

# Child Find Chats: Understanding and Improving your Preschool Child's Behavior

---

Contributors: Courtney Barti, EdS NCSP, Lu Klipple, MA CCC/SLP  
& Dawn Marie Harvey, MED

Presented by:  
Dawn Marie Harvey and Lu Klipple

# What most children are doing

## Age 2

Sentences with 2-4 words

Follow simple 2 step related instructions

Show more independence

Show defiant behavior

Play mainly beside other children



## Age 3

Copy adults and friends

Understand “mine,” “his” and “hers”

Get upset with major changes in routine

Show a wide range of emotions

Follow instructions with 2 or 3 steps

Talk well enough for strangers to understand

Speak in sentences

Converse with others (2 or 3 exchanges)

Play make-belief

# What most children are doing

## Age 4

Can use future tense

Speak clearly

Can tell a simple story using full sentences



## Age 5

More likely to agree with rules

Want to please friends

Want to be like friends

Can tell what's real and make-believe

Sometimes demanding / sometimes cooperative

# What is behavior?

- Observable actions
- Functional to meet a goal or need
- Form of Communication
- Developmental skill that can be taught (the child may not know what is appropriate)
- Learned: it has been effective (in meeting the child's need) or reinforced



# Factors that influence behavior...

PHYSICAL

MEDICAL

SENSORY DIFFERENCES

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND TEMPERAMENT

FAMILY CULTURE

All children demonstrate negative behaviors sometimes.



Negative behaviors become more problematic as they occur more often and are more intense.

# Typical Behavior Concerns in Preschoolers

- Frustration
- Physical expressions of anger
  - Yelling, crying, tantrums, holding breath, throwing
- Crying at separation
- Saying “No”
- Not sharing



# The World of Toddlers

Want to explore the world without the skills to handle it

- Underdeveloped language skills
- Parents are beginning to tell them “no”
- No experience to draw from
- Underdeveloped frontal lobe (responsible for planning, logic, reasoning, working memory and self-control)
  - No sense of time and patience (wanting is needing)
  - Skewed sense of cause-and-effect (fear of bathtub, they could go down the drain)
  - Fear their parents will abandon them
  - Poor problem solving skills
  - Can't identify and label the emotions they are feeling



Toddlers are living in the moment. Their world is amazing and terrifying and frustrating and unpredictable.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ycoXiEDBZk>

# Toddlers - What can you do?

- Remain calm
- Remember that YOU are the adult
- Talk about it afterwards (validate their feelings)
- Try to head off tantrum -triggering situations
  - \* make sure he is getting enough rest
  - \* make sure she/he is NOT hungry
  - \* give a “heads up” before transitioning
  - \* watch how much you say NO
  - \* watch for signs of overstress

What if adults acted like toddlers?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZl\\_rCJtTsg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZl_rCJtTsg)

*As children develop, behaviors tend to serve a function. Figuring out the function of your child's behavior will help you figure out how to respond.*

What does this behavior do for your child?

What does your child get in return for this behavior?



Consider one specific behavior you  
want to change.

# Typical Functions of Behavior for Preschoolers

Learned Helplessness

Attention

Escape/Avoidance

Revenge

Power/Control

What is the function of this child's behavior?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T2R8pTpcoo>

# ABCs of Behavior

Antecedent -> Behavior <- Consequence





# ABC Example:

**Antecedent (what happens before):** Child wants candy and is told no.

**Behavior:** Child starts screaming and throws a tantrum.

**Consequence (what happens after):** After a few minutes, parent gives the child the candy.



**Behavior:** Child throws a toy or pushes another child.

**Antecedent:**

- Teacher was paying attention to another child

**Behavior:** Child throws a toy or pushes another child.

**Consequence:**

- Teacher talks to the child that's upset or child gets sent to the director's office or removed from play completely.



# *What can you do?*

*Prevent the behavior by changing what happens before.*

*Decrease the behavior by changing what happens after.*

# Strategies for Prevention

- Create family rules and clear expectations
- Change how you give instructions
- Give choices
- Change the environment
- Prepare your child for transitions or changes in routines
- Teach coping strategies

# Create Family/Class Rules

## • Family Rules •

**be kind**

**Try your best**

**BE GRATEFUL**

**HELP OUT**

**BE HONEST**

**respect one another**

**laugh & have fun**

- Be responsible (help clean up messes/toys)
- Be respectful (use manners, share, be kind to others)
- Be safe (hold hands on walks, stay on the sidewalk, climb down carefully from high structures)
- Be honest (tell me what really happened)

**Parent/Caregiver needs to follow the rules as well!**

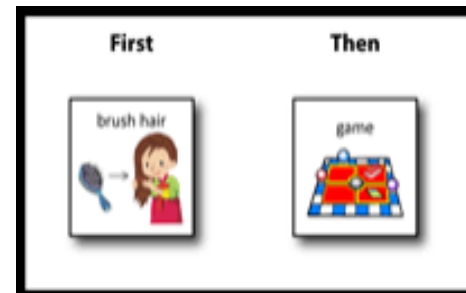
# Set clear expectations

- **Use “I need” language**
  - I need quiet in the car, so I can think about driving.
- **Add descriptions of things they CAN DO**
  - You may quietly look at books in the car.
- **Let them know the consequences ahead of time**
  - If you are loud, I will stop driving until you are quiet.



# Change how you give instructions

- Use short, single step directions
- No trigger words (e.g. no, don't, stop)
- State in positive terms or what you want your child to do and not what you want your child to stop doing
- Tell, don't ask
- Build direction into routine (after lunch we're going to..)
- Use first/then (first you pick up, then we can have snack)
- Use choices
- Give extra prompts or cues



# Provide Choices

## The Magic Wand



- WIN-WIN solution
- Offer limited choices that YOU can provide

“It’s time to go inside/take a bath....

Would you like to go on your own



or would you like to be carried?”



# Change the Environment



- Create a routine (Mealtimes, Bedtimes)
- Organize or structure the situation (new or change)
- Keep items kids can't have out of reach
- Provide appropriate toys, rotate toys
- Provide a variety of play locations and types of play
- Build in structured games
- Offer motor breaks
- Meet sensory needs



# Prepare for Transitions

- Warnings
- Reminders
- Picture schedule of day
- Visual Clock (hourglass or iPad)

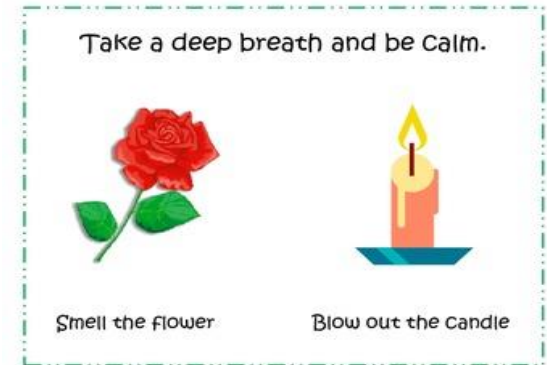


*Takes ownership off of parents! The timer says...*



# Teach Coping Strategies

- Identifying feelings (emotion faces)
- Identifying level of escalation
- Deep breathing
- Sensory items



5	Rage, Furious	
4	Angry, Mad	
3	Frustrated, Confused, Annoyed, Sad	
2	Nervous, Worried, Anxious	
1	Happy, Calm, Satisfied, Pleased, Okay	

# Cozy Corner

- Have your child take ownership
- Post coping strategies on the wall
- Child can go on their own as needed to regulate themselves
- Child can be gently guided to calm
- This area should never be used as punishment



Even with the best  
laid plans,  
inappropriate  
behaviors can still  
occur.



# *What can you do?*

*Prevent the behavior by changing what happens before.*

*Decrease the behavior by changing what happens after.*

# Responses to Behavior/Consequences

- **Stay calm – be in control of your own emotions**
- Ignore the behavior (if not causing harm)
- Managing Tantrums
- Logical and Natural Consequences
- Take a break/Time Out
- Reward the positive – using behavior specific praise
- Consider reward/behavior chart
- Give rewards/privileges

Response must be consistent with...

the **function** of the behavior.

# Ignoring Behaviors

- **Works best when the function is attention**
- Inform your child that you will wait until they are finished - **Do not give any attention for misbehavior**  
(no looking or talking at/about the behavior)
- Do not use for aggressive or dangerous behaviors  
(causing harm to self/others or damage of property)
- Combine with rewards for positive behavior - **Ignore the negative behavior and reward any desired behavior**





# Managing Tantrums



- It is ok for your child to be angry.
  - Allow the tantrum behaviors to play out on their own, as long as your child is safe.
- 
- It is important for children to learn how to express anger appropriately. TEACH them strategies.
  - Reasoning with a child *during* a tantrum DOES NOT WORK.
  - If possible, distract or interrupt and redirect.

# Logical and Natural Consequences

**Logical consequence:** something created by the parent, related to the behavior

- The toy will be taken away for the day if it isn't played with appropriately.

**Natural Consequence:** something that happens on its own

- Toy breaks when child throws it.



# Take a Break / Time-Out



- **Don't use time out if the child's goal is avoidance**
- The number of minutes is determined by the age
- Time-out should be in a consistent area (not cozy corner)
- Do not interact with the child during the time out
- If child leaves time-out, gently/quietly lead them back
- A child should be welcomed back after the time out: always talk about what to do different next time at a level the child can understand – end on a positive note

# Reward Positive Behaviors

- *For every response to a negative behavior, provide 4 responses to positive behaviors* - **Praise works better than error correction**
- **Catch your child being good.** Talk about the positive behaviors you want to see. Point them out frequently and consistently.
- Praise and reward the behaviors when you see them. **Use specific, consistent and frequent praise.**
- Use verbal or non-verbal (high-five, hug, smile) praise
- **Praise the behavior and not the child.**



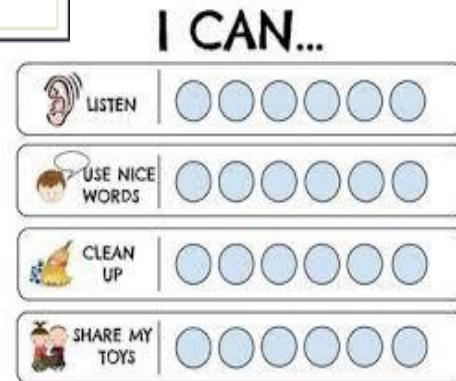
# Use Behavior Specific Praise

*Identify and define both your child and the behavior*

- Praise the completion of a task  
“You put all the toys away!”
- Praise your child when they show a talent  
“You built a great tower with your blocks.”
- Praise positive character traits/following family rules  
“That was responsible/respectful/safe when you ...”  
“That was helpful/kind/considerate when you ...”
- Praise for resisting negative behavior positively  
“I like the way you walked with me on the sidewalk.”



# Consider a Reward Chart/Container



## Charts:

- focus on one to two behaviors you want to see
- make time frames short (adjust as needed)
- remember developmental expectation and thinking skills

## Container:

- Catch them being good, earn tickets
- “cash” them in
- never taken



# Tangible Rewards

- Can be an object or a privilege
- Use only with specific behavior and reduce when behavior goal has been met (toilet training)
- Offer reward immediately
- Avoid extravagant rewards
- Rewards may need to be modified frequently to peak interest
- NEVER take away earned rewards
- Decrease as behaviors are learned



# “Privilege” Ideas

- Going to the park
- Playing with a special toy
- Getting a piggyback ride
- Having a bubble bath
- Watch a special movie
- Making a special treat
- Having a picnic
- Taking a walk with parent(s)
- Going out for a special treat
- Going on a special errand with parent(s)
- Helping choose an activity
- Helping parent(s) with grown-up task
- Riding a bike with parent(s)
- Playing a game with parent(s)





Give things time to work.

Be consistent.

Don't be discouraged if the behavior worsens before it gets better.

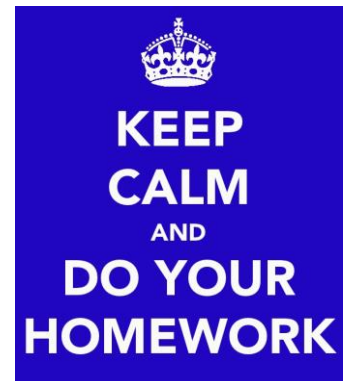
Positive responses for  
good behavior increase  
frequency of good  
behavior.

**For every negative response given,  
give 4 positive responses**

# Homework for Caregivers

Pick an hour a day watching/playing -  
look for 10 positive behaviors to praise.

Create responses to negative behaviors  
**BEFORE** they happen.





# How to Contact Child Find

Child Find Office  
20 Union Street NW  
Leesburg, VA 20176  
571-252-2180

website: <https://www.lcps.org/ChildFindCenter>

Go to LCPS.org, click on the FAMILIES tab, click  
on CHILD FIND CENTER

# Upcoming Child Find Chats

- January 28<sup>th</sup> – Raising Young Communicators
- March 10<sup>th</sup> – Screen Sense for Young Communicators

LCPS Administration Building

6 – 8 pm

# Thank you!

