

Top Tips for Responding to Behaviour in Young Children

Children need a safe 'container' in which to grow and thrive. We help provide this by creating a stimulating and challenging environment in which they can learn and test safely. We further support this by setting appropriate limits, appreciating behaviour we like and ignoring minor behaviour we don't like.

Language is an important tool in responding to children's behaviour. We will also want to observe, get to know a child and their family and consider what might be likely triggers for different behaviours.

Say what you *do* want, rather than what you *don't*

For example: "I'd like you to walk on the pavement" *rather than* "Don't walk in the road!", "Let's sit really quietly ... like tiny, wee mice!" *rather than* "Stop shouting!" or "Stop that Noise!"

Yes rather than No

Speak in the positive, for example: "Yes, we can have a story time, once we've cleared up the lunch things" *rather than* "No, not yet, we have to tidy up first". Young children respond much better to yes than no. Aim for 10 Yes's for every No.

Limited choice

"Would you like to walk, or ride in the buggy?" (This would be a good choice if you can't carry a child, as you have two older children who are walking and you need your hands free). Or "Would you like milk or water to drink?" And as a parent: "I need to go in five minutes, shall we say our good-bye here or by the door?"

Ignore the bad, notice the good

Invest some time noticing and telling children when they do something you like. This is called Positive Attention. For example: "Great hand washing!", "Who tidied all these toys away? Good job!" or "Thank you for keeping quiet while I talked to Sarah". Appreciate good behaviour whenever you can, however small and be specific.

Share positive comments like this with a child and their parent(s).

Any attention is better than none. Some children learn that to get attention, they have to behave in a negative way, although this is more usual with children aged 3+. Good habits should start early, so letting babies and very young children know when they have achieved something, or managed a new piece of behaviour will stand you in good stead.

