

Leaflet for parents

Understanding behaviour:

A child's perspective

- Even when I try to be good, she doesn't think I am.
- Why does it always happen to me? I don't mean it to go wrong. I want a new mummy – a nicer one.
- It's more exciting to be naughty – it's too hard being good all the time.
- If she can say NO to me, I don't have to do what she wants.
- If Daddy shouts at Mummy, why can't I?
- Nobody loves me. They would rather I wasn't born – it's not my fault.
- I'll get my own back for them being so horrible to me.
- Ever since that baby came, no one thinks I'm the best anymore.
- I can look after myself. I don't need Mummy and Daddy.
- Mum loves her more than me.
- Why should I have to say sorry? They started it.
- I want to go to bed please, Mummy, but I'm frightened of the monsters.
- He'll give in in a minute if I keep on screaming.
- I don't want to be naughty, but nobody notices when I'm good.
- Why can't I do this today? Daddy let me yesterday.
- She doesn't stop to listen and understand why I'm doing this.



A parent's perspective

- What am I doing wrong? It must be my fault.
- He's so naughty; he keeps throwing the toy out of the pushchair when I'm shopping.
- She screams when I'm on the phone.
- When we are out, other people stare when he has a tantrum. It's so embarrassing.
- Her sister was an easy baby, but she's SUCH hard work!
- I'm so exhausted. I could really do without this right now.
- He's doing it to wind me up.
- I know he's only little, but I just need him to get on with it so I can get on with all these jobs.
- Everyone else is managing. Why do I feel like I'm losing the plot!
- I'm a Dad. I'm meant to be in control. This is just humiliating.
- The house is a mess. I'm a mess. I can't get her to do anything. I feel so out of control!
- Why does it have to take so long for us to leave the house?
- I hate having to repeat myself and then I end up shouting. If only they'd listened the first time. They drive me crazy.
- Sometimes, it's just easier to give her my phone for some peace and quiet.

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Leaflet for parents

How to help your child develop emotionally and behave well

Build a positive relationship with your child

Building a positive relationship with your child is the best way to help your child develop positive emotional wellbeing. As a parent you have a central part in helping your child learn how to tolerate frustration, learn to calm down, know how to behave acceptably in society and relate to others in a healthy way.

Showing your child that you are listening to them and that you understand that they are trying to communicate with you is an important part of developing a two-way relationship. You may not always know immediately what they are attempting to tell you but they will feel more secure knowing that you are open to hearing about their feelings.

Show your child you are listening to them

Find support for yourself

There may be times when both you and your child might find feelings overwhelming. It is at these times that logical clear thought seems to be most difficult. Finding support for yourself is an extremely important part of your emotional wellbeing. In taking care of your emotions you may feel better able to help your child with his. Regaining a sense of calm may make what you thought was an unmanageable situation seem less difficult.

Parents have often commented that at difficult times it is hard to look past your child's behaviour and think about how your child is feeling. Finding ways to stay calm can not only support you but also help you to look past the behaviour and see the message your child may be giving and why they behaved in that particular way.

Stay calm and try to work out what your child is feeling

Accept angry and frustrated feelings and offer calm or comforting words and actions

Helping your child to calm down so that they will eventually learn what it feels like to calm themselves is an important skill for life. For example staying close to the child and offering words of comfort and an affectionate gentle hug to let them know you are there for them and helping them to cope with their anger and frustration. As children get older, being able to tolerate frustration and cope with strong emotions may positively affect the way they behave towards other people.

Children respond far more positively towards loving, predictable behaviour and clear boundaries. Avoiding threats and harsh punishment, smacking and excessive shouting will help both you and your child develop a more respectful and positive relationship. Giving children a way of saving face and an opportunity to change their behaviour is important in helping them to learn that relationships are about how both people feel.

Give your child a way to back down without losing face

Lay foundations by praising positive behaviour

Choosing behaviour techniques such as positive praise and encouragement, distraction, time to calm down, or rewarding good behaviour instead of focusing on difficult behaviour, will help lay the foundations for later negotiations on acceptable limits to behaviour.

Boundaries and rules are often an important part of family life. They can offer a sense of security and predictability for your child. Boundaries that are most effective are those that are appropriate to your child's age.

Rules and routines help children feel safe...

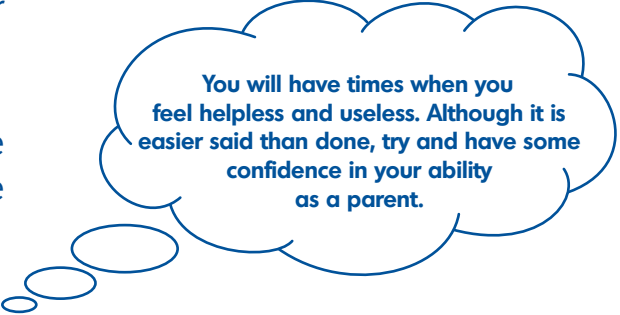
... but be flexible where necessary

While it is good to be consistent in putting agreed rules and boundaries into place, it is also helpful for a degree of flexibility. There may be occasions when it is appropriate not to stick rigidly to the rules such as when your child is ill.

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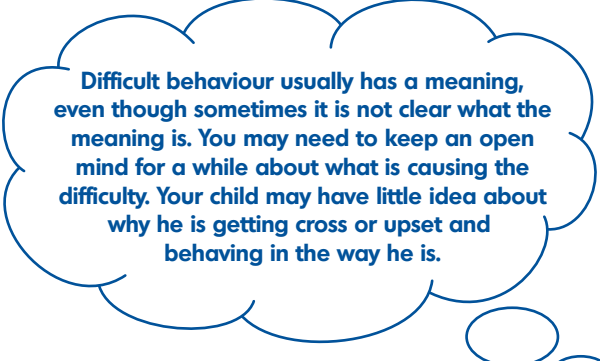
If boundaries are changed for other reasons it is best to avoid making decisions at the height of an argument or in anger. The message about new rules may be lost as one or both of you struggle to keep control of your emotions.



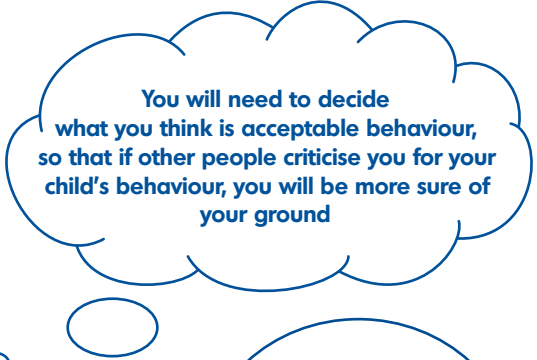
You will have times when you feel helpless and useless. Although it is easier said than done, try and have some confidence in your ability as a parent.

Do not make unrealistic rules. Make a few rules and stick to them

As your child grows and develops there will be decisions to be made about changes in boundaries. Talking to your child about why new boundaries are planned will help them co-operate more readily.

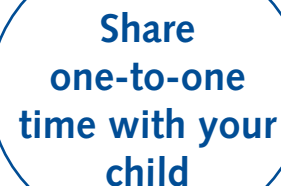


Difficult behaviour usually has a meaning, even though sometimes it is not clear what the meaning is. You may need to keep an open mind for a while about what is causing the difficulty. Your child may have little idea about why he is getting cross or upset and behaving in the way he is.

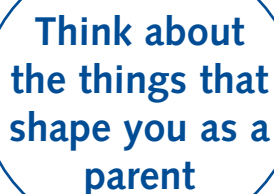


You will need to decide what you think is acceptable behaviour, so that if other people criticise you for your child's behaviour, you will be more sure of your ground

Sharing time with your child to help develop a positive relationship is important. Within a family children may have different individual needs. This may include giving different age-appropriate bedtimes.



Share one-to-one time with your child



Think about the things that shape you as a parent

It may be useful to spend some time thinking about the way you want to parent your child. You may choose to discuss this with your partner and family members. Each parent or carers' experience of being parented as a child themselves may be different and can raise difficult issues for some couples who may feel they want to parent their own children differently. Children can feel confused by receiving different messages from adults in their lives, so it might be really useful to think about how you would like to be as a parent.

Understanding Childhood

Understanding Childhood is a series of leaflets written by experienced child psychotherapists to give insight into the child's feelings and view of the world and help parents, and those who work with children, to make sense of their behaviour.

This leaflet was originally published by the Child Psychotherapy Trust.

Leaflets available from:
<https://childpsychotherapy.org.uk/resources-families/understanding-childhood>

tempers and tears in the twos and threes



It's a long way from being a helpless baby to becoming a relatively independent three or four year old, ready to go to playgroup or nursery. It can be an exciting journey of discovery – but it can also seem like a very bumpy ride for both you and your child.

As children move towards their second birthday, they want to take part in what is going on around them – exploring and playing, watching and imitating others, using their first words. They now feel that they are a person in an interesting world of other people and they want to join in.

What it is like to be two or three

Your two year old is discovering all sorts of things that they can't do or mustn't do. They are waging a constant battle with their own passionate wants, hopes and fears.

They have feelings that they can't yet manage by themselves without tempers or

tears. They are still struggling to sort out who they are and what they feel about the people who care for them – why they love them one moment and hate them the next. They can't just ask for your help. Instead, they mess you around with contradictory demands because that's how helpless and confused they feel.

Young children react very differently to the triumphs and setbacks of their second and third years so they need different kinds of support from their parents.

Being bossy

Some children can't bear to feel little and helpless. They refuse to accept that there are things they can't yet manage. Being bossy can be a way of covering this up and trying to make others feel small. They can be so convincing that, as parents, we may sometimes come to believe they don't need us or may feel so irritated that we want to cut them down to size.

But bossy two year olds really need someone to offer them love and care even when they don't seem to want it.

Being fussy

Many children of two or three develop all sorts of fads and rituals that they absolutely insist on. From a parent's point of view it can seem silly and tyrannical, but how does it look to a small child?



Everyone is expecting them to give up being a baby and become more independent. But they may feel as if the grown-ups are always interfering and bossing them around. When they insist on wearing something strange, or doing things in a particular order, they may be trying to get you to recognise that they have their own choices and preferences.

Sometimes it's probably helpful to give in gracefully over things that don't really matter. That way they will get the chance to learn how to back down themselves. And, of course, there are going to be plenty of times when they want something impossible or dangerous. So there will still be opportunities for them to learn about 'no' and for you to learn to cope with their tears.

Sometimes fussiness is to do with worries that your child can't name or tell you about. Then their determination to avoid certain objects or situations may be their way of controlling their fears.

What's worrying them may not have any obvious connection with the things they're making a fuss about – but it's easier to control what you let your mum put on your plate than to control anxieties you don't understand.

These sorts of fears tend to come and go, but if your child's behaviour becomes especially difficult it is worth wondering if they are under some particular stress.

Being clingy

Some children seem to be saying 'I'd rather be small'. A child who is clingy and fearful can be very trying to parents in a different way from one who is bossy.

As parents, we need the reassurance of seeing things move in the right general direction. So 'babyish' behaviour is hard to bear because it makes us worry that things are

going backwards. It's also very exhausting not knowing if you've got a baby or a big girl or boy on your hands.

When you have the feeling that you can't get it right, the chances are that your child is feeling in a tremendous muddle too.

Being fearful

New situations can be frightening. Children of two or three sometimes feel quite scared about new situations, especially if they think it means being left with other people. It is worth being truthful about new situations – such as the birth of a baby or different childcare arrangements – so that they don't feel taken by surprise or tricked. Allow plenty of time for settling in and a certain amount of fussing. And be prepared to take your child seriously if they really feel they are not ready for a new step forward.

But some of the frightening things are inside them.

It is at this age that children first complain of bad dreams or night terrors. Sometimes the dreams may be connected with worrying events that happened during the day, but quite often they seem to grow from feelings within the child.

You may never really know what's troubling them, but it's very comforting for a child who can't yet understand themselves if they feel that a grown up is trying to do the understanding for them.

Useful Understanding Childhood leaflets

Sibling rivalry

Separation and changes in the early years

Temper tantrums

Your child is coping with strong feelings all day long. If they're managing to keep on a reasonably even keel they're doing well, but there are bound to be times when they can't cope.

When your child throws a temper tantrum they are showing you what it feels like inside them when they can no longer cope. This could simply be because they are exhausted or overwhelmed.

They are not doing it just to get attention. They have a tantrum because they can't tell you in words. They scream and throw

themselves around because they feel their big self has exploded.

They are probably scared, as well as angry, because their rage seems so powerful and dangerous and they have lost their picture of Mummy and Daddy as helpful or friendly.

They don't need you to come up with a solution or to buy them off with treats (though every one has done that at times). They do need to see that you can feel upset and helpless but still keep them safe from hurting themselves, take care of both of you and go on loving them.

Is there a real problem?

Sometimes parents feel that their child's temper tantrums are not just the ordinary sort that they will grow out of.

Perhaps they feel that their child has never really started talking or doesn't enjoy playing or being with other people. They may be restless and destructive as if they can't take pleasure in anything. And – most painful of all – parents in this situation may feel that there is a barrier between themselves and their child.

If you have concerns of this sort, it is important to ask for specialist advice. It is not a good idea to just leave things in the hope that they will sort themselves out.

How can parents cope?

Coping with your child's tantrums doesn't mean trying to stop them being angry – it means coping with how angry they make *you* feel. In the heat of the moment it is easy to become just as angry as your child and to scream back. You are not expected to be perfect parents but you *are* expected to be able to control your own feelings when your child's feelings are out of control.

As parents we feel helpless, embarrassed or exposed if our children have tantrums in public. Even at home there are going to be times when they drive us too far.

Firmness is important, but so are understanding and tolerance. Simply telling a child to behave better doesn't give them the strength to control their feelings. They can only learn slowly how to share with other children and to accept people saying 'no' when they want something.

Children learn by example, so they learn that it is possible to be distressed or angry

without throwing a tantrum through seeing us struggling to cope with our own frustration or worry.

Getting to the end of your tether

Sometimes parents feel they are no longer able to keep going. They may become frightened that they will injure their child physically or emotionally.

You may feel you don't have enough help and support. You may have too many worries on your plate. You may feel depressed or unwell.

If you feel this is happening to you, for the sake of your child and yourself, you should seek help to sort out what's wrong.

Useful Understanding Childhood leaflets

Postnatal depression

Some helpful practical tips

- Unless they are doing something dangerous, or could accidentally hurt themselves, count to 10 before doing anything at all.
- Try not to get drawn into an argument about exactly what started it – they really are beyond reasoning with.
- Don't ask more of them than they can manage.
- Try to avoid saying things just to hurt them back – especially threats of leaving home or having them put away. You may not mean it but they don't know that.
- Don't worry about them growing up to be a monster. The temper tantrums of a two and three year old will start to tail off – but only slowly. It may take two or three years.
- Try to remember that through their tempers they're learning important lessons about themselves – and both of you are practising for when they're a teenager!

Further help

In every area there are organisations that provide support and services for children and families. Your GP or health visitor will be able to offer you advice and, if needed, refer you to specialist services. To find out more about local supporting agencies, visit your library, your town or county hall, or contact your local council for voluntary service.

Contacts

Sure Start

There are a number of Sure Start programmes in the UK offering services and information for parents and children under four. To find if there is one in your area contact:

Phone 0870 0002288

Web www.surestart.gov.uk

YoungMinds Parents' Information Service

Information and advice for anyone concerned about the mental health of a child or young person.

Freephone 0800 018 2138

Web www.youngminds.org.uk

Parentline

Help and advice for anyone looking after a child.

Freephone 0808 800 2222

Web www.parentlineplus.org.uk

ChildcareLink

Information about child care and early years services in your local area.

Freephone 0800 096 0296

Web www.childcarelink.gov.uk

Contact a Family

Help for parents and families who care for children with any disability or special need.

Freephone 0808 808 3555

Web www.cafamily.org.uk



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series of leaflets can be viewed and
printed free from

<https://childpsychotherapy.org.uk/resources-families/understanding-childhood>

An order form to buy printed copies
is available from the site.

Leaflet for parents Before, during and after

Trying to understand your child's difficult behaviour

Why is your child behaving like that? Sometimes it is very hard to understand why your child is suddenly having a temper tantrum. Why is she trying to break things or hurt another child for apparently no reason? Some of the things children do seem to have no relation to what is going on around them. You may be exhausted or feel helpless trying to cope with your child's behaviour.

This leaflet explains one way of trying to understand your child's behaviour. What children do has a meaning behind it, even if it's difficult to see. It is very rare for a temper tantrum to come out of the blue. This approach can help you gather up the clues to what is happening and why it is happening. In turn, this can help you with the situation. You may be able to see a different way of doing things or it may show you that your child is struggling to come to terms with something that you may be able to help her with. This approach looks at what happens before, during and after the tantrum or behaviour.

When your child does 'it' again, take a few moments to think about what happened. Looking at a situation in this way, what happened before, during and after can help in several ways. The 'Before' section can show you what is setting the situation off. This may give you ideas about what to do differently. The 'During' section tells you a bit more about what is happening, which again can give you ideas about what to do differently. The 'After' section shows you if the behaviour of your child is rewarded in any way. This will make it more likely that the behaviour will happen again. For example, if your child knows that if he makes enough fuss at bedtime you will let him stay up longer, this will make it more likely that next time he will complain long and loudly about going to bed. There is a 'Before, During and After' chart (the ABC chart) which your health visitor can give you.

Before

Think about what was happening before 'it' began. What were you doing? What was your child doing? What were other people doing? You may also find it useful to try and think about what you were feeling and thinking at the time and about what your child was thinking and feeling.

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During

Think about exactly what you, other people and your child did. Again, it can be useful to remember what you were thinking and feeling at the time and what you imagine your child was thinking and feeling.

After

What happened afterwards? What did you do? What did your child do? What thoughts and feelings did you and your child have?

A more complicated example is the everyday story of Lee and Jordan. Lee and Jordan were brothers. Lee was 8 years old and Jordan was 5 years old. Most of the time they got on fairly well, playing all sorts of games, but sometimes Jordan became suddenly very cross as he was playing.

At first Mum and Dad thought he was just being selfish, wanting to be the centre of attention as he played, but when Jordan began to throw things, break things and kick and punch Lee they began to get very cross with him and also worried that his behaviour might get worse. There were soon frequent scenes in the house when both boys were upset, something was broken and Mum and Dad were telling one or both of them off.

Mum and Dad thought that Jordan was a naughty boy who just wanted attention but they decided to try to use the 'Before, During and After' approach to understand a little more about what was going on.

They chose a particular event when a game on the computer had ended with Jordan almost breaking one of the controls, pushing Lee and storming out of the room in angry tears.

They described the following things:

Before: Jordan and Lee were playing happily. They seemed excited and cheerful, laughing and giggling. Lee seemed to be concentrating more. Jordan seemed to be becoming increasingly serious. The game was reaching a crucial point. Lee was winning.

During: Jordan became very angry, frowning and complaining. He shouted and screamed and said it wasn't fair. He seemed unable to control himself and seemed to want to break the computer. He punched Lee as if he really wanted to hurt him then ran out of the room. Jordan seemed very cross with Lee.

After: The game was not over but nobody was now going to win. Lee looked shocked and upset. Jordan was upset in another room.

Mum and Dad were telling Jordan he was a naughty boy. Lee said 'it wasn't my fault'. Mum and Dad were cross with Jordan.

Having noticed these things Mum and Dad sat down and talked about what could be going on. Here are some of the questions they found themselves trying to explain:

- What were the boys thinking about as they were playing?
- What was happening in the game as Jordan began to get cross?
- Why was Jordan so cross with Lee?
- Why did Lee have to concentrate so hard?
- What did Jordan think was unfair?
- Who had been going to win the game?
- Why did Jordan leave the room?

After discussing this for a few days they sat down with the boys and talked it through. They asked the boys some of these questions and tried to help both of them to explain what they had been feeling at the time. The conversation got quite heated but eventually Mum and Dad had an idea of what had happened in this game and in other games too. It turned out that Jordan was getting very cross because Lee had a way of always winning. Jordan was not skilful enough to beat Lee because he was younger. Lee was very good at making sure that he always beat Jordan. Jordan felt that Lee was deliberately making him cross and this made him even more angry. Jordan then spoilt the game and left it before it was over so that Lee did not actually win. In this way the game did not have an ending and there was no winner or loser.

Now that Mum and Dad were thinking about this event like this they were able to try to find ways of dealing with the cross feelings in the family. Competition is normal between brothers and sisters, but sometimes children (and parents!) need help to manage it.

- They spoke to Jordan about how hard it is to be only 5 years old when Lee is 8 years old and is able to do more than Jordan.
- They spoke to Lee about how they now knew that it wasn't all Jordan's fault and that Lee liked to annoy his brother by beating him and then getting him into trouble by making him angry.
- They tried to arrange for Jordan to play more with children of his own age and ability.
- They encouraged the boys to play some games that didn't have to involve one being a winner and the other a loser.

Describing Behaviour, the ‘Before, During and After’ chart (ABC chart).

Name _____

A Before	B During	C After
<div>Where was the child?</div> <div>What seemed to lead up to the behaviour?</div> <div>Were any warnings given prior to the behaviour?</div> <div>What did individuals do or say to the child?</div> <div>How did you feel?</div> <div>How did you think the child was feeling?</div>	<div>What time of day was it?</div> <div>What did the child do exactly?</div>	<div>What happened as a result of the behaviour?</div> <div>How did the episode come to an end?</div>
<div>Date</div>		

Leaflet for parents

Guidelines for the use of star charts

A star chart acts as a reward. Your child earns gold or coloured stars for the behaviour you are trying to encourage. Star charts also show your child how her behaviour is changing. Children are usually ready to record their successes, so you can encourage your child to record them.

There are various charts available but parents usually like to design their own to suit their child. Or the child may prefer to design the chart with their parent or design it themselves. Instead of using a star chart, you can use a drawing of your child's favourite character, divided into sections. One section is coloured in instead of using stars. So the pathway on the journey to the castle would be coloured in.

It is important to explain to your child exactly what must be done to earn a star/smiley face. You should ensure that she understands what needs to be done. E.g. 'Sarah you tidied your toys and put them away'. 'Sarah you played quietly while I fed Johnnie'. 'You read Billy a story and gave him a nice gentle hug'. 'You let Amy sit on the horse/go on the trampoline first'.

- Keep the chart in a place it can be easily seen by your child.
- Tell people who see your child regularly about the star chart so that they can also encourage your child to earn stars. Success at an early stage is vital to keep your child interested.
- If your child is not able to earn a star in the early days of trying, then you could make the first step easier to encourage her.
- Always praise your child when she earns a star and let her stick it on the chart at once.
- If your child is disappointed when she has not earned a star you should sympathise, but encourage her by saying 'you can try again.'
- It is important to remember not to get cross or upset – be positive.
- It is also important not to remove stars for 'bad' behaviour.
- Once a star is earned it should never be removed.
- Use the chart to reward your child. Never use the chart in a negative way.

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If the desired result is not being achieved it is important to find a behaviour that can be praised. It does not have to be drastic. For example, try and catch her doing something that you have asked and say something like 'you did what I asked. I am very pleased.'

Three stars on a chart are rewarded with a small present or an activity/event. This does not have to be expensive and should be appropriate for the child.

Parents have noted the following have been important for their children:

Books/comics, cooking biscuits, small toys/treats, trips to library/park, sweets, extra bedtime story, watching a favourite TV programme, short game, time with parents, water play/swimming.

When to stop using a chart

Wait until your child is regularly earning stars. Then you can either:

Stop giving stars but always continue to praise your child.

Gradually decrease the number of stars you give your child.

You can put your child’s favourite picture here or your child could draw their own picture to colour in



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Journey to the castle

Your child's name _____

