



Raise Your Child with Praise

Tips for Parents with Two- to Five-Year-Olds





We all want to teach children how to behave without making them feel bad. However, two- to five-year-olds view everything (including themselves) as either “good” or “bad.” Children want to please. They want to behave, but at the same time they will need your help.

You can discipline your children by praising their positive words and actions. Positive words help them learn how to do things correctly without making them feel badly about themselves.

Since children between two and five years of age are at different stages of development, this tip card has examples for toddlers (two- and three-year-olds) and preschoolers (four- and five-year-olds).

Please remember: children are good. It is their behavior that is sometimes bad. Never tell a child that she is a bad girl or he is a naughty boy. By praising children, you will be encouraging good behavior and reducing bad behavior. And you won't have to use discipline as much.

Catch Your Child Being Good!

All children seek their parents' attention. However, sometimes, when a parent or caregiver is caught up with work, a cell phone conversation or texting, chores, or other constant demands on their time, a child learns that the only — or the best — way to get attention is to misbehave! So, watch for when your child is being good and be sure to pay attention to good behavior.

Some examples of praising a child are:

Toddlers

- ▶ “Nice coloring.”
- ▶ “Good sharing.”
- ▶ While you are talking on the phone, say, “Good waiting!”

Preschoolers

- ▶ “I love it when you play so nicely with your sister.”
- ▶ “What a good job waiting for me to help you cross the street.”
- ▶ “Thanks for the drawing. It makes me happy.”

Teach your child that the best way to get your attention is to behave well. A young child loves to help! A good way for your child to get your attention is to have your child help you with chores such as folding the laundry, raking leaves, setting the table, or walking a pet.

Toddlers and preschoolers think they are special — and they should feel this way — because they are! Self-respect is the first step toward learning how to respect others. Children who know they are special can learn that others are special too. So, it’s OK to tell children:

- ▶ “You’re the greatest!”
- ▶ “You should be so proud of yourself!”
- ▶ “Good job!”

Use Praise and Hugs and Kisses!





Make It Plain! Teach All the Steps

What seems simple to an adult — like getting dressed — is actually a process with many steps for your child. So, if your child “can’t” or “won’t” do something, it may be because it’s too hard. For example, if your child has trouble getting dressed in the morning, explain the steps one at a time:

Toddlers

- ▶ **Step 1:** “Bring your clothes to me... Thank you.”
- ▶ **Step 2:** “OK, now, take off your pajamas... Great!”
- ▶ **Step 3:** “Now, put on your shirt... Good job.”

You may have to work with them several times until they can do this alone.

Preschoolers

- ▶ **Step 1:** “It’s time to get dressed. Please take off your pajamas.”
- ▶ **Step 2:** “Get your clothes; they are on the bed.”



- ▶ **Step 3:** “After you are dressed, I’ll help you with your shoes.”
- ▶ **Step 4:** “You look very nice today. You did a good job getting dressed.”

Take time to remind your child about each step rather than doing it yourself or getting upset. It will take longer at first, but it is well worth it! Praising each step will make your child more self-confident.

Set Clear Rules

Help your child learn the rules by repeating them often and sticking to them — even when it seems like a lot of trouble!

Toddlers

- ▶ “It’s bedtime now.”
- ▶ “Please get in your bed right away and then we can read a story.”

Preschoolers

- ▶ “Bedtime is eight o’clock. If you get ready for bed quickly, there will be time for a story.”
- ▶ “Thank you for getting ready for bed. I love reading to you at night!”

Spend Time with Your Children!

Plan to spend a minimum of 15 to 20 minutes every day playing or talking with your children. Try to do so as soon as you can and as often as you can — morning, afternoon, and evening.





Playing

When playing with your child, turn the TV off and take a break from your chores — this is just playtime! This should be fun. There is no need to teach your child anything. Let your child choose the activity and make up the rules. While playing, talk about what your child is doing:

- ▶ “What a great tower!”
- ▶ “What is the doll going to eat?”

Listening

Maybe at dinner or bedtime you can say:

- ▶ “Tell me about what you did today.”
- ▶ “What was your favorite thing?”

If your child had a tough time in preschool or child care that day, quietly listen to the whole story. By judging or telling your child how they should have acted before the story is done, they feel as if you haven’t listened. Find positive aspects of the story to praise. When your child has done something wrong, teach them other ways of behaving. Always use a calm and loving voice.

Children Need Discipline!

Of course, no one is perfect, and this is where a good supply of patience is needed. When your child needs discipline, name the bad behavior — avoid saying, “You’re bad!” Tell your child that the behavior needs to stop:

- ▶ “No hitting! That’s not nice.”

Talk with your health care or child care provider about time-outs. This is a type of quiet time that can be used when your child does something dangerous or wrong on purpose.

When your child is doing something good, let your child know by saying: "I like it when you..."

Know! Know! Know!

Part of being a child this age is saying "NO!" Your child can "test your patience," "push your buttons," and "drive you up a wall." No matter how difficult your child can be, you are the most important person in your child's world. You can change your child's behavior.

- ▶ Teach your child to be good by balancing discipline with praise.
- ▶ Be clear about what you expect and praise success.
- ▶ Raise your child with praise and you will both be happier!

A child's behavior can easily upset a parent. Learning how to handle these feelings is part of being a parent. If you want or need more help, talk with your health care provider.

KNOW it takes courage...

KNOW it takes patience . . .

KNOW it takes time!

But, if you are still having problems, speak with your doctor or nurse.



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This tip card is part of a series originated by Robert Sege, MD, PhD, Boston, MA, and developed with the Massachusetts Medical Society's Committee on Violence Intervention and Prevention. Original funding was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research #H133850006, and the Massachusetts Medical Society.

Co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Medical Society Alliance

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