

Effective Discipline for Two Year Olds

The "terrible" twos are a time of great change for most children. They are learning how to be independent and often defy their parents, yet this newfound freedom sometimes frightens them. They can understand far more complex concepts than they can express verbally, leading to frustration and tantrums. They are endlessly curious about the world around them but they have not developed a sense of personal safety, so they don't understand why certain activities are off limits.

With all the conflicting advice parents receive about discipline, it's easy to forget that the word "discipline" means "to teach." Many situations requiring discipline at this age can be turned into learning experiences for both you and your child. Approaching difficult situations with that concept firmly in mind can help you discipline even the most difficult preschooler.

For example, the dreaded word "no" causes automatic tension in most parents of two-year-olds. Your instinct may be to engage in a battle of wills or simply pick up the child and make them do what is required. However, if you allow the child to say "no" to your request, you will often get a "yes" if you ask again in a few minutes. Allowing a child to say "no" once in awhile shows them that you respect their growing independence.

Another opportunity to teach proper behavior arises when your child deliberately makes a mess for you to clean up. Most parents can tell the difference between a genuine accident and willful misbehavior. For the latter, parents can use the incident as an example of cause and effect. If your child deliberately colors on the walls after you have told him not to, having him help you clean up the mess can teach a valuable lesson about responsibility and consequences.

The most important tool in your discipline toolbox is consistency. By imposing the same discipline every time your preschooler misbehaves, you're teaching them that their actions have predictable consequences. If you allow a behavior one day and punish it the next day, your child will be very confused. Children at this age are too young to understand special exceptions so you should stick carefully to your routines as much as possible each and every day.

Finally, if all else fails, preschoolers are generally very receptive to redirection. If your child does not want to go to bed, instead of arguing with her and insisting that it's time for bed, change the subject and ask what doll she wants to take to bed with her or which bedtime story she wants to hear. This teaches children that some behavior is not negotiable and shows them acceptable alternatives.

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