

Sunny Days Ahead!

Parents and preschoolers overcome stormy behavior *and* have fun with INTERPLAY!

Use these seven techniques to help your young child become better at minding your requests and instructions

From time to time, all preschool-age children seem to have a need to express independence by disobeying parents, teachers, or other adults when they are asked to do something. These moments of rebellion can take place at any time or place throughout the day. Maybe you've witnessed firsthand a child in the grocery store in the midst of a full-blown temper tantrum because his mother won't buy his favorite candy bar. Perhaps your own child has difficulty going to bed when she is told, or argues with you each time you ask her to help with household chores.

Research has shown the value of *seven special techniques* parents can use to reduce the occurrence of "stormy" behavior. Some of these deal directly with the child's behavior, while others strengthen a positive parent-child relationship (which helps the child to be less resistant to making changes in his behavior). Together we call them INTERPLAY. Engage in INTERPLAY techniques daily during the course of everyday activities or special "playtimes" with your child. Research shows it takes only about five minutes a day for the techniques to be effective. Here's how:

1 Sing their praises!

When your child is behaving properly, be sure to compliment him by giving "labeled praise"; that is, letting him know exactly what you like about his behavior ("I like the way you're playing so quietly"). By doing so, you will increase your child's self esteem, and the child is likely to increase this type of behavior in the future.

2 Describe what's going on

As you and your child get absorbed in an activity, describe out loud what is happening. Your description should include both what the child is doing ("You're making a tower") and the objects and events that are involved in the activity ("Look, the train track is curving around the mountain"). This ongoing narrative shows your child that you're interested in what he's doing, willing to follow his lead, and involved in the activity at hand.



When parents use INTERPLAY, a set of interaction techniques that 1) build a more positive relationship and 2) address disruptive behaviors, their preschoolers can learn to follow adult instruction better and avoid getting into trouble.

3 Be a copy cat!

When your child is appropriately engaging in an activity or playing nicely, imitate his actions. For instance, if you're participating in a coloring session with your child and he draws a house, you should follow suit and draw a house as well. By imitating your child's actions, you're showing him that you approve of what he's doing. You're also teaching him how to play appropriately with others.

4 Keep the conversation going

Show your child that you're really listening when he talks by expanding upon what he says. If your child says "I like to play with this car," you can keep the conversation going by making statements such as "Yes, this car is really fun to play with" or "I can see that you like the car better than the truck." These statements demonstrate your acceptance and understanding of what your child is doing.

5 Be clear

As you get farther along in an activity, start to incorporate some simple instructions. Make them clear enough so that there's no question in your child's mind about what he's being asked to do. Instead of telling your

child to behave, for example, you could instruct him to “talk in a quiet voice.” Similarly, “get down off the chair” is preferable to “be careful!” Other guidelines for giving clear instructions include telling your child what *to* do (“Come and sit beside me”) rather than what *not* to do (“Don’t run around the room”), and giving instructions one at a time.

6 Be calm and polite

When instructing your child to do something, remember that it’s important to deliver the message using polite language (“Please pick up the toy”), and a calm, matter-of-fact tone (rather than shouting or using an angry voice). By doing so, your child will learn to respond to directions issued in a normal conversational tone. You don’t want to use shouting as a way to signify that you mean

business, because your child will likely end up ignoring instructions you give when you are *not* shouting.

7 Be consistent!

In order to see an improvement in your child’s ability to follow instructions, you must consistently apply consequences for both compliant and non-compliant behavior. In other words, your child must learn that when he does what he is told to do, he will receive praise from you (“I like it when you do what I tell you to do”), and when he disobeys, he will be punished in some way. For instance, he’ll have to sit in a time-out chair for a certain length of time, or his favorite toy will be taken away. When you apply these same consequences *WHENEVER* your child behaves or misbehaves, he will soon learn that *he* is in control of determining whether he receives praise or punishment.

More opportunities...

Special INTERPLAYtime...Just for Me!

Set aside a special one-on-one play time each day (it only takes five minutes!). Using the INTERPLAY strategies during play time is a good idea for two reasons: (1) most children will relish this special time with Mom or Dad; and (2) young children often learn best when they’re playing.

During special play time, be sure to pay attention to the type of toys that are available for your child to use. Stick to toys that encourage creative play, such as building blocks, dolls, modeling dough, and crayons/paper. It’s best to avoid toys that encourage rough or aggressive play (such as action figures and play weapons) and toys that have defined rules or that encourage competition (such as card games and board games).

Begin by emphasizing the first four INTERPLAY strategies to increase warmth and good feelings between you and your child—Praise, Describe, Imitate, Elaborate. As playtime progresses, incorporate the final three INTERPLAY strategies to focus on helping your child listen to and follow directions better—the “3 C’s” (Clear, Calm, and Consistent). Before you know it, your child will be looking forward to special INTERPLAY time every day!

Let’s Go Public!!

After practicing the INTERPLAY strategies at home, parents can incorporate these techniques as much as possible into everyday activities outside the home, since learning to obey parents in “real world” settings is the ultimate goal!

Try this: Take your child grocery shopping and let her follow along beside you using her own child-size grocery cart. Play the “let’s shop for dinner” game by letting her choose various items off of the shelves. Compliment her on her tasty dinner selections and elaborate upon what she says

as she describes what she’ll be cooking up later on! Before you’re ready to check out, instruct her to return the items to the shelves, one at a time, and let her know how much you appreciate her being a “good shopping helper” when she does what you ask her to do!

Using INTERPLAY in public places can present some unique challenges, but they can be overcome by planning ahead. Parents can carefully prepare their child for outings by explaining rules and consequences before entering public places (“If you can walk through the store without touching anything, then we’ll go to the park this afternoon;” “As long as you don’t ask for anything when we are in the grocery store, I’ll buy you a candy bar for being good!”). Remember that the “time-out” consequence for disobedience can be used in a public setting—with a little creativity. For instance, out-of-the-way places such as dressing rooms, benches outside of stores, public restrooms, and building hallways can serve as effective “time-out” places. Parents can even bring along a “time-out towel” that can be placed anywhere for the child to sit on during time out.



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