



As newcomers to Canada, you and your family have been through many changes. This can lead to stress and anxiety for the whole family. When children are anxious, it often results in difficult behaviour. They may be disobedient or they might cry easily, cling to you or have trouble sleeping and eating.

No matter how your child behaves, it's important to be consistent, but also understanding, patient and loving.

Different Behaviour for Different Ages

BABIES

- Babies cannot tell us their feelings; however, when something is wrong, they cry to let us know. Your baby may also make many sounds to “talk” with you.
- The sound of your voice helps to calm your baby.
- When a baby spills or breaks something, it is not deliberate.
- Older infants become anxious when they are with strangers. This is especially true if they have no experience being away from their parents.

TODDLERS (1-3 YEAR-OLDS)

- Toddlers don't have much control over their feelings. When something is wrong, they need you to reassure them that everything is okay. They cannot hold in their tears or stop clinging to you.
- Your toddler may be upset when you try to leave them for even a short time. They are not sure if you will come back and feel lost without you.
- Toddlers use their whole body to explore and control their world. They may hit, kick, pinch, bite or pull hair.
- Don't expect them to be able to obey you.

PRESCHOOLERS (3-6 YEAR-OLDS)

- Preschoolers are slowly learning to calm and control themselves.
- Your child is gradually learning to communicate to get what they want; however, these new skills disappear when your child feels anxious.

When Do Children Misbehave?

Children often misbehave when they are under stress of some kind. This might include:

- when they have strong feelings that they don't understand (e.g., frustration, fear, anger, helplessness);
- when they have strong needs (e.g., they are tired, hungry, in pain, sick);
- when the environment is chaotic (e.g., too noisy, overwhelming, others are angry);
- when adults don't (or are unable to) respond to their needs or emotions;
- when they don't know any other way to express themselves;
- when they face social challenges (e.g., entering play, sharing, learning to lead and follow).

10 Suggestions for Helping Your Child to Behave

1. Have a calm, relaxed, safe home that isn't cluttered but has some play options.
2. Listen to and talk calmly with your child.
3. Get down to your child's level to play, and give them your full attention.
4. Have realistic expectations according to your child's age, ability and the time of day.
5. Have a predictable routine. Give your child a few minutes warning for any changes. Expect that when there is a change in routine, your child may react. Plan ahead for difficult times (e.g., a snack or nap before going shopping).
6. Notice your child's behaviour and what leads to any misbehaviour. Notice early on when your child is upset and comfort them.
7. Avoid situations that lead to misbehaviour (e.g., rushing, lack of attention, allowing them to get hungry or tired).
8. Have clear, consistent limits and follow through. Calmly stop misbehaviour right away.
9. Model the behaviour you want from your child. Hitting your child doesn't stop your child from misbehaving. It is very harmful.
10. Help your child handle a situation better. (e.g., If they grab someone's toy, help them learn to offer the other child another toy or to say, "Can I play?")

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Funded by: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada / Financé par : Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada