

Three simple steps from difficult to delightful

In the supermarket checkout line, your 3-year-old leans out of the grocery cart and grabs a candy bar. You say, "You've had enough candy today," then take the bar and put it back. He lunges for the rack wailing, "I want candy NOW!" You try to get through the line before the tantrum escalates out of control. Too late. He's banging his feet, flailing for candy and screaming at the top of his lungs.

When you ask people how they deal with defiant behavior and tantrums, parents, teachers, or your pediatrician are likely to say that these behaviors are a sign of a "chemical imbalance." They point to a host of drugs that "treat" them. But are drugs the answer? Whatever happened to the terrible twos? Wasn't it a normal stage every parent expected their child to go through?

The good news is, it is a stage but contrary to what all the professionals have told you, your child won't outgrow it without your firm guidance and direction. In fact, defiance is a young child's expression of something quite worthy: the desire to grow up, to be a big boy or a big girl.

Children need to learn three things:

1) We live in a world with other people whose needs, feelings and wishes must be respected.

2) That we live in a world in which you cannot always have what you want.

3) Self-control.

Parents must redefine



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for their child what it truly means to be grown-up. This redefinition is critically important! Children think defiance and demanding behaviors mean being grown-up ("You are not the boss over me.") Being self-centered is not grown-up behavior, but respecting the needs of others is. Being demanding, yelling or hitting is not grown-up, but learning how to wait your turn, sharing with friends and siblings, exercising self-control is grown-up.

Step 1

Look at your child with new eyes. Observe and record caring behaviors toward siblings and others, and the ability to take disappointment calmly. Keep a diary and note four to six examples each week for the following kinds of behavior:

- Sibling caring
 - Wished big brother luck in Little League game.
 - Let younger sister borrow hair clip.
- Mother Teresa behaviors
 - Helped put the groceries away.
 - Put dirty dishes in the sink
 - Put his dirty clothing in the hamper.
- Taking disappointment

calmly behaviors

-Reacted calmly when dad brought home the wrong video.

-Quickly recovered from not being invited to Jane's birthday party.

Step 2

A) Nurture grown-up diary behaviors. At a later time (one-half to six hours later), take your child aside, in private, and make the earlier behavior come to life again by describing it in words.

Praise the child who clears the table and helps carry groceries into the house. Congratulate the child who says goodbye without fussing when it's time to leave a friend's house, or accepts that eating cake is for after dinner instead of now. Avoid injecting criticism into your praise such as, "It's nice to see you sharing for a change."

B) Explain why this behavior is of value. After describing the grown-up behavior in vivid detail, label it as "big girl/big boy" behavior. Say something like, "It was very grown-up of you to share your favorite doll." Do not say, good job or good girl/boy.

C) Immediately follow this by doing something your child enjoys. For example, spend between five and 15 minutes playing one of your child's favorite games. This confirms the praise and the child is savoring your attention for mature behaviors.

What should you do when your child hits,

bites, throws food or has a tantrum? Use time out. Many parents say, "I'm already using time out and it doesn't work!" If you are "reasoning" with your child while they're sitting in their time out corner, or if you've sent your child to their bedroom full of computer games, videos and toys "to think about their misdeeds," then you are not using a REAL time out.

Step 3

A real time out for serious misbehaviors only. A real time out is total nothingness for three to four minutes maximum, regardless of age.

Time out means no talking, no iPods, no cell phones, no video games; nothing.

Stop rewarding the very behaviors that drive you crazy. Hugging a tantrum — as a famous parenting book suggests — only creates future, more frequent and longer tantrums.

Parents can guide children to be helpful, kind and caring adults. That's their job. It isn't the job of doctors, pills or the pharmaceutical industry. It's up to parents to "say no to drugs" and teach their children that life is meant to be learned and experienced — it's not just a pill to be swallowed.

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