

# Teaching your toddler about GOOD behaviour



Toddlers need discipline, limits and guidance. They need to feel safe and secure while learning to get along with others and to live in society. The best discipline leads to children learning self-discipline.

Discipline is not physical punishment! Discipline is about teaching your child what to do, and setting clear limits about what not to do that your child can understand. Discipline should be positive and used to encourage good behaviour, and to stop bad behaviour.

Here are some positive things to do:

- praise your toddler when they do something well e.g. when they eat their dinner, put their toys away, play well with their brothers and sisters



- teach what you want (say it clearly and show a young child)
- distract or offer alternatives if your child is doing something you don't like instead of saying 'Don't'
- give your child a choice of something similar he can do, e.g. 'You can play your drum outside or play a quiet game in here'



- use consequences – helping your child to learn from what she has done e.g. when she makes a mess, get her to help you clean it up
- ignore things that don't matter. They are more likely to stop if no one notices
- think about what you are about to say - how would you feel if an adult spoke to you in this way.



## MAKING THE RULES

When telling your child what you want him to do, make sure you:

- have only a few rules** because too many rules can be confusing and lead to failure
- are clear.** Saying 'No' to your toddler without explanation of why it's wrong means little to him and he is likely to do it again. If you give too much information at once he won't remember and if you don't give enough he won't know what to do
- both understand what you mean.** 'Be polite' may not mean anything to a very young child
- choose your time well.** Trying to teach your son while he is watching his favourite television program is not likely to be successful
- know what your child is able to do.** If the task is too hard your child may fail and you may feel disappointed or angry
- don't give your toddler a choice if there isn't one**
- don't give mixed messages to your child.** The way you look can give a different message from what you say. Laughing at your son's mischievous behaviour while you say "No" may leave him wondering if you approve or not
- are prepared to back up what you say with action.** If you do not follow through with what you said would happen if he disobeyed, your child is likely to disobey next time.

**'Time in'**

'Time in' means to remove your child from the situation that she cannot manage to spend time with an adult. Keep her with you while you help to settle her, or just hold her until she is able to get calm again. By being with her through this you are teaching her about managing feelings and difficult situations.

'Time in' can be a more positive and effective way of teaching than 'time out'.

**'Time out'**

It is never helpful to use time out for children under the age of three years. It is often more helpful to remove your child from a difficult situation and keep her with you for a while. It is especially important for an adult to stay near if your child's feelings are very strong.

If you are getting too stressed and are likely to harm your child, make sure they are safe with someone else and then take some 'time out' yourself. For more support see page 23.

**Some discipline IS NOT OK**

Hitting, punching or striking a child is never acceptable. In NSW it is against the law to use excessive physical punishment against a child. This law applies to parents and to people acting in the place of a parent.

The law says that it is unacceptable to use physical force on:

- any part of your child's head or neck (unless it is insignificant)
- any other part of your child's body if the harm it causes lasts for more than a short time.

***There are more effective ways of disciplining children than using physical punishment. If you use physical punishment with your toddler chances are they will copy you and bully others.***

**Help! My child bites...**

If your toddler is going through a biting stage – don't despair! Biting is fairly common among young children. Biting is often very painful and frightening for the child (or adult) who is bitten. It can also be frightening for the child who bites, because it upsets the other child and makes adults angry. Children bite for different reasons – to see what it's like or because they feel frustrated, stressed or powerless.

Biting is one way that babies explore the world. They put everything into their mouths – it's common for babies to bite your breast when they are feeding.

**What parents can do**

- ✿ Get in first and try to avoid situations that your child can't cope with – keep play groups small, make sure your child doesn't get tired and stressed by playing for too long.
- ✿ Try and protect your child so that she doesn't need to bite.
- ✿ If she is playing with older children, explain to them how your child feels and ask them to share toys and games.
- ✿ Constantly supervise small children and make separate play places for older and younger children if necessary.
- ✿ Step in when two children may be fighting over the same toy.
- ✿ If your child has already bitten, quickly tell her that she is not to bite and remove her from the situation and keep her with you for a while before letting her return.

**Remember to always comfort your child - whatever the reason for the bite. Whatever you do, don't bite back or respond by physically punishing your child - it only teaches them to be violent towards others.**

