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STRATEGIES FOR MISBEHAVIOR

PLEASE NOTE: Only 1 or 2 of these ideas will work in any given situation, so ignore the ones you know will not work and find the strategy that is worth trying.

- 1) **IGNORE.** Sometimes as parents, we are so busy that our children learn that in order to get noticed, they must misbehave. You will think you are constantly giving your child attention (“Stop fighting with your sister.” “Don’t run in the house.” “You’re screaming too loud”) when, in fact, what you are paying attention to is misbehavior rather than giving attention for good behavior. It is perfectly normal for your child to need and be given attention, but you don’t want to reward inappropriate behavior. If you ignore a behavior, be sure to give positive attention as soon as the inappropriate behavior stops. (“You were kind when you shared the toys with your sister.” “Oh, you walked down the hall just now. You are learning to only walk in the house.” “Even though you were angry just now, you used a quiet ‘inside’ voice. Thank you for doing that.”)
- 2) **DISTRACT.** Do not comment on the misbehavior, but simply say something to invite your child to get interested in something else. It may take several suggestions before your child abandons the misbehavior. (“You could play with your dinosaurs or have me read you a story now.” “Let’s go look out the window and see if we can see some birds outside.”) The more excitement and energy you put into your words, the more likely you are to successfully distract your child from the misbehavior.
- 3) **SHOW HOW AND WHERE YOUR CHILD CAN DO THAT BEHAVIOR IN AN OKAY WAY.** If your child is swinging a toy in the house, and it would be okay to swing it outdoors, then tell him to go outdoors and swing it. (You may have to briefly take away the toy, if your child refuses to go outdoors. Then when the toy has been on “time-out” for a few minutes, you can invite your child to play with it outdoors.)
- 4) **REMOVE OUR CHILD FROM THE SITUATION.** If our child is misbehaving in a store, then you may need to go outside the store for a few minutes until he calms down.

- 5) **GIVE A REMINDER OF THE RULE.** Children often forget what they are supposed to do because they are engrossed in play, are impulsive, or can't apply the rule to a slightly new situation. A calm reminder of the rule can be very effective. If your child still does not follow the rule, add a gentle reminder about what happens when the rule is not followed.
- 6) **PREPARE FOR TRANSITIONS.** Children often misbehave when we expect them to change quickly from one activity to another. For example, even if a child knows that you are cooking dinner, he may resist ending playing and sitting down to eat. If, however, you give him a couple of reminders that it is nearly time to stop playing and sit down to eat, he will more easily make the transition from play to mealtime.
- 7) **ISOLATE BRIEFLY (TIME-OUT).** Your child's age should equal the maximum length of time in time-out. But often just two or three minutes of time-out will be sufficient for your child to realize that you will not allow that particular behavior. A shorter time-out allows you to get your child back in the situation where he can practice the good behavior rather than your spending time policing him to stay in time-out. If your child is screaming in time-out, you can tell him you are setting the timer again and he has a chance to try again to be silent during the time-out. Children who enjoy being around people are usually motivated to calm down during time-out in order to be allowed to join the family members or friends they were isolated from. Time-out will not work with children who don't care whether they are around others. If you are using time-out for the first time or if you are changing the rules, be sure you prepare your child in advance for the changes.

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