

Behavior Tip of the Week

1. Invest in one-on-one time with kids daily.

By far, the best thing you can do to improve your children's behavior is spending time with them individually every day, giving them the positive attention and emotional connection they're hard-wired to need.

When they don't have that positive attention, they will seek out attention in negative ways. Aim for 10-15 minutes a day per child and you'll see improvement almost immediately.

2. Get serious about sleep.

Think of how you feel when you're overtired. You may feel cranky, irritable, your head and/or stomach may hurt. It's the same for kids, and most children from toddlers up to teenagers get far less sleep than their growing bodies need.

Teens even need more sleep than some younger kids. Consult your family physician about the hours of sleep your kids need by age. If your child has a sleep deficit, try moving up bedtime by 10 minutes every few nights. A well-rested kid is a well-behaved kid and can function better throughout the day, including during school.

3. Focus on routines.

Kids thrive with a routine, so set clearly defined routines for the most challenging times of the day, like mornings, after school, mealtimes and bedtimes.

Let your kids help decide how the routine will go—do we get dressed or brush teeth first? How can you help get dinner ready?

For younger kids or children that have delays, write out the order of the routine using pictures or words and let them decorate it, then hang it where they'll see it every day. Then stick to it.

4. Everyone pitches in.

For better behavior, kids need to understand that everyone needs to contribute to make a household run smoothly.

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All children, of any age or ability level, should have “family contributions” that are appropriate to them that they do daily – this helps bring your family closer together, teaches them life skills and works to prevent entitlement.

5. Encourage your kids to be problem solvers.

Time to retire your referee whistle – when parents step in the middle of a sibling disagreement and determine who’s at fault and dole out punishments, it may actually make things worse. To children, they may see a winner and a loser and a need to escalate the sibling rivalry.

Encourage your kids to find a resolution to the problem on their own, which will help them solve conflicts as they grow older. If you have to get involved, don’t choose sides, but ask questions that will help them figure out a solution that all parties can feel good about.