



WHY CHILDREN MISBEHAVE

Youth development (YD) programs offer children fun and engaging activities that help children learn and grow in many ways. During these activities, YD staff help children manage their behavior. Sometimes this can be challenging, and staff may wonder, “why do children misbehave?”

At times, children discover that the best way to get what they want is misbehaving. Other times, children may not be intentionally trying to get something, but rather reacting to a need they have that they may not fully understand. Whether the behavior is intentional or not, we can help them learn better ways to meet their needs by changing the way we interact with them.

3 REASONS FOR MISBEHAVIOR

1

Attention Seeking

2

Avoiding Something They Don't Like

3

Attempting to Get Something They Want

REASON 1: ATTENTION SEEKING

Definition: This misbehavior occurs to get a reaction out of you or others and is often accompanied by lots of laughter. Laughter during the misbehavior is an indication the child is likely enjoying your attempts to stop the behavior.

Examples: Goofing around, showing off, hitting, interrupting, annoying sounds, whining. If attention is the reason for the misbehavior, children may complain of being bored or ignored.



Description: Attention-seeking behaviors can be very effective at getting you to spend one-on-one time with the child. The time you spend explaining why they should not behave that way gives the child exactly what they were looking for, your attention. Unfortunately, this type of attention will not likely lead to change in the child's behavior and sometimes makes it worse.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?



Active Ignoring

If you are facilitating an activity when the child begins this type of behavior, continue what you are doing, and do not give attention to the behavior. If you are not facilitating an activity, pretend to be interested in something else. Remember, we are not suggesting that you generally ignore children's behavior, only frequent, inappropriate behavior which can safely be ignored.

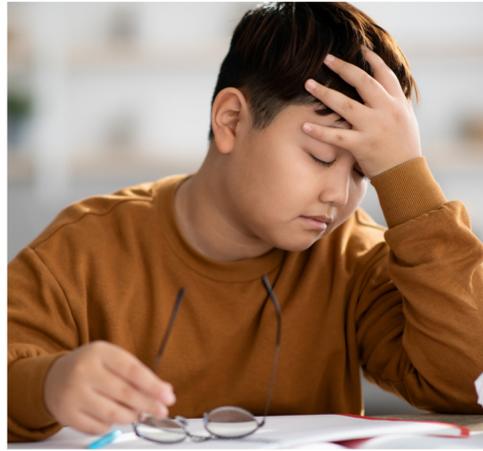


Praise Appropriate Behavior

Praising appropriate behavior is key. You may not have been paying enough attention to the child prior to the misbehavior. As you work to get the child back on track, prompt them to comply, then praise the child for doing what you have asked. Gradually, remove your prompts while you continue to praise them when they are doing the right thing.

REASON 2: AVOIDANCE

Definition: This kind of misbehavior leads to quick avoidance or delay of something they don't want to do such as having to end their favorite arts activity before homework time. Find something the child doesn't like to do, and you'll usually find lots of avoidance misbehavior.



Examples: Refusal to comply, tantrums, physical aggression, going limp, whining, arguing.

Description: Anything that delays or terminates an instruction given by a supervising adult could function as a form of avoidance-motivated behavior.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?



Escape Extinction

Once you ask a child to follow a rule, it is important to see it through. Do not allow the child to avoid complying, even only partially, with the initial request as it will make it more likely that they will misbehave the next time they don't want to do something. If they do not comply, you should be prepared to implement a mild, logical consequence. For example, if child tantrums when you ask them to clean up their art materials before homework time, you might need to use active ignoring first. Once they have calmed down, a logical consequence would be to ensure they clean up at least part of their art materials and then complete a small part of their homework. Over time, the child will understand that you will not give in, and they will have to follow the rules.

REASON 3: GET SOMETHING THEY WANT

Definition: Children sometimes choose to behave appropriately to receive something material they want. Other times, they agree to stop doing something inappropriate to get something such as promising to stop disrupting others in exchange for being allowed computer time.



Examples: Whining/begging, tantrums, pouting, promising or bargaining to “be good if ...”, playing on adults’ guilt or emotions with statements such as “you don’t like me” or “I hate you.”

Description: Children can sometimes wear you down with an extended tantrum or a promise “to be good,” but don’t let this happen. It will teach them that the best way to get what they want is to misbehave.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?



Reward Carefully

Do not reward misbehavior. Never purchase or deliver material goodies such as food, toys, etc. in order to get a child to STOP misbehaving. Save tangible rewards for times when the child is exhibiting appropriate behavior.



Token Economies

Have a well-defined token system in place so that children can earn all those material goodies with appropriate behavior rather than misbehavior. For more detailed information on token economies, reach out to Project RISE.

PROJECT RISE OFFERS HELP TAILORED TO THE CHILDREN IN YOUR PROGRAM

Project RISE coaches can come to your program to help you plan new ways of interacting with children. Together, you will assess the reasons for misbehavior described above and decide which strategies might work best for your program. Email Project RISE at ProjectRISE@nova.edu today to get started!