

# The Road to Parenting Success



What's on your behavior "wish list" for your children? You probably want them to be responsible, have good manners, and treat others with respect.

Here are ideas to help your little ones use their growing vocabulary and increasing attention span to act the way you'd like them to. Remember, teaching good behavior takes time—your youngsters will have moments when they forget what is the right thing to do. Try to be patient, and keep in mind that you're instilling values for a lifetime.

## Decisions, decisions

You can improve your child's behavior by letting him make his own decisions as often as possible. He'll feel more in control of himself, which will make him more likely to listen to you and his teachers.

★ Help your youngster practice decision-making skills in daily life. For instance, let her choose how to spend her birthday money. In the store, let her pick which color shirt to buy. You can limit her to two or three options so she isn't overwhelmed.

★ Show your child that he can make choices about his behavior. *Example:* He comes in the house and tosses his jacket on the floor. Ask, "What would be a better thing to do?" Tell him that his actions have consequences. If he hangs his coat on a hook, he can go play right away. If he argues, he won't get as much free time.

★ Look for opportunities to praise your youngster when she makes a good decision. *Idea:* Create "Good job!" stickers out of mailing or printer labels. When you catch her doing the right thing without being asked, such as making her bed, give her a sticker to wear.



## Showing good character

If your youngster develops good character traits, she will behave better naturally. You can point out examples when you see them (on TV shows, in a store), and try these strategies, too.

★ Instead of traditional rules ("No throwing"), work together to make a list of character traits, such as honesty and kindness, that you'd like family members to have. Then, have your child help you brainstorm specific behaviors for each quality. For example, under "Be considerate," you might write, "Talk quietly when the baby is sleeping." Post the list where everyone can see it (refrigerator, bulletin board).

★ Teach responsibility by assigning chores. Your youngster's first jobs will probably include taking care of his own belongings. For example, he can put his games on the shelves and his shoes in the closet. He may also be ready to take on other tasks, such as feeding the dog, folding towels, watering plants, and helping you wash the car.



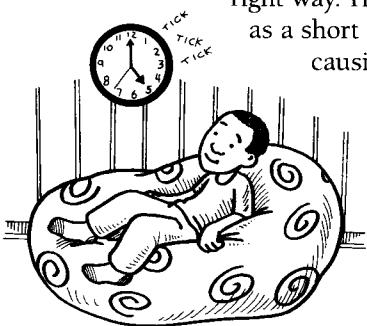
★ Practice good manners. In addition to "please" and "thank you," teach your youngster to say, "I'm sorry," when she bumps into someone, or, "May I be excused?" before leaving the table. Show her how to let others out of an elevator before getting on, and how to introduce herself to someone. Learning manners will make her feel grown-up.



### Rewards and consequences

Use rewards and consequences carefully. You probably don't want your child to be too dependent on either one. Try to give compliments, which will boost self-esteem and lead to long-term good behavior. Come up with consequences that teach lessons gently so that you aren't modeling hurtful behavior.

- ★ The good feeling that comes from doing the right thing can be a reward in itself. Help your youngster connect actions with feelings. For example, she may feel proud when she shares her doll with a playmate. Say, "I bet that made you feel good, didn't it?"
- ★ Give your child ways to correct his own mistakes when he misbehaves. If he pushes his sister, point out her tears and explain that she feels hurt and upset. The consequence could be that he must think of a way to make his sister happy before he can play. Perhaps he can draw a picture for her or let her use one of his special toys.
- ★ Privileges are another good reward. For example, if your youngster gets ready for bed without complaining, you can let her stay up an extra five minutes. If she clears the table, let her choose what to have for dessert.



★ Time-outs can be an effective consequence if used the right way. Help your child see a time-out as a short break from the situation that's causing him to misbehave, rather than as a punishment. You might even refer to it as a "break." Try to speak calmly and firmly as you direct him to a quiet place to cool down.

### Books that teach

A fun and effective way to help your youngster learn about right and wrong is through stories. Here are ways to use tales to teach.

First, choose a story with a lesson. Be sure it's something your child will enjoy reading so you'll be able to capture her attention. Try to find a character she can connect with (a child her age, a cute animal).

Next, read the story out loud. Let your youngster enjoy it without interrupting the flow for discussion, unless she asks questions.

Finally, talk about the story. What did the character do? Why did he act that way? Do you think he did the right thing? What could he have done instead?

Here are a few books to try:

***It's Mine***, by Leo Lionni

Three little frogs argue about what belongs to whom—worms, butterflies, and even the water—while a big toad tries to teach them about sharing. One day, they are forced to share a "rock" to stay safe from rising water. They soon discover they're actually standing on the toad, and they learn that sharing isn't so bad after all.

***Franklin Is Messy***, by Paulette Bourgeois

A little turtle's room is so messy that he can't find his favorite things. His parents show him the reward for cleaning up—he can play with the things he enjoys.

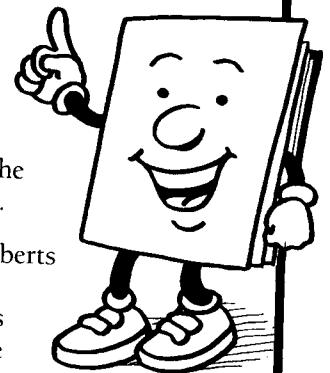
***Monster Manners***, by Bethany Roberts

The monsters in this story have good manners, but they sometimes forget them. Your youngster will be able to relate to the examples, such as breaking toys on "bad" days and taking care of them on "good" days.

***The Berenstain Bears and the Truth***, by Stan and Jan Berenstain

Brother and Sister accidentally break Mama Bear's favorite lamp while playing ball in the house. They tell a "whopper" to explain what happened. Papa Bear helps them tell the truth, and they learn that fibbing has a cost: they have to work hard to earn back Mama's trust.

Note: For more titles, ask your librarian for **Books That Build Character** by William Kilpatrick.



## Early Years