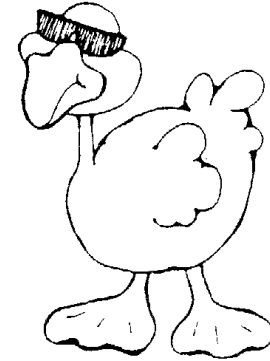

FAMILY · SERVICES

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Your Child's

Outrageous Behavior



Summer is nearly upon us and vacations are ahead. For many of us, this means family events, trips to new places, visits to grandparents, weddings, family reunions, and back-yard barbeques with friends. Good times, right? Yes...unless our child's normally sweet disposition suddenly turns monstrous. How do we cope? Here are a few thoughts to help families plan ahead for the unexpected parenting challenges we all may encounter along the way.

How to Handle Monstrous Manners in Public

We have all died of shame as our "monster child" came out in public and embarrassed us in front of other people—especially in social situations! While we may not aspire to look like the 'perfect parent,' we all yearn to be 'good enough' mothers and fathers. Certainly, none of us wants to be thought of as having an "out of control child"—even though all kids do get out of control at times. Truthfully, we'd all like our kids to show manners and respect in public, but most of us aren't really sure how to do it.

The following excerpt is from the book, "***The Answer is NO—Saying It and Sticking to It***, by Cynthia Whitman, MSW. This is another gem of a book. Ms. Whitman offers some great ideas. Read on....

You simply want
to be the parent
of a **model child**
for one day...
or even one
evening.
**Is that too much
to ask?**

The Problem?

Your child is a pain in the neck at a relative's or friend's house (or when they are visiting you), he insists on a particular chair when it's already occupied, wants to grab food off your plate, interrupts you continuously with rude questions when you are trying to talk to your elderly aunt, kicks or bites other children, has a full blown, flailing tantrum in the middle of the living room, announces, "I'm bored" every twenty minutes, grabs toys away from (or in another way tortures) his defenseless younger cousin.

Thinking It Over...

In public, whether stranger-public, friend-public, or family-public, kids often display their most creative and challenging obnoxious behavior. In fact, in these circumstances you frequently see behavior your child would never, and I mean never, pull otherwise. It's as if our kids know we're on trial for *Felony Poor Parenting* and we've got the most unsympathetic jury in the world!

Getting "Perfect" Behavior

(...Will you settle for reasonable behavior?)



- 1. In your own home, let your child know what rude behavior is and what the Consequence will be for rude behavior.**

If at dinner your child says, "Yuck, this tastes awful," respond with "You are insulting and that's being rude. The next time you are rude, you will leave the table for three minutes."

2. Insist on good behavior when visiting ANY one at ANY time.

- **Small trips serve as a practice for longer ones**, whether it's a short coffee visit with a neighbor or dropping something off at a friend's house.
- **Establish clear rules and if they are violated, give a WARNING of a CONSEQUENCE**, such as the removal of a privilege (i.e.: no TV, no dessert, early bedtime, etc.).
- **If your child starts to cooperate, thank him.** If not, follow through with the consequence. To further drive home the point, you could consider leaving your child with a sitter or his other parent the next time you run errands. If your child begs to go, you might respond,



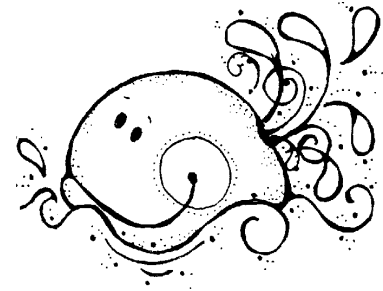
The last time we went to the bakery, you kept interrupting me when I was ordering. Today, you must stay home. I'll give you another chance next Saturday.

- **Don't give in!!** Your child may scream until you are out of sight, but my guess is that he will try harder on errands in the future. And that better behavior will carry over to other outings.

3. If visiting other people's homes tends to be difficult for your child, or if you want to cut trouble off at the pass, carefully assess the upcoming event.

Consider these and other possible problems and interventions:

- If the party is starting during your child's naptime, arrive late, after nap, or early enough so he can nap on the way before everyone arrives.
- If the party is starting later than your child's usual mealtime, have snacks in the car or bring along a sack lunch for her to have whenever she needs it.
- If the gathering is around a dinner table, light candles. A dimly lit room often has a soothing effect on kids. And since they love to blow out candles, use this **When/Then Deal**: "Whoever remembers their manners at dinner tonight gets to blow out the candles. (If there are more terrific diners than candles, re-light for round two.)"
- Be specific about what "good manners" means to you. Describe the behaviors you want. For example: no reaching across the table, chew with your mouth closed, stay seated during the meal, etc.
- If Cousin Matthew hates to share his toys, bring along some of your child's toys. Choose toys that he is willing to share with Matthew, or toys that could get lost or wrecked without major trauma.
- If your child is at an age where he hates to share his mom or dad, and you are looking forward to spending time talking with Aunt Margaret, hire an older cousin to play with him or an hour or two, and rent a video that he is fond of for after dinner.
- If the party will last past his bedtime, bring pj's, a sleeping bag, toothbrush, and teddy bear. Then he can either bed down at his usual time or when he gets tired and cranky. Or, you can choose to leave early and bundle him into the car all ready for bed.
- If your plan is to put your child to bed while the party is still going on, both Dad and Mom should spend some separate, relaxed, relatively brief "good-night time" so that your child gets as much of her normal routine with stories, lullabies, and so forth, as possible.



- If your child is not fond of the cousins, or vice versa, "Inspire cooperation" with a **When/Then Deal**: *Hey, if you can get along with your cousins tonight, you can have a friend sleep over tomorrow night.*
- In case kids need to play separately, bring along books or other solitary playthings.
- If you are planning to visit a friend or relative your child has never met, prepare

him as best you can by letting him know what to expect. A few short talks can help:

Cousin Lloyd lives in a house with an upstairs and a downstairs. There will be lots of people there, cooking and eating and talking. Your aunts will probably want to kiss you and you don't have to like it.

Uncle Malcolm likes to wrestle. You will probably like that a lot, but if he tickles you too much, tell him you don't like it or call me. He used to tickle me a lot when we were kids. You may be bored until the big cousins arrive. We'll take some things for you to play with before they get there.

4. Establish the rules before you go.

- Pick the three most important ones and make them clear to your child:



Keep your feet off the furniture.

If your aunt gives you food you don't like, just leave it on your plate. Don't announce that you don't like it.

Please say, "Excuse me," if you need to interrupt.

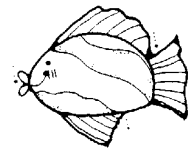
- When your child follows the rules, praise him with a whisper in the ear, a thumb's up sign, or a big hug for any terrific visiting behavior.

5. Let your child know what family subjects are taboo or "private."

Explain subjects that might be embarrassing or hurtful for someone if they were brought up, such as a teen cousin's pregnancy, Uncle Bud's hair loss from chemotherapy, or bickering that goes on between a couple near divorce. Let your child know that if she is concerned or frightened, you will gladly talk to her privately about her worries. Reassure her that you are always ready to listen, but sometimes she might have to wait until you have a "private" time together to talk.

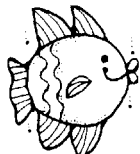
6. Give relatives permission to set limits if they have similar parenting styles.

It is sometimes easiest to defer to them. Even better than saying, "Aunt Nancy does not allow jumping on the furniture. If you do that again, you will have to go play outside," get Aunt Nancy to say, "If you jump on the furniture in my house, you will need to play outside for fifteen minutes." Nancy will probably be pleased that you respect her rules, and you will be off the hook.



7. Before a big event, say a wedding, about which you are nervous, plan a Trial Run or two in preparation.

Any low-stress event, such as a close friend's pot luck, a relaxed Sunday walk with neighbors, or an afternoon barbecue in the park, can provide a perfect opportunity to practice reasonable behavior.



Do the **Trial Run** following these guidelines:

- **Remind your child of the rules** (three is a good number):

Keep your hands to yourself with Tony.

No pulling the cat's tail or chasing the dog.

Do not leave the Wilson's' back yard without asking Mom or Dad.

- **Give a Warning of a Consequence.**

Remember, if you break the rules, you will go to bed half an hour early.

- **Praise your child for following any of the rules.**

Hey guys, you are playing together so well. Thanks!

You're being so nice and gentle with Woofie.

Good job remembering to ask before taking the food.

- **If he breaks a rule, follow through with the Consequence.**
You left the yard without asking. Tonight, bedtime is 7:30 sharp.
- **Have another Trial Run before the big event (such as a pot luck at your house) and announce the Consequence for breaking any of the rules again.**
- **Pick a Consequence you will be able to enforce** while hosting the party. Give the Consequence if your child earns it. The Trial Run will give you confidence in public and give your child the valuable message, "My parent means business."

8. Your messages (spoken or not) are communicated to your child.

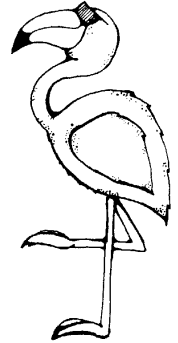
Your preparations can give your child the message that rude or aggressive behaviors will not be tolerated. Your messages, spoken or not, are communicated to your child and can affect his behavior.

If you have prepared for the outing as suggested, you will hopefully find that your child really rises to the occasion and behaves well, because you have prepared for the worst.

In my private practice, clients often bring up situations that overwhelm them, such as family reunions that are approaching. We go over what is troubling them, and we strategize ways to handle difficult people or situations. Next, we practice together for the upcoming event; for example, a woman will plan to ignore (by changing the subject) her father's unkind comments about her spouse. If her father continues, she plans to leave the room calmly. Often, after the visit, the client returns saying something like, "Dad wasn't all that bad this time."

I am convinced that part of the reason "Dad wasn't all that bad" is that he picked up an unspoken but perceptible change in his daughter. She was prepared this time to handle him if he became rude or insulting. She was not going to tolerate it.

If, in spite of all preparation, a rule is broken, follow through with your limit-setting plans.



Saying No and Sticking To It

1. **Don't ever reward outrageous behavior by punishing yourself!** Do not cut your day or evening short in response to your child's tantrum. This outing is a treat for you. Your child may have to suffer the Consequence of an early bedtime, docking his allowance, losing out on a favorite TV show, or missing dessert (if that is the only Consequence you have at hand).
2. **Try using Time-Out if you need an immediate, all-purpose, portable consequence.**
Time-Out meets all the criteria of an effective Consequence:
 - It has meaning for the child (kids usually hate it!).
 - Parents can usually get their child to take a Time-Out (so they have the necessary control).
 - Parents are willing to give a Time-Out (it's not overly punitive).
 - Time-Out is minimal (it is brief and immediate).
3. **Remind your child of the rules and give him a Warning that he will earn a Time-Out if he breaks a rule.**
4. **Praise your child if he cooperates with following the rules.** You may even want to use the **TREASURE BOX**, allowing your child to pick a treasure for "super-terrific behavior."

Treasure Box

A Treasure Box is a collection of goodies and doodads that can be wrapped or unwrapped. Good Treasure Box items are: inexpensive, non-perishable leftovers from any holiday, stickers, small boxes of crayons, marbles, or simply pieces of paper rolled up and tied with yarn on which you write activities (playing music CD's, dancing with mom for 15 minutes, painting, being read to, going for a walk, playing a game, making a visit to the library, twenty minutes of child-chosen play, gluing a collage, renting a DVD, fixing a snack together, inviting a friend over to play).

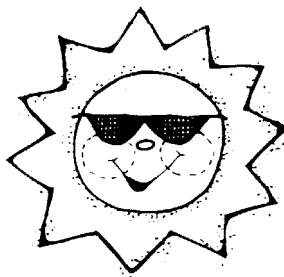
In return for terrific behavior, your child gets to choose from the box. You must be willing to do your part immediately when your child has earned a right to pick a treasure.

(C. Whitman, p. 212)

5. **If your child breaks a rule, lead him (or calmly carry him, if necessary) out of the family area and give him a Time-Out. If you need to stay with him so that he won't be scared,** do so, but turn away and do NOT interact with him. You needn't demand silence, just that he stays in the chair for a specified short time.
6. **If he refuses to stay in the chair, use a room without fun or danger potential.**
Lead him to the room, leave the door ajar, and wait outside the door for the appropriate number of minutes. Two minutes would be fine for a two or three year old. Other parents prefer using one minute for every year of age. Use your watch, or if possible, a kitchen timer.
7. **When the timer rings, simply give him an invitation back to the family.**
Your Time-Out is over. You may come back to the family now.
8. **Don't lecture or remind him of his transgressions.**
Wipe the slate clean and start afresh. If he sits sulking and refuses to budge, let him know where you will be in a pleasant, non-punitive time. *I'll be sitting with Nana on the front porch.*
9. **Every time he repeats the offence that day, or in the subsequent days on a longer trip, he earns another Time-Out. You may increase the time slightly.**
10. **Remember, on trips of any length (even more than in your day-to-day life at home), your child needs clear expectations and firm, fair, limit-setting.**

**Everyone in the family matters.
Everyone counts.
The hard part about every one counting is
that frequently some one in the family
doesn't get what he wants
when he wants it.
A hard lesson for the little guy, sure,
but one to teach well
before he becomes a teenager.**

-Cynthia Whitman



Have a Happy Summer!

The "secret" to having a good time is preparing ahead and planning to avoid problems.
Good Luck!



Planning To Avoid Problems

Restructure Time	Rearrange schedules--your child's and/or yours.
Foreshadowing	Prepare your child for an experience that is new or uncomfortable ahead of time.
Transitions	Let your child know what comes next, making expectations clear. Provide rituals (bedtime, meal time, school time, goodbyes, etc.).
Say it with a Word	Instead of talking in paragraphs, reduce your message to a few simple words.
Describe	Instead of blaming or commanding, describe what you see or describe the problem.
Give Information	Instead of accusing or insulting, give information. (Rather than saying, " <i>Who forgot to close the door?</i> " say, " <i>When the door is left open, flies come inside.</i> ")
Make Commands Positive	Instead of " <i>Don't shout!</i> " say, " <i>Please talk in a quiet voice.</i> "
Avoid "No" and "Don't"	<i>"I listen when people use their words.</i> (Instead of " <i>Don't whine!</i> ") <i>"Remember, we use our walking feet."</i> (Instead of " <i>Don't run!</i> ")
Give Limited Choices	Restrict alternatives and choices to what is acceptable to you.
Grandma's Rule	Use the " <i>When... Then...</i> " technique for clarifying what you expect to happen. It implies an expectation. (" <i>When you have put the Legos away, you may watch your train video.</i> ")
Speak at the Child's Eye Level/Verbal Level	Get down and look your child in the eye, telling him exactly what you want. Avoid yelling from a distance, since kids close off and tune out.
Questions vs. Commands	Make expectations clear. Give an order if you want your child to do something. Ask a " <i>Yes</i> " or " <i>No</i> " question only if you are willing to accept either answer.

