

Top Ten Tips For Disciplining Your Toddler

Dr. Clare Albright

How can I support my toddler's spontaneity while supporting his need to learn to behave in ways that will help him to get along well in relationships and at school? How can I discipline my toddler without causing him to feel shame?

- 1.** Learn to say "no" in a firm, peaceful way that carries authority but not anger. This parenting skill will help you to cut short years of power struggles with your child and will help your child to feel secure in knowing that there are limits. Strong-willed behavior and temper tantrums can be encouraged by a "no" from a parent who doesn't sound convincing.
- 2.** Stay with your child when they are in "time out" so that they don't feel abandoned. Many parents leave the area, which can make a child feel rejected.
- 3.** Follow through, no matter what, if you say that there will be a consequence for misbehaving so that your child does not learn to manipulate you. If you change your mind after a child protests, you are encouraging your child to protest even more in the future.
- 4.** Pick one or two target behaviors to focus your discipline on at a time, such as not playing with their food. It is usually more effective to completely train your child in one or two areas than to try to train them a little bit in many different areas.
- 5.** Be the boss and don't be ashamed of being the boss in your relationship with your child. If you are not the boss, they will step into the power vacuum and this may have long term negative consequences. You could even say to your child occasionally, "I am the boss."
- 6.** Discipline your child in your loving, caring environment. Otherwise, they may learn discipline from frustrated teachers in the less caring and loving environment of school.
- 7.** Present you child with small choices if you are in a lot of power struggles with your child. "Do you want to wear the white shirt or the blue shirt? Do you want the carrots or the peas?"
- 8.** Remember that consistent discipline is a safety issue. There will be times that your child's obedience to your input can save them from danger. The best time to prepare for a dangerous situation is before you are in a dangerous situation.
- 9.** Do not feel obligated to explain your rationale for the things that you ask of your child every time that you ask something of them. Many parents fall into the trap of explaining the rationale behind all of their requests, usually because they want their child to feel respected. Unfortunately, this often leads to the child learning how to manipulate their parent by acting like the rationale is not compelling enough to justify cooperating with the parent's request.
- 10.** Focus on "first time" obedience. Your child is old enough to learn this concept. It is not helpful to your child to have you repeat yourself over and over when it is time for them to come to dinner, have their diaper changed, etc.

Written by Dr. Clare Albright, Psychologist and Parenting Coach. Excerpted from her booklet, "100 Tips for Parents of Two-Year Olds" at

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