



# Why Do Children "Misbehave"?

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Parents often approach psychologists looking for ideas to deal with behaviours that are difficult to manage. In order to try to help with suggestions and strategies for your children, it is important to find out what may be causing these behaviours in the first place.

## So, why do children "misbehave"?

1. Some children may not behave the way that we want them to because they are simply too young to either understand what to do or to know what is expected of them. Some of the children may be at a developmental stage that does not allow them to understand what we want them to do.
2. Some children may have difficulty behaving because they are bored (for example, listening to adults talk at a restaurant, or anywhere for that matter), tired, over-excited (birthday parties, special occasions, holidays, visits), or looking for attention.
3. Some children try to "test the limits" to see what's OK and what's not OK. Sometimes, this testing the limits results in behaviours that parents don't appreciate.
4. Sometimes kids misbehave because they're just being kids.

When we have a better idea as to why our children are "misbehaving", we will likely have better ways to deal with these behaviours.



For example, if children do not understand what is expected of them, it is important to teach them what you want them to know. Depending on the age and stage of your child, these factors will determine how you teach them successfully. Showing them what you want them to do, practice and repetition, role-playing with other siblings, visual cues, and reminders are some of the ways to teach your child the skill or behaviour that you want them to demonstrate.

Children seem to like it when they are given our attention. Instead of waiting to get our attention by making lots of noise, fighting with their siblings, making messes all over the house, etc., try to "catch" them doing "good" things. Try to give your child three positive praises for every one negative reminder. If you pay attention only to the negative behaviours, your children will likely learn that to get your attention, they should misbehave.

It is very common for children to "test the limits" to see what they "can get away with". As parents, it is really important (and difficult) to be consistent and persistent. To be consistent and persistent, it takes a lot of energy and patience but the results are rewarding. When you're not consistent, our kids have a more difficult time understanding what the rules are and, therefore, they have more difficulty following the rules. For example, if every time your child jumps on the couch, you take him or her to the rebounder, your child will eventually learn where it's OK to jump. If they know that sometimes you let them jump on the couch, they probably won't learn that lesson. The more consistent you are, the quicker the children will learn. It may take a lot of repetition and persistence for young children to learn new lessons, so stick with it!!

Remember that children's behaviours rarely change overnight. It may take a lot of small steps, time, and energy but the results can be very rewarding.