



Strategies with Kids | Information for Parents

# Managing behaviour for under fives



**Guidance, or discipline, is most effective in a warm and loving relationship, where your child feels supported and secure.**

**“Say lots more positive than negative things”**

**“Behave in the same way you want your children to”**

# Managing behaviour

Children explore and experiment to find out about the world and their place in it. They climb, taste, poke, jump, touch and ask a million questions. This helps them make sense of the world around them and to learn where their boundaries are.

You can help guide all of this exploration by making sure your child keeps safe and by giving them new things to learn about. By doing this you are helping your child to develop the skills and wisdom they will need as they grow into adults.

**“Consistency is the key”**

**“Kids want  
to please - they  
want to get  
it right”**



# What works

- Give lots of love and warmth and praise.
- Communicate clearly. Tell your child when they are doing well, they'll develop the self confidence to try new things. Praise your child and they'll repeat the behaviour you like.
- Be clear about what you would like your child to do, and what you don't want them to do. Set clear limits and boundaries.
- If something does go wrong, talk to them about what happened. They might need help to work things out. If they are very young and you can't have a chat, think about what happened – they may be tired, hungry or frustrated and not be able to tell you.

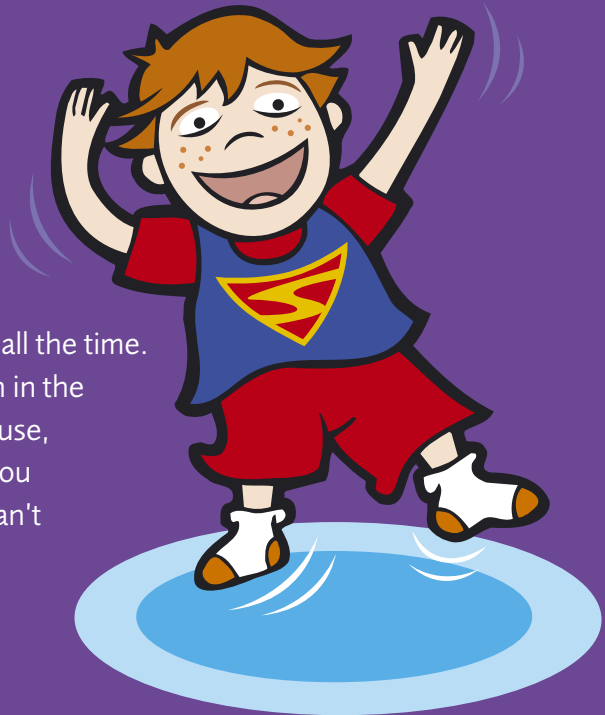
**“Praise them  
when they’re  
doing well, keep  
the momentum  
going”**

- If your child is refusing to do something, try to understand why. They could be wanting more attention, be frustrated or feel unsure of themselves. They might just need a hug or some encouraging words.
- Talk to your child about consequences. For instance you could tell them that if they hit the cat it might scratch them, or if they throw a toy it might break. Keep things brief and in words they will understand.

# “Be firm, fair and friendly”

- If you ask them not to do something and they do it, follow through. This might mean saying sorry if they hit someone, not being able to play with a toy or helping you to clean up if they make a mess.
- Say sorry yourself. This will help your child learn to say it too. Act as you want your child to act.
- Be patient. It takes time for a child to develop their own self discipline.

- Plan. Put precious things out of reach. Don't take your child to the supermarket if they're tired, and teach your child to cross at the lights.
- Try not to say *no* and *don't* all the time. Instead of saying "don't run in the house" say "walk in the house, you might hurt yourself if you run" or instead of "no we can't go to the park" say "maybe tomorrow".



# What works cont.

- Have realistic expectations – a small child won't be able to sit still for a long time or will end up with food all over the place when they first start eating on their own. You can change rules and expectations as they grow and develop more skills.
- Try to have routines for eating and sleeping. This helps children become organised and feel secure.

**“Giving your child lots of attention and love won't spoil them”**

**“Yelling and smacking really does escalate things. I find a quiet voice, close up, better”**



- Keep your sense of humour. Sometimes you have a split second when you have to decide whether you're going to get really angry, or whether you'll see the funny side. If a child has smeared lipstick all over their face, and you laugh, you can still ask them not to do it again and explain why.

## What doesn't work

- Don't withhold love when your child does something wrong. This gives a message that you don't like them, when what you don't like is their behaviour.
- Smacking or hitting doesn't teach your child what they did wrong. It teaches them that hitting other people is okay.
- Yelling and screaming can make things build up into major battles. Take a deep breath, walk away for a minute, be calm.



**“I get lots of ideas from other parents”**

**“You are your child's role model”**

# S.K.I.P

Strategies with Kids | Information for Parents

Skip supports parents and caregivers  
to raise their children in a positive way.

For more information go to:

**[www.familyservices.govt.nz/skip/](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/skip/)**

Email: **[skipinfo@msd.govt.nz](mailto:skipinfo@msd.govt.nz)**

or phone: **04 916 3300**

For more information on support for parents go to

**[www.familyservices.govt.nz](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz)**

and click on National Directory.



**family &  
community services**  
*ratonga ā-whānau, ā-hapori*

*A service of the Ministry of Social Development*