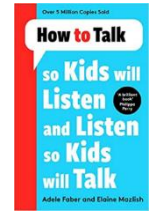
Connect, empathise and get curious

In that moment when a child is dysregulated, overwhelmed and struggling, it may be tempting to try and use this as a teaching moment. Sometimes the most powerful tool (maybe the only tool!) we have in that moment is our calming presence. Once we connect, and regulate we can then show empathy for them experiencing that uncomfortable emotion. We can then work together to 'dig deep' and get curious without too many questions. E.g. Rather than, *“Why are you always shouting at your sister? What has she done now?”* try *“I can see that you are struggling playing with your sister, you're getting angry – is that right? Tell me more about what's been happening...”*

Books

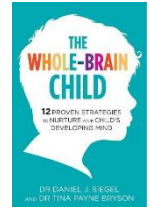
How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk by Adele Faber

Parenting experts Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish provide effective step by step techniques to help you improve and enrich your relationships with your children.



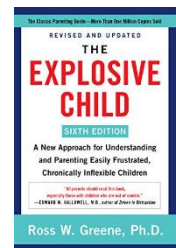
The Whole-Brain Child: by Dr Tina Payne Bryson and Dr. Daniel Siegel

In this pioneering, practical book for parents and carers, neuroscientist Daniel J. Siegel and parenting expert Tina Payne Bryson explain the new science of how a child's brain is wired and how it matures. Different parts of a child's brain develop at different speeds and understanding these differences can help you turn any outburst, argument, or fear into a chance to integrate your child's brain and raise calmer, happier children.



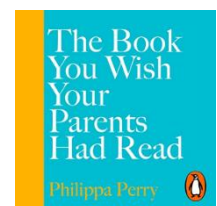
The Explosive Child by Ross W Greene PhD

Now in a revised and updated edition, the ground-breaking, research-based approach to understanding and parenting children who frequently exhibit severe fits of temper and other challenging behaviours, from a distinguished clinician and pioneer in the field.



The Book You Wish Your Parents Had Read (and Your Children Will Be Glad That You Did) by Philippa Perry

In this Sunday Times bestseller, leading psychotherapist Philippa Perry reveals the vital do's and don'ts of relationships.



No-Drama Discipline: the bestselling parenting guide to nurturing your child's developing mind by Daniel J. Siegel MD (Author), Tina Payne Bryson

No-Drama Discipline provides an effective, compassionate road map for dealing with such tantrums, tensions, and tears – without causing a scene. Based on recent discoveries about the brain that give us deep insights into the children we care for, what they need, and how to discipline them in ways that foster optimal development, this book offers a 'relational' approach that builds on children's innate desire to please their parents and get along well with others.

