



Dealing with Disobedience

The majority of parents smack their children at least occasionally. But research tells us that the more you smack your child the more likely your child will develop further behaviour problems. Smacking may serve as a model of aggression — the very behaviour we want our children to be able to control.

So is it child abuse to give an occasional smack for naughty behaviour?

No it is not. What we as parents need to keep in mind is that any harsh, unpredictable punishment given in anger, such as smacking, can be severely damaging to children. Anything that has the power to invoke fear, anger, and retribution in our children carries risks.

But while an occasional single smack is not likely to turn your child into an aggressive adult it is ultimately a negative approach to dealing with misbehaviour. And for children with more severe behaviour problems, research shows that smacking is not very effective.

So how do we deal with misbehaviour?

Firstly, expect it. We are humans, not angels, and we must all live our lives within limits. For children, these limits must be fair and appropriate and, for their own safety, they need to learn to accept those limits. However, the process of learning takes time. Disobedience from your child shouldn't really be considered a problem unless it occurs frequently, such as when your child follows less than half the instructions given to them.

Parents will usually first experience disobedience when their child becomes a toddler. Toddlers are mobile and just beginning to learn independence and assertiveness. They may start to resist you. When you say "No" it can be like a dare to them. It is important to deal with this disobedience firmly and decisively. However misusing or overusing smacking to deal with this disobedience will cause harm.

Look for practical and effective alternatives.

For a start, make sure that you don't give too many instructions. Remember that every time you give your child an instruction to do something there is an opportunity for disobedience. Be clear in what you are saying and ensure that your child understands exactly what is required. If your child is busy watching their favourite television show accept that you are likely to be ignored until you can calmly and effectively gain their full attention.

With young children, when you see problem behaviour occurring, stop what you are doing and move to within an arm's length of your child and bend down to their eye level. Gain their attention by using their name, hold their hands firmly and say "No" in a firm calm voice while frowning and shaking your head from side to side.

With older children you should tell your child specifically what you want them to stop doing and what they should do instead. Be consistent with your attitudes to misbehaviour and choose a

logical consequence if your child does not do as you ask. Where possible remove the activity or toy that is at the centre of the problem and explain why you are doing this — “Frank, you have not done as I asked. TV is off for 10 minutes”

To help give your older child more independence provide them with options to choose from where possible. Make sure they know the difference between choices and instructions and try not to give them too many choices about everyday routines.

Above all, don't forget to praise and reward your children when they behave.

PARENTING TIP:

A good way to reduce the number of times you have to deal with disobedience is to reduce the chances of your child doing something that you don't want them to do. If you make some temporary changes in your home this can prevent you from having to continually tell your toddler “No”, and “Don't touch”. Put valuable and fragile things out of reach, use child-proof catches on cupboards, and close doors and gates to areas where it is not safe for your child to be alone.