

Prepared for:

**United Independent School District
Laredo, Texas**



Common Discipline Problems Of Preschoolers And How to Deal With Them

One of a series of Parent Guides from



Parent Guide

Common Discipline Problems Of Preschoolers

And How to Deal With Them

The Parent Institute
P.O. Box 7474
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525
www.parent-institute.com

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. Executive Editor: Jeff Peters. Writer: Holly Smith. Senior Editor: Betsie Ridnour. Staff Editors: Pat Hodgdon, Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley. Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter. Marketing Director: Laura Bono. Business Manager: Sally Bert. Operations & Technical Services Manager: Barbara Peters. Customer Service Manager: Pam Beltz. Customer Service Associates: Peggy Costello, Louise Lawrence, Elizabeth Hipfel & Margie Supervielle. Business Assistant: Donna Ross. Marketing Assistant: Joyce Ghen. Circulation Associates: Marsha Phillips, Catalina Lalande & Diane Perry.

Copyright © 2004 by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc. reproduction rights exclusively for:

United Independent School District
Laredo, Texas
Order number: x02547349

Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	.2
Five Unwavering Truths About Discipline . . . . .	.2
Discipline Dilemma #1: Public Tantrums . . . . .	.3
Discipline Dilemma #2: Tantrums at Home . . . . .	.3
Discipline Dilemma #3: Power Struggles . . . . .	.3
Discipline Dilemma #4: Whining . . . . .	.4
Discipline Dilemma #5: Swearing . . . . .	.4
Discipline Dilemma #6: Hitting . . . . .	.4
Discipline Dilemma #7: Bedtime Battles . . . . .	.5
Discipline Dilemma #8: Dawdling . . . . .	.5
Discipline Dilemma #9: Lying . . . . .	.5
Discipline Dilemma #10: Disobedience . . . . .	.6
Take Time Out for Time In . . . . .	.6
Appropriate Consequences (That Don't Involve Spanking) . . . . .	.6
Where to Go for Help . . . . .	.7
For More Information . . . . .	.7
Other Parent Guides Available From The Parent Institute . . . . .	.8

Introduction

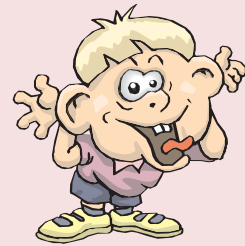
Somewhere between the untamed toddler and the more malleable elementary schooler lies a creature like no other: the preschooler. Neither a baby nor a big kid, a preschooler is a wonderful mix of all that's good—and not so good—about both age groups.

Of course, as wonderful as this mix might be, it can make discipline especially challenging. For instance, preschoolers can often be reasoned with—except when they can't. They're able to remember household rules—except when they forget. And the youngsters generally know right from wrong—except when they don't.

But one thing's always true about preschoolers: Like every other child, they benefit immensely from loving, consistent discipline. And, believe it or not, there are effective ways to keep your discipline lovingly consistent (without pulling your hair out in the process).

Read on to discover suggestions for handling 10 of the most common preschool-related discipline problems, along with examples of how real parents are successfully navigating the tricky—and terrific—preschool years.

**Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*



Five Unwavering Truths About Discipline

1. Discipline means “to teach”—it does not mean “to punish.” Accordingly, it should be done out of love.
2. Consistency is key. No matter what approach you take to discipline, it's crucial to be consistent about it. In other words, this morning's rules should also apply this afternoon.
3. Be patient. No discipline strategy works all the time—but that doesn't mean the strategy isn't working overall.
4. Children need and want limits. Effective discipline doesn't stifle kids—it gives them a strong, dependable foundation from which to grow and mature.
5. Discipline isn't just about correcting what your child does wrong—it's about celebrating what he does right. The more you praise and reinforce the good things he does, the more he'll want to do the right things.

Discipline Dilemma #1: Public Tantrums

Smart Solution: The only thing worse than a child having a meltdown in the grocery store or at a restaurant is realizing that it's your child making the scene! And although you must be prepared to make a quick exit if your preschooler's in total tantrum mode, there are some ways to prevent the problem in the first place:

- Be clear before you go out. "We're just buying groceries today, not toys." Also, remind your child of the rules: "Stay with Daddy, no running, inside voices only."
- Be smart. If you're running several errands or will be out for a long time, arm yourself with distractions. Books, stickers, crackers and art supplies can help keep your preschooler busy and behaving.
- Offer lots of praise. Did your child do a good job picking out a box of cereal? Was he polite when the waiter brought more water? Let him know how well he's doing.

Real-Life Remedy: "Before you leave for a restaurant, have a talk with [your kids] about 'indoor restaurant behavior,' which means no screaming or whining," suggests a Massachusetts mother of three children under six years old. "Add a bit of fun by making a game of looking for the best behaved child (the 'B.B.C.') in the room. That always keeps them hooked."

Discipline Dilemma #2: Tantrums at Home

Smart Solution: Even if your preschooler has outgrown the flailing-on-the-floor-kicking-and-screaming tantrums of yore, she's probably still capable of staging an impressive scene when things aren't going her way. Here are some ideas for redirecting your little rainmaker before she huffs and puffs and blows the house down:

- Defuse the situation with humor. Is your child stomping? Ask her please not to shake up the whole neighborhood! Is she pouting? Remind her that she only has one bottom lip—if she pushes it out too much, it could get stuck.
- Ignore or distract her. Assuming she's not in danger of hurting herself or someone else, let her rant and rave (if it drives you nuts, have her do it in her room). Otherwise, shift her focus to something else: "I'm frustrated that the puzzle's so hard, too. Why don't we try putting this other one together instead?"
- Don't give in. If her raging and blustering result in your saying, "Okay, you can watch one more TV show," she'll learn an important (if unfortunate) lesson: Tantrums work.

Discipline Dilemma #3: Power Struggles

Smart Solution: Does your willful four-year-old sometimes remind you of a 14-year-old? It's probably because she's testing ways to assert herself (and doing it with more nuance than she could muster as a toddler). To head off battles of will, try these tips:

- Avoid the knee-jerk "No." If you refuse every request your child makes, she won't learn to compromise. Instead, give her options when possible. "We can stay at the park for five more minutes, but then we'll have less time to play 'Go Fish' tonight." This sidesteps a power struggle by giving both of you the power.
- Limit the power-sharing. Sure, giving your child options is important, but don't go crazy. You're the parent, and yours is still the final say (even if she believes otherwise).
- Make sure she understands the rules. If you have non-negotiable rules—no TV during dinner, lights-out at 8:00 p.m.—she may be less likely to throw down the gauntlet over an issue she knows she can't change.

Discipline Dilemma #4: Swearing

Smart Solution: Remember how thrilled you were when your little one first said “Mama”? It was likely equal to the mortification you later felt when he first shrieked, “Mama, I hate this #\$\$@& place!” (undoubtedly uttered during a solemn worship service or while standing in line at the bank). To purge the potty talk from your preschooler’s vocabulary, try these strategies:

- Don’t make a big deal out of it. Granted, it’s tough, but try not to overreact to your child’s bad language. If he sees that his words have this much power, he may decide to use them more frequently.
- Let him know that swearing is unacceptable. Saying, “Words like that make people feel bad,” gives him a simple reason why cursing is inappropriate, but doesn’t belabor the point.
- Walk the walk. Did your child get his favorite expletive from you? If you don’t want him repeating it over and over, you’ll need to clean up your own language.

Real-Life Remedy: “When my four year old starts to whine, I remind her that I can’t hear what she’s saying when she talks like that,” says a mother of two from Ontario, Canada. “If it carries on, I remind her that she needs to ask nicely if she wants something. I don’t ever give in and get her the thing she [wants] until she stops whining.”

Discipline Dilemma #5: Whining

Smart Solution: For many moms and dads, few things are as maddening as whining—parenthood’s equivalent of “fingernails on the blackboard.” Luckily, if your child is prone to whimpering, there are things you can do to eliminate—or at least tone down—this frustrating behavior:

- Develop a straightforward response to the first sign of a whine and use it consistently: “I’m sorry, but you’re whining. When you can speak in a normal voice, I’ll listen.”
- Designate a “whining room.” If she simply must whine, have your child do it in a specific place (like the laundry room). Chances are, she’ll start to see how silly her behavior is.
- Give her alternatives. Children often resort to whining because they want attention, so offer her better ways of getting it. Make up a catch-phrase (“Mommy, I have something super-important to say!”) or a funny song she can use when she absolutely, positively needs your undivided attention right this minute.

Discipline Dilemma #6: Hitting

Smart Solution: Your preschooler’s big sister is teasing him ... he’s getting frustrated ... his face is turning red ... then whap! He slaps her. Soon she’s crying, he’s crying, and you’re left wondering where you went wrong. Relax. Although hitting is never okay, it is normal. Here are some ways to deal with it:

- Develop a simple mantra—“Use your words, not your hands”—and repeat it to your child often. The more he hears it, the more he’ll be reminded that the way to solve problems is by talking them out, not pounding them out.
- Make the consequences swift and predictable. When he hits, he immediately gets removed from the situation—even if it means interrupting a playdate, family event, or special outing.
- Don’t resort to corporal punishment. Although you may be tempted to “give him a taste of his own medicine,” reprimanding a hitter by slapping or spanking him may actually increase his aggression—and cause him to doubt your pronouncement that “hitting is wrong.”



Discipline Dilemma #7: Bedtime Battles

Smart Solution: What are the five most important minutes in young children's lives? Those "five more minutes" that come every night before bed. For some preschoolers, bedtime avoidance isn't merely a talent, it's a calling. To cut down on bedtime struggles—and prevent morning sleepyheads—try these ideas:

- Embrace routines. Come up with a workable bedtime ritual—bath, brush teeth, two short stories, then lights-out—and stick with it.
- Start sounding like a broken record. If your child whines about wanting to stay up later, tell her, "Bedtime is at 8:30." And if she asks again? "Bedtime is at 8:30."
- Try giving her a one-minute "nightly pass." Let her use it once—and only once—each night to get a drink of water, an extra hug, etc. This way, you're giving her a little control (which may thwart power struggles) without actually derailing bedtime.

Real-Life Remedy: One mom avoids power struggles and meltdowns by smoothing her preschooler's transitions. When it's time to stop playing, for example, she gives him a few minutes notice first. "It not only helps the transition," says the resourceful mom, "it also teaches that you respect their time by not asking them to just drop what they're doing."

Discipline Dilemma #8: Dawdling

Smart Solution: You have to be at work 20 minutes ago and your travel mug of coffee is already getting cold. Where's your preschooler? Upstairs, carefully mulling over whether she feels like green or purple socks today. Before you implode, remember these tips for hurrying your little one along:

- Rely on games. Want your child to get dressed quickly? Play "Who can get ready the fastest?" Do you need to run to the post office before it closes? Turn up the radio and see if everyone can put on shoes and coats before the song ends.
- Set a kitchen timer. Young children have no real concept of time, so saying, "We have to leave in five minutes," won't mean much to her. Instead, show her what "five minutes" looks like.
- Keep your cool. Yelling at your dawdler may make her slow down even more, or worse, start to cry. Be realistic about how quickly she can move, and when possible, build a few minutes of buffer time into your schedule to allow for some foot-dragging.

Discipline Dilemma #9: Lying

Smart Solution: Until they're five or six years old, it's normal for kids to tell lies. To them, it's a matter of self-preservation: "If I tell the truth about what I did, I'll get in trouble!" Still, just because lying is normal doesn't mean it's right. Here are some ways to address the dishonesty issue:

- Don't demand a confession or try to "catch" your child lying. If there's a puddle of milk on the floor and he's holding the now half-empty carton, don't ask, "Did you do this?" It's obvious that he did, and asking him the question only tempts him to come up with a whopper.
- Let it go if there's no proof of a transgression. For instance, if you're convinced that your child played a forbidden video game, but you can't actually prove it, move on. You'll save yourself a headache.
- Let him know that lying is not okay. "It upsets me when you lie, and I hope next time you'll be honest." Also, consider increasing his punishment when he lies about what he did. "Your time-out is longer because lying always makes things worse."

Discipline Dilemma #10: Disobedience

Smart Solution: Want to know a secret? Disciplining kids is hard. Despite all your best efforts, flashy behavior charts and esteem-building praise, your kids are going to disobey you sometimes (annoying, isn't it?). But rather than wave the white flag and admit defeat, stay the course with these tips for handling garden-variety disobedience:



- Curtail conversation. Rather than launch into a dissertation-length explanation about why your child's behavior is inappropriate, keep it short and sweet: "What you're doing is wrong and it's going to stop right now."

- Pick your battles. Not every infraction is worth fighting over. If your child's disobedience is more obnoxious than malicious, try ignoring it. Selective deafness can go a long way toward preserving your sanity and eliminating the behavior.

- Tell your child exactly what he's doing wrong—"It's not all right to bounce balls in the kitchen"—and then enforce an appropriate consequence (such as taking the ball away for a day).

Real-Life Remedy: "At three and a half, Nathan's finding he doesn't necessarily want to become a 'big boy,' especially because he now has a little sister," says a Missouri mom. To get him to stop a bad behavior, "I've begun saying to him, 'Is that something a little boy who's three and a half should do/say/act, etc.?' It seems to be working pretty well thus far."

Take Time Out for Time In

Now that your preschooler dresses, feeds and possibly bathes herself, you may have less physical contact than you once did. But loving touches—hugging, holding, cuddling—are still important. Here are some ways to build these special non-verbal moments (called "Time-ins") into your day:

- Sit near one another. Whether eating, watching TV, or playing a board game, sit next to your child rather than opposite her.
- Make contact. Are you reading together? Hold her hand. When she walks by, give her head a quick pat.
- Talk less. Instead of always saying, "Good job," try giving her a big hug instead. Words aren't the only way to show praise or reinforce good behavior.

Appropriate Consequences (That Don't Involve Spanking)

A 2002 study by Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty concluded that the more a child is spanked, the more likely he is to become aggressive and misbehave again. To avoid the problems associated with spanking—avoid spanking! Instead, try some of these consequences when your little one misbehaves:

- Time-out (one minute for each year of your child's age).
- Loss of privileges (for example, no cartoons, no computer games, etc.).
- Removal from a fun activity (such as ending a playdate early).
- Silence. Used sparingly, a little "silent treatment" can be extremely effective.
- The Look. The one that means you're all business—and that your child's behavior is totally unacceptable.

Where to Go for Help

Despite your best efforts, is your child acting up (or acting out) more and more? If so, consider getting outside help. Here are some places to start:

- Other parents. Never underestimate the wealth of knowledge and insight that fellow moms and dads can offer.
- Your child's preschool teacher.
- Your pediatrician or family physician.
- The public library (which may provide information on parenting classes or other community resources).
- Your county health department.

For More Information

"10 Alternatives to Spanking"

ParentSoup

www.parentsoup.com/print/0,,554700.html

"Corporal Punishment by Parents and Associated Child Behaviors and Experiences: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review"

by Elizabeth Thompson Gershoff

Psychological Bulletin 2002, vol. 128 no. 4

American Psychological Association, Inc.

1-800-374-2727

www.apa.org

Discipline the Brazelton Way

by T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., and Joshua D.

Sparrow, M.D.

Da Capo Press

1-800-255-1514

www.dacapopress.com

Go to Your Room!

by Shari Steelsmith

Parenting Press

1-800-992-6657

www.parentingpress.com

"Misbehavior in Public Places: Rules and Discipline,"

University of Michigan Health System

www.med.umich.edu/llibr/pa/

pa_publicmb_hhg.htm

The Parent Institute

1-800-756-5525

www.parent-institute.com

"Time-In"

University of Michigan Health System

www.med.umich.edu/llibr/pa/

pa_timein_hhg.htm

"Whine, Whine Go Away"

ParentSoup

www.parentsoup.com/print/0,,188012,00.html

"Who's the Boss?"

by Deborah Geiges Berry

Parenting

April 2004

The Parenting Group

1-800-234-0847

www.parenting.com

Other Parent Guides Available From The Parent Institute®

Family & Home Set

10 Great Ways to Teach Children Responsibility
25 Ways You Can Put the Power of Routines to Work for You and Your Child
52 Great Ways Families Can Spend Time Together

School Readiness—Set 1

Developmental Milestones for Preschool Children—Is My Child on Track?
Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five
How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child

School Readiness—Set 2

Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them
37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School
Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten

School Success—Set 1

The Road to Reading Success—Elementary School Years
Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them
31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child

School Success—Set 2

Give Your Child the Edge: Teachers' Top 10 Learning Secrets Parents Can Use
How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests
Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork

School Success—Set 3

Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles
How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child
Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School

When There is a Problem—Set 1

Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying
Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure
How to Help Your Struggling Student

Other Important Titles

Common Discipline Problems of Teenagers and How to Solve Them
What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD
Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them
Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

*For more information about these and other materials for
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

1-800-756-5525
www.parent-institute.com

