

# Addressing Difficult Behaviors at Home

## Encouraging Cooperation and Positive Family Interactions

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*While there may be many reasons that difficult behaviors emerge, here are a few to consider.*

- **Attention:** To get attention from a caregiver or sibling
- **Escape:** To get out of doing something or to “escape” a demand or instruction (e.g., homework, cleaning up)
- **Tangible:** To get access to something he/she wants (e.g., activity, TV, tablet, favorite snack)



### Strategies for Addressing Difficult Behaviors

#### Attention-Seeking Behaviors

*Some children engage in difficult behaviors (e.g., tantrums, whining) to get attention. For some children, positive OR negative attention is better than no attention at all.*

- Intentionally schedule times each day to engage with your child in a positive way.
- *Catch them being good.* Praise your child when you see positive behaviors (e.g., “Thank you for sharing that train with your sister”, “Great job listening on the first try”).
- *Praise the opposite.* For example, if yelling is a problem, praise your child for talking in an “inside voice.” If throwing toys is a problem, praise your child for sharing nicely.
- Try to *ignore* whining and fussing (e.g., avoid eye contact, keep talking to a minimum, wait for your child to stop the difficult behavior and then resume your attention).

#### Escape-Related Behaviors

*Some children engage in difficult behaviors to try to persuade caregivers to let them out of something they don't want to do (e.g., homeschool work, clean up, chores).*

- Teach the “*First then*” rule: We can teach children to “First” do what we asked them to do and “Then” they can have what they want (e.g., “*First*, pick up your bedroom, *then* you can watch TV”).
- Offer small and reasonable rewards for compliance (e.g., “First, finish your morning work, then you can play outside”).
- Break down tasks into *small chunks* (e.g., “Complete 5 math problems, then 5 spelling words, then take a break”; “You pick up 10 toys and then I’ll pick up 10 toys”).
- *Use a timer* to set work expectations (e.g., microwave timer, phone timer). Young children have more difficulty with the concept of time. Use a *visual timer* instead, such as the “Children’s Countdown App,” which is free for iPhone and Android.

### Tangible Behaviors

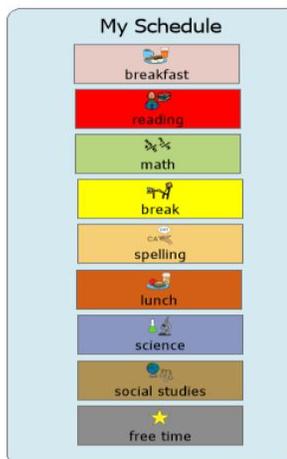
Some children engage in difficult behaviors to try to persuade caregivers to give them something they want.

- Offer choices to decrease the likelihood that you have to say “no” (e.g., “Tablet is not an option right now, but you can play with trains or you can play outside”).
- Teach your child to wait. Use a timer to limit the amount of time each child has with an activity and to encourage turn-taking (e.g., “Johnny gets 30 minutes on the computer and Susie can have 30 minutes on the computer”).
- Indicate when a preferred activity or snack can be available (e.g., “No more snacks right now, but at 12:00pm we will eat lunch”).
- *Eliminate surprises!* Use a timer to show how much time is left with activity. Give *verbal warnings* when time is almost up (e.g., Johnny, in 3 minutes, the timer will go off and it will be time to give the controller to Susie”). Be firm when time is up. Provide positive attention when your child follows the rules of the timer.
- Indicate when your child can have access to a favorite toys or activity again (e.g., “Time is up on the tablet, but you can have it back after you eat dinner”).

### Additional Suggestions

**Increase Time Spent Outdoors:** When you can do so safely, increase your family’s time outdoors or time engaged in physical activities.

**Maintain a Routine:** Predictability decreases anxiety and increases cooperation. Consider putting together a schedule for each day and then stick to the schedule. Be sure to praise your child for completed activities. Offer small and reasonable rewards as needed. You can find free examples of visual schedules using a google search or at [www.do2learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com). Here is one example:



**Your Safety is Our #1 Priority:** If your child engages in behavior that cannot be safely managed at home, please call our Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC; 513-636-4124) to receive guidance and support.