



Managing "Misbehavior"

Why do kids misbehave? Sometimes they're just seeking your attention. Children find attention, especially from a trusted and loved adult, intrinsically rewarding – even if it's "negative" attention like yelling. Children are constantly learning associations between their behaviors and consequences. Positive consequences can include praise and rewards, while negative consequences can include punishment and scolding. Despite your intentions, sometimes even your negative attention can inadvertently make misbehavior *more* likely to occur. Here are some tips to help rebalance positive and negative attention in your household to address misbehavior.

Create time for positive attention. Often during times of heightened family conflict and stress, time for enjoyable activities with the kids can fall to the wayside. If you imagine your child's need for your attention as a gas tank, they may be running on empty, so to speak, which may lead them to seek your attention in other ways, like misbehavior. Setting aside 5 – 10 minutes per day, without distractions (e.g., leave your phone elsewhere) to focus on positive attention with fun and play can help to fill their tank little by little. Ideally, during this time you would let your child choose an activity for you to do together (reading a book, playing with a toy, showing you their stuffed animals, etc.). During this time, it is important to follow their lead and call attention to behaviors you like to see from your child ("I like how you're playing with the toys gently") or to narrate what they are doing back to them. Don't choose anything too exciting, just 15 min of easy play will do the trick. This helps your child feel "seen" and gives you a few moments' break to enjoy your child without needing to "control" their behavior.

Catch your child being good. Another way to build positive attention is to use praise and rewards for behaviors you like to see from your child. It is important that your praise be specific to the behavior you like to see. For example, instead of saying "Great job", try saying "Great job picking up your toys. I like when you listen to me the first time I ask." Being as consistent as possible, and giving praise every time you notice the behavior helps teach your child the connection between behaviors that will earn them positive attention from you.

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Check out the page below for more resources!

Click [here](#) to tell us what topics you want covered in future newsletters!



Please reach out if you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The WHALE Study or the COVID-19 situation. Staff can be reached by call, text, or email: whalestudy@unc.edu | 919-914-0588

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Ignore small misbehaviors. Have you ever noticed that when you have scolded your child or told them to stop something you find annoying (potty humor, cussing, baby talk), they do it even more? In these cases, negative attention for these behaviors (i.e., scolding, lecturing) may unintentionally give your child what they are ultimately looking for — attention. By removing your attention from these situations, your child will learn* that negative behaviors do *not* get the response they are searching for. It is very important that ignoring small negative behaviors is used in balance with positive attention so that your child learns appropriate behaviors that get attention rather than only learning what you do not like to see.

Learning takes time. Sometimes things get worse before they get better because children will desperately try harder at strategies that used to work to get (negative) attention, but will eventually stop the behavior after a(n exhausting) period of time if you're consistently not giving them any attention for those actions. **We do not recommend ignoring physically dangerous behaviors. Those situations are best practiced with the guidance of a trained therapist who can help you problem-solve those extra difficult moments and support your family through the process.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Quick Reads:

- [The Power of Positive Attention](#)
- [How Positive Attention Can Reduce Behavior Problems](#)
- [Using Praise to Encourage Good Behaviors](#)

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

HEALTH & SAFETY

- [Compass Center for Women and Families](#)
 - 919-929-7122 (24/7 Domestic Violence Hotline)
- [Durham Crisis Response Center](#)
919-40-6562 (24-hour Help Line)
- [InterAct Family Safety and Empowerment Center](#)
 - 919-828-7501 (Main office)
- [Orange County Rape Crisis Center](#)
 - 866-935-4783 (call), 919-967-7273 (text)
- [Freedom House](#)
 - 866-275-9552 (Orange/Person County Mobile Crisis)
 - 919-957-7386 (Durham Women's House)
 - 336-599-8366 (Roxboro)
- [Suicide & Crisis Hotline](#): call or text 988
- [Hope4NC Helpline](#): Call or text "hope" to 1-855-587-3463
- [24/7 Crisis Text Line](#): Text HOME to 741741

FOOD & GROCERIES

- [Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina](#)
- [No Kid Hungry NC](#) - Text FOODNC or COMIDA to 877-877 to receive information about 3 drive-thru or pickup sites with meals for kids closest to you.
- **Free/Reduced Price School Meals:**
 - [Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools](#)
 - [Durham County](#)
 - [Wake County](#)
- **Food Resources by County:** [Orange County](#) (Updated Nov. 2022), [Durham County](#), [Wake County](#)

CHILDCARE

- [Childcare Payment Assistance](#)
- [CCSA Child Care Scholarship Program](#)
- [NC Pre-K](#): state-funded, part-day preschool program
- [Durham Pre-K](#): 1-833-773-5338
- **Child Care Subsidy Programs:**
 - [Alamance County](#): 336-570-6532
 - [Durham County](#): 919-560-8300
 - [Orange County](#): 919-968-2000
 - [Wake County](#): 919-212-7000
- [Child Care Referral Central \(CCRC\)](#)

LEARNING

- [Scholastics Learn at Home](#)
- [Khan Academy Kids](#)
- [PBS Kids](#)

More community resources can be found on our website:
circlelab.unc.edu