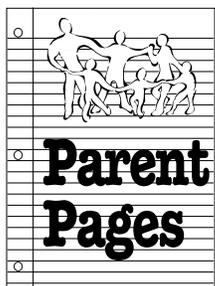


# Helping Young Children Develop Self-Control



Children learn self-control and how to get along with others from the adults around them. This is the true meaning of discipline -- to teach children how to be responsible for themselves and to others.

Sometimes children seem completely out of control, especially when they are angry or frustrated. When their strong emotions get the best of them, they may misbehave. Parents and other adults should not be afraid of children's strong feelings, nor should they be afraid to correct children's unacceptable behavior.

*Here are some ideas for helping children gain self-control.*

## 1. Recognize and accept the child's feelings in the situation.

For example, when a child grabs a toy from and hits another child, you can say, "I know you want to play with the truck" or "I know you're angry with Sara because she didn't give you the truck." This shows that you understand and care about a child's legitimate desires and strong feelings.

## 2. State the "but."

You may say, "I know you want to play with the truck, but Sara is using it right now." In this way, you let the child know that, while his feelings are acceptable, his behavior is not. You are also communicating the fact that other children have needs, thus helping the child see a situation from someone else's point of view.

## 3. Make your expectations clear.

State your rules precisely and firmly. Since hitting is not allowed, say very clearly and simply, "I don't want you to hit or hurt anyone -- even when you're angry."

## 4. Suggest an alternative action.

For example, "I want you tap my hand when you feel like hitting someone," or "When you're angry, walk away and take a deep breath." Let the child know what he can do instead of misbehaving.

## 5. Offer a solution.

You may say, "Soon you can play with the truck," or "It's your turn next." Even one-year-olds can begin to understand "just a minute" and will wait patiently, as long as we always follow through 60 seconds later. Two- and three-year-olds can learn to understand, "I'll tell you when it's your turn" -- if we always follow through within two or three minutes. This helps children learn how to wait for something they want.

## 6. Teach children how to use words.

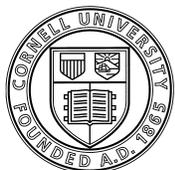
Assist children to develop language that helps them express their feelings, including anger, and their wishes. Help them think about alternatives and solutions to problems. For example, "Tell me what you are feeling," or "Tell Sara what you want." Sometimes, you can help children discuss their feelings and ideas by asking open-ended questions like, "How do you feel when you have to wait?" or "What would you like to say to Sara?"

## 7. Show confidence.

Say something that indicates your confidence in the child's ability and willingness to learn. Say, "Next time, you can ask Sara if you can play with the truck." This affirms your faith in the child and his ability to behave better in the future.

*Source: Tim Jahn, Human Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*

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