
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to provide you with a guide for handling your child's problem behaviors. It presents a complete step-by-step approach to changing inappropriate behavior to appropriate behavior. It takes the guesswork out of how you handle discipline problems by offering specific techniques for dealing with various misbehaviors.

Often, our handling of discipline problems is an emotional reaction to the child's behavior. We don't think about whether our reaction is good for the child or our overall situation at home. Every discipline encounter with our children can either be an opportunity to help our children grow into the kind of people we want them to be—or it can be a screaming match. Rarely can it be both at the same time!

Parents often feel that they must “control” their children, when in reality, the only person a parent can control is himself or herself. It's true that we can sometimes force a child to do what we want him or her to do for the moment, but that certainly isn't the same as trying to figure out why the child is acting out so that we can help him or her choose to act differently next time. As parents, when we learn to control our own behavior and reactions, we are better positioned to help our children overcome their behavior problems.

This resource offers a step-by-step guide to many options for handling over 100 problem behaviors children may exhibit. It can help you learn how to handle discipline concerns effectively, keep yourself in control of the situation, and teach children self-discipline for the future.

Using the Model

Before you can begin trying to change your child's behavior, you have to properly identify that behavior. The identification must be specific and accurate. For example, the behavior of cheating is very different than the behavior of whining and requires different techniques to address the problem. You can't lump all problem behaviors into one pot and use the same approach for all. Therefore, the first step in selecting the proper techniques is identifying the behavior and its characteristics.

Please note: The names of the behaviors are not labels for children. They are simply descriptions of the behaviors and are provided to facilitate identification, cross-reference, and an understanding of how to handle discipline concerns effectively, stay in control of the situation, and teach your children self-discipline. The techniques apply to all levels of your child's behavior: first-time, occasional, and habitual. You must rely on your knowledge of the child to decide which techniques you want to use each time you counsel him or her.

Now let's look at how the information about each behavior is organized. Each type of behavior is divided into four sections, described below.

I. BEHAVIOR: How exactly is my child behaving? Study the behavior characteristics listed in this section. Does your child's behavior match the characteristics listed? It may be helpful to check the “Behavior” section of some of the other related types of behavior listed in the “See Also” section at the end of each behavior type, if you need more information or haven't quite found the right words to describe your child's behavior.

Pinpointing your child's observed or expressed behavior is vital because it helps you identify the exact characteristics of the behavior. It helps you avoid generalizing and enables you to zero in on the behavior you want to change. It also makes it easier to describe the problem behavior to the child or to teachers, in case the behavior is also a problem at school.

II. EFFECTS: How does my child's behavior affect other people at home and in school? Understanding how the behavior affects other people is another vital part of dealing with that behavior. If you take the time to observe the effects of the behavior in question, you'll find it much easier to pursue workable solutions designed to bring about positive and constructive change.

As you observe the effects of your child's behavior, keep in mind that your child's behavior may not be affecting everyone who comes in contact with him or her. The child's behavior may be affecting only the parent and not the rest of the family. Or sometimes the child's behavior may be a problem at school and not at home. Yet, if the child's behavior is a constant source of worry for the parent or prevents the teacher from teaching, then some changes in the child's behavior are needed. A home-school partnership is often very valuable in solving problems.

III. ACTION: Why is my child behaving this way, what unmet needs does he or she have, and what specific things can I do to help him or her behave better?

In this section of each behavior, we will cover the causes of the behavior and why the child is probably doing what he or she is doing. Let's take a few minutes now to go over what these reasons usually are.

Primary Cause of Misbehavior. The well-behaved child behaves well for a reason. Likewise, the child who acts up is doing it for a reason. The fact is that all behavior has purpose. This is the main reason we can't lump all discipline problems under one label and deal with them the same way. It won't work. The child who bullies doesn't have the same reasons for misbehaving as the child who act as the class clown does. The child who talks non-stop is different from the child who talks back.

One of the toughest—but most important—things we can do when we're trying to help a child behave in a better manner is discover the purpose of the misbehavior. We cannot treat any misbehavior effectively until we know the reasons for it. It isn't always easy to keep our cool and really think about why the child is misbehaving, but it will certainly pay off when we do it.

To say that there are only four reasons for misbehavior would be untrue. As the parent, you will understand your child and what causes him or her to have behavior problems better than anyone else can. However, the vast majority of misbehavior arises from four causes: lack of attention, lack of power, desire for revenge, and lack of self-confidence. For this reason, these four receive special attention in this resource. Let's discuss these four primary causes of misbehavior now.

- **Attention:** Most children gain attention in school or at home in normal, positive ways. However, some children feel that misbehaving is their best way to get attention. These children are the ones who constantly speak out without permission in school or make strange noises at the dinner table that force everyone to stop their conversation and pay attention. Some children will even tell us about all the bad things they have done that day. They are misbehaving in an attempt to gain attention.
- **Power:** The need for power also causes misbehavior. Children with this need argue a lot and refuse to follow rules. Remember, these children usually *feel defeated* if they do as they are told. They think they are losing if they do what their parents want them to do. Most commonly, we know these children as the defiant ones, the rule-breakers, and the bullies. They truly feel that *lack of power* lies behind all their troubles, and that more power would be the answer to all their problems. If they had more power, they believe, they would be telling parents what to do rather than vice versa and they'd be happier that way.
- **Revenge:** Some children find their places by being hated. *Failure has made them give up trying for attention and power.* Unfortunately, they find personal satisfaction in being mean, vicious, and violent. They will seek revenge against parents and other children or siblings in any way they can. They are the children who write on desks in school, beat up other children or siblings, threaten younger children, and vandalize. They are out to get even.

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- **Self-Confidence:** Lack of self-confidence is also a cause of misbehavior. Children who lack self-confidence honestly *expect* failure. They don't feel they have the ability to function in the classroom—but may feel completely adequate outside school or when they're supposed to be doing something connected with school. They frustrate us as parents because they are often capable of handling their schoolwork successfully—but they don't. We are angered because we feel their behavior is a cop-out. It is—except they really think they can't win in school. These children use inability—real or assumed—to escape participation. When they are supposed to be doing their homework, they play and look for distractions instead. Then they make excuses like “I couldn't do it” or “I'm dumb.” No amount of parental encouragement seems to make a difference to them.

Primary Needs Being Revealed. We all have physical needs that we are born with—called our primary needs—and if these needs aren't met, that can sometimes cause misbehavior. This section considers the primary needs being revealed by the misbehaving child. Watching how children behave in order to get their primary needs met can really help you get a handle on correcting discipline problems. No matter what our age, we seek continually to meet our primary needs. Therefore, when we as parents attempt to change the behavior of a child, one of our first considerations must be to look at primary needs *not* being met. These needs must be filled before the child can turn his or her attention to anything else—including better behavior. The primary needs are:

- **Hunger:** The need for food—or poor eating habits—can cause children to be restless or even hostile at home or in the classroom. Children on diets, or those who have stopped eating for any of a wide variety of reasons, will have difficulty concentrating in their classes or meeting their responsibilities around the house. Money problems can make it difficult for parents to feel that they are giving their children nutritious meals. All these possibilities may lead to behavior problems in the classroom and at home. Parents can talk with teachers or administrators about participating in breakfast and lunch programs at school that can help meet the children's needs and ensure that they are able to function better at home and in the classroom.
- **Thirst:** Excessive thirst may be the result of a medical problem. If you believe that your child may be too thirsty or if you notice a change in his or her habits, be sure to talk with a health care professional like your doctor or school nurse.
- **Gender/Identity:** Personal adjustment problems and misbehavior may result from a child's difficulty in establishing friendships, the loss of a boyfriend or girlfriend, or the breakup of parents. Personal problems in relationships at home or at school can often cause misbehavior problems. This is an important need of all people, and it should be examined carefully when a child's behavior is being evaluated.
- **Air:** Schools have the highest density of people per square foot of any place in a community, and when kids must work closely with each other in small, unventilated classrooms, some of them are likely to misbehave. A lack of air may also be related to a medical problem, especially for children with asthma. Likewise, various psychological problems, such as claustrophobia, may contribute to behavior problems at school or home.
- **Rest:** The primary need for rest is revealed often through misbehavior, which won't surprise any parent of a cranky three-year-old! There are many factors that keep children from getting enough rest, such as too much noise in the house late at night or too much stimulation from TV or video games. An older child may have a job or may be working on homework very late each night. Parents working split shifts may affect their children's sleeping habits. Use of certain medications may also contribute to a lack of sleep or abnormal drowsiness during the day. Think about which factors in your home or your child's life may be keeping him or her from getting enough rest, and talk to your doctor or school nurse if you have concerns.
- **Escape from Pain:** Of all the primary needs, this may be the most important one to consider when you're trying to figure out why your child is misbehaving. People will go to great extremes to escape pain, whether it's physical pain or emotional pain. In fact, they usually don't consider the consequences of their behavior when acting badly to escape pain. They are so intent on escaping the pain, they don't consider what other people think of their behavior or how it will affect others. We are all wired to escape pain. It's the choices we make to cope with the pain in our lives that can determine whether the results are seen by others as good behavior or as misbehavior.

A child may feel very “dumb” in a particular subject in school, for example, and this may cause him or her a great deal of pain. The child's choice of misbehavior may well be a means of covering the pain of not achieving. For instance, a child may be able to prevent others from finding out he is “dumb” in social studies by disrupting the class, especially if he thinks that the teacher won't call on him if she is distracted by disciplining him.

Children, like everyone else, experience a great deal of physical or mental pain. The pain may result from the loss of a parent through death or divorce, or from poor health, financial problems in the family, difficulty in relationships with family or friends, or trouble in school. Any failure that causes pain—even if it seems trivial to an adult—may be the major contributor to misbehavior. Remember that the child may know the behavior is wrong, but he or she may still misbehave in an attempt to reduce the pain. Reducing the pain becomes a primary motivator—and nothing anybody says seems to make a difference. Many discipline problems can be traced back to the primary need to escape pain. Could your child's behavior problems be an attempt to escape from some type of pain in his or her life? Take every opportunity you can to talk with your child about what's going on at home and at school. Don't hesitate to contact the school if you suspect your child's pain stems from something going on there. Remember, the school wants your child to do well, too.

- **Elimination of Waste:** The use—and lack of use—of restrooms causes many problems in school. It's a fact of life that some children need to go to the restroom at other than scheduled times. Some children may be shy or afraid to use the restrooms. There may be a medical problem that prevents a child from controlling himself or herself. As the parent, you're often aware of your child's habits—but you don't want to embarrass your child, either. If your child has issues with elimination of waste, talk discreetly with the teacher or school nurse to see what might help.

Secondary Needs Being Revealed. Besides the physical primary needs we are all born with, we also have secondary needs, which are psychological and learned. Remember, *all* humans have each of these needs, just in different degrees depending on our personalities. When we can meet our secondary needs, we can work toward goals and improve our self-concept. The secondary needs are a strong motivating force in all our lives—yet they are immaterial until the primary needs have been met. It's very hard to concentrate on learning the multiplication tables when you're hungry. Children will try very hard to meet secondary needs in a positive manner in the classroom and school if possible, without misbehaving. However, if they can't meet these needs in a good way, many children will try negative ways—misbehavior—to get those needs met.

To help children adjust their behavior, parents must appeal to those needs held in high esteem by their child. Rather than fight those needs, we need to meet them. Too often, we think these needs are abnormal. They are not! Only the intensity of the need varies from child to child—and from adult to adult. If we fight fulfillment of a need, we can cause a child to fight us—automatically.

The secondary needs are:

- **Gregariousness:** This is a child's need to associate with a group. This need is strong in children who really want to be part of a particular group at school or in the neighborhood. This need, if unmet, also causes children to be very upset if they are left out of a party, not chosen for a committee, or not asked for input on family activities, and if decisions are imposed on them with no explanations.
- **Aggression:** Children need to assert themselves. Parents must allow children to fulfill this need; otherwise, parents may find themselves being forced into confrontations for no particular reason. Include the child in certain decisions, involve the child in planning activities, and give the child responsibility for choosing certain courses of action the family may take. Letting a child with strong aggression have some control will go a long way toward channeling this tendency in positive ways.

Many children feel they have *no* say in anything, that no one listens to them or lets them be in charge of anything. For them, it is a terrible and helpless feeling. It doesn't mean the parents always have to do what the child demands, however. What it does mean is that the parent must listen to the child. The aggression need can often be met by just listening to and considering the child's point of view. It can be that simple.

- **Affiliation:** Developing, maintaining, and strengthening associations with others is a strong human need. Some children have a very strong need to be close to each other, but often they also have an intense desire to be close to the parent. They need someone in whom they can confide and trust. It makes them feel very secure and special, and they'll do anything to have such an affiliation—with parents, with other children or siblings, and in school activities, if these things are available. Or sometimes children who have no other options and a strong need to affiliate with someone will go looking in the wrong places. This is how young people can end up in gangs or with other people you as the parent would rather your child didn't associate with. We must be aware of the normal drive to ward off loneliness and find a "special person" that every child has. But looking in the wrong places for someone to feel close to is usually a cry of "I need an adult friend."

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- **Inquisitiveness:** People need to know what's going on. For some, it's a driving force. Sometimes we think our children are being nosy, and we brush them off. That's a big mistake! Children are motivated by the need to know. It is a motivation that enhances positive behavior and learning. Think about how curious babies are and how much they learn about their world by exploring it. People never lose that need to be "in the know." Our children also need to know how we feel about them—both as people and as our children. This is one reason parents must constantly be talking to their children and answering their questions. (Many parents have discovered the value of "car time" for keeping in touch with their kids. Car rides to and from school, soccer, piano lessons, or the grocery store are great opportunities to answer lots of questions your kids have about you and the world in general.)

These talks with our children should reveal the "whys" behind what we are doing and the decisions we have made for the family. Fulfilling the need to know can promote positive behavior. You will show respect and consideration for your child when you satisfy his or her need to know what's going on and that will help cut down on misbehavior.

- **Achievement:** All people have a need to succeed. They also have a need to be recognized for their success. The truth is that a great deal of misbehavior results because some kids feel they can't win in school or at home, and the only way they can get any recognition is through failure. As parents, we must be aware that success without recognition weakens motivation. Helping kids win and recognizing their achievements are two of the most important things we do. Remember, *any* improvement, no matter how small, is a positive, constructive achievement. Likewise, whenever children make an effort and the parent doesn't recognize the effort, they soon realize that they will get the same "reward" for doing nothing—so why bother to try? Be aware of your child's victories and celebrate them!
- **Power:** Children can express the need for power either positively or negatively, and for some children, power is an extremely strong need. Parents should recognize that children need to know that they count. Parents need to make children feel significant. Remember, children who feel that others believe they are insignificant, or that no one cares whether or not they are around, may soon develop behavior problems.

You as the parent must grant power, whenever possible, to your child. The child who cannot find a power base in the home or school may attempt to find it outside school in gangs or other negative ways. Likewise, when you give a child a job to do, make sure he or she has the authority and responsibility that go with the task. A sense of ownership is power. And children feel a sense of ownership when they are involved in shared decision making at home or at school.

- **Status:** Everybody wants to be "somebody." For some, this need is a driving force in their lives. Therefore, any dehumanizing effort or action by a parent is a mistake. If we are to meet this need, we should always make sure our children know we recognize and value their special qualities and talents.
- **Autonomy:** The need for autonomy is the need to be one's own boss, to be independent, and to have some control over one's own life. Parents can help children express this need by letting them make choices and set goals. Parents must be sensitive to opportunities to fulfill, whenever possible, the need all children have for autonomy.

Methods, Procedures, and Techniques. The rest of this section gives you strategies you can use to help your child improve his or her behavior. It is now your responsibility to select the techniques that you believe will most help your child. For instance, you may select one or two suggestions to use on your first try. Later, you may want to try other suggestions to see if they have more effect. If problems persist, seek help from friends or your child's school. Be open to all possible solutions.

IV. MISTAKES: What common discipline mistakes of parents may make the problem behavior worse? Often our solution to misbehavior at home is to react to the behavior personally rather than approach the problem calmly and effectively. This section discusses some typical parent reactions that may make the problem worse or cause it to last longer. Thinking about these reactions should help parents avoid mistakes that can be destructive to the parent, the child, and the rest of the family. One very common mistake is to fail to get the help of experts. Medical, educational, and mental health professionals can all be wonderful sources of information and assistance. Since children are all unique and no book can possibly cover all the various situations that parents and children may find themselves in, don't hesitate to get outside help if your best efforts aren't working for your family.

*When you are concerned
because your child continually...*

DEFIES AUTHORITY

I. BEHAVIOR: How exactly is my child behaving?

1. Openly challenges parents or teachers at almost every opportunity.
2. Talks back.
3. Dares punishment.
4. Usually appears unaffected by what parents say or do—and may even laugh at it.
5. May even refuse to accept punishment.
6. Usually overly critical of parents' sense of fairness.
7. Quick to claim injustice by saying, "Nobody likes me." Thus, extremely conscious and critical of parents' treatment of him or her.
8. Does not appear to feel very good about himself or herself; seems to think he or she is not being treated well by others, including siblings, other children, parents, and teachers.
9. Loses sight of the fact that his or her behavior is actually the reason for what is happening in relationships with other people.
10. Has little self-control.
11. Often highly emotional.
12. Tries to rationalize or justify what's happening as someone else's fault.
13. Picks fights with siblings or other children—in addition to taunting parents. Picks fights at school too—over the smallest of incidents, which he or she claims are significant.

II. EFFECTS: How does my child's behavior affect other people at home and in school?

1. Neither parents nor teachers know how to respond to or handle this child.
2. Meals, events, and lessons are disrupted.
3. Rules are challenged.
4. Home and classroom are in turmoil and crises arise daily.
5. Parents experience much anguish.
6. Parents feel uneasy and may even become ineffective.
7. Parents worry about disciplining other children because they haven't been successful with the defiant child.
8. If this child's behavior is allowed to go unchecked, siblings may question parents' fairness when they are reprimanded.
9. Tension becomes an ever-present condition at home.

III. ACTION: Why is my child behaving this way, what unmet needs does he or she have, and what specific things can I do to help him or her behave better?

1. Primary cause of misbehavior:
 - ▮ Revenge: This child wants to be disliked. Failure has made him or her give up trying to get attention in an acceptable way.
2. Primary needs being revealed:
 - ▮ Escape from Pain: This child is feeling a lot of pain and his or her behavior demonstrates this pain.

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- ▶ Gender/Identity: This person's interactions with people are very negative.
3. Secondary needs being revealed:
 - ▶ Aggression: This person is using assertion as a means of survival. This assertion must be directed toward a more positive involvement.
 - ▶ Achievement: Personal responsibility is a form of achievement for this child.
 - ▶ Power: A form of power must be offered to this child.
 - ▶ Status: Everything must be done to demonstrate the worth of this child. This does not mean you accept his or her behavior, but you do accept the person.
 - ▶ Autonomy: The child needs many ways to be in control of his or her life other than defiance.
 4. Regardless of the situation, never get into a "yes you will" contest with this child. Silence is a better response.
 5. Whatever you do, don't lose your dignity, and never, never raise your voice or argue with the child.
 6. Use the "Third-Person" technique. Remember, you are the outlet, not the cause, for this child's defiance—unless you are shouting, arguing, or attempting to handle him or her with sarcasm. Therefore, don't take the defiance personally. Rather, say, "John, what's the matter? That doesn't sound like you," or "What's making you so upset?" By using this approach, even if it doesn't reflect your feelings, you place yourself in the position of a third person who can help rather than affront, and you can maintain both your dignity and your position of authority. In addition, you emphatically convey to other children that the defiant child is the problem, not you. If you don't use this approach, especially in front of other children, you may feel forced into saying or doing something that will only aggravate the situation.
 7. If a child says, "I won't do it," or "You can't make me," don't let the child make you believe his or her defiance is directed toward you. Again, become a third-party participant by saying in a questioning or even bewildered way, "What's the matter?" or "That's not like you." This reaction may not agree with your feelings, but it will produce the best results. Follow this response with "What happened to make you so upset?" or "Is there anything I can do to help you?" If the child replies, "Yes, get off my back," don't lose your composure. Rather, continue using the third-person stance and the problem has a chance for a solution rather than a guarantee of an unfortunate scene.
 8. The "Delayed Parent Reaction" also works well. For example, if a child says, "I won't do it," do not say anything for a moment. Rather, look at him or her in surprise and say, "I don't think I heard you." This response gives the child a chance to retract the statement—to change unacceptable behavior into an apology without a reprimand. If your situation with this child has already deteriorated to the point that you could not use this approach in front of other children, then do it privately. This problem can never be handled past this point publicly. Sometimes, you can only try to quiet the child by saying, "Let's not talk about it here. Let's visit later when you can tell me everything that's on your mind."
 9. Speak to this child one-on-one in a quiet, private, neutral place.
 10. Be caring, but honest. Tell your child exactly what it is that is causing problems as far as you are concerned. Be sure you listen to him or her as well. In the process, insist upon one rule—that you both be respectful.
 11. Avoid power struggles with this child. They will get you nowhere.
 12. Try to convince the child that he or she must produce in order to survive in a meaningful way.
 13. Give this child some responsibilities.
 14. Look for various group activities so the child can have experiences with peers.
 15. Always listen to this child. Let him or her talk. Don't interrupt until he or she finishes.
 16. Ask if time alone would help, but don't force it on the child prior to talking about it. Such "surprises" will only make him or her more defiant.
 17. Make the child a part of any plan to change behavior. If you don't, you'll become the enemy.
 18. Above all, reach an agreement with your child on how you will treat each other.
 19. Be very specific in telling the child what behavior is unacceptable.

IV. MISTAKES: What common discipline mistakes of parents may make the problem behavior worse?

1. Getting involved in “yes you will” contests with these children.
2. Becoming emotionally involved.
3. Losing your dignity, raising your voice, or arguing with the defiant child.
4. Feeling you are the cause of the defiance. This is not true unless you shout, argue, or attempt to handle the child with sarcasm in retaliation. These tactics can increase the intensity of the problem.
5. Taking this defiance personally.
6. Dealing with the child in front of others, rather than on a one-to-one basis in private.
7. Trying to get other children on your side.
8. Assigning unusually harsh and inappropriate punishments in retaliation.
9. Issuing threats which you are really not prepared to carry out or capable of carrying out.
10. Trying to appease the defiant child—or letting the child think you are afraid of him or her.

SEE ALSO:

- Feels Angry
- Pushes Authority
- Hates Others
- Acts Like an “Animal”
- Acts Disrespectfully
- Behaves Too Aggressively

