# STEP 1

# Providing Clear Expectations: Define the Problem Misbehavior

**What would you like to see your child doing differently?**

Improving your child’s behavior requires making it clear to ourselves and our child what we mean by misbehavior. While many families have similar concerns, everybody has different goals for what they would like to see change. Start by listing the concerns that led you to seek help. We included some of the most common concerns that bring parents to groups like this. Check the ones that apply to your child and add your own. Make sure you include as many behaviors that brought you here as you can think of.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Current problematic behaviors |
| ☐ | Argues |
| ☐ | Refuses to do what is asked |
| ☐ | Temper tantrums |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Now let’s get an idea of how severe a problem your child’s behavior has been; how often does the behavior get in the way and how upsetting is it? Circle a number along the right-hand side of the page that represents how much of a problem your child’s symptoms have been recently.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Over the past 2 weeks my concerns** | | |
| **have been…** | **because they were…** |  |
| A huge problem | extremely upsetting and ***stopped almost all*** daily activities | 10 |
| **extremely upsetting** and got in the way of most daily activities | 9 |
| A big problem | very upsetting and **got in the way of most** daily activities | 8 |
| **very upsetting** and got in the way of many daily activities | 7 |
| A medium problem | upsetting and **got in the way of many** daily activities | 6 |
| **upsetting** and got in the way of some daily activities | 5 |
| somewhat upsetting and **got in the way of some** daily activities | 4 |
| A small problem | **somewhat upsetting** and got in the way of a few daily activities | 3 |
| a little upsetting and **got in the way of a few** daily activities | 2 |
| Not a problem | **a little upsetting**, but did *not* get in the way of daily activities | 1 |
| **not present** and did *not* get in the way of daily activities | 0 |

Approximately one month after you begin using these parent skills, review this page. If the list of problem behaviors is shorter and your ratings are lower keep doing what you are doing. If the list and ratings haven’t change, you might need more assistance putting your plan in place.

**Providing Clear Expectations: Define Good Behavior**

**What good behavior would you like to see replace the misbehavior?**

Now that we know what misbehavior you want to see less of, we need to be very specific about the opposite good behaviors you want to see replace them. If you tell your child to stop doing something, there are a lot of things he could do instead, and only a small number of those choices will make you happy. For example, if you tell your child to stop yelling, he might be quiet and start hitting. He listened to you, but still is misbehaving. Telling our children to *stop* does not tell them want you want them to *start* doing instead. To set you and your children up for success, make it very clear what positive behavior they need to do to be successful. Translate your list of problem behaviors (see page 4) that led you to seek help into specific positive behaviors that you would like to see your child doing more often. We translated the most common misbehaviors here and list some more examples below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Specific positive behavior to replace the problem behavior |
| ☐ | Accept “no” politely |
| ☐ | Do what is asked of you the first time |
| ☐ | Handle frustration calmly |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Here are some more examples of good behaviors to replace misbehavior

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Problem Behavior* | *Opposite Good Behavior* |
| Argues | Accepts limits politely |
| Refuses to follow instructions | Do what is told the first time |
| Tantrums | Handle frustration calmly |
| Hitting / pushing / kicking | Use words to solve problem |
| Screaming or talking too loudly | Speaks with “indoor voice” |
| Bosses other kids around | Lets other kids choose the game |
| Whines | Uses pleasant tone |
| Plays roughly with animals | Plays nicely with animals |
| Plays roughly with, or breaks, toys | Plays carefully with toys |
| Swears or uses bad language | Uses nice words |
| Makes threats | Uses words to express frustration |
| Criticizes others or says mean things | Gives compliments and says nice things |
| Acts angry or irritable | Acts pleasant and cheerful |
| Interrupts | Waits for one’s turn |
| Refuses to eat / bad table manners | Eats what prepared/leaves a clean table |
| Blames others | Takes responsibility |
| Stalling | Doing things on time |
| Has anger or emotional outbursts | Uses strategies to remain calm |

**Providing Clear Expectations: Be Realistic**

**Does my child have a good chance of being successful?**

Now that we are clear about which good behavior we would like to see replace the misbehavior, we need to make sure that we have realistic expectations. If we expect our children to do something that they have little chance of being able to do, they will probably be unsuccessful and we all will be frustrated. Our goal is to gradually expect a little more from our children than they have done before. Here are some common ways that parents expect too much from their children.

*Ineffective commands*. Sometimes children misbehave when we don’t make it clear what we expect them to do. For example, a child may not know what his mother requires when she says “Behave!” Or, a child may think they have the option to say “no” when his father asks “Can you turn off your video game now?”, rather than giving a command. Child are most likely to listen when parents first get their attention, and then give a specific command that makes it clear what they need to do to be successful. Here are some examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Effective Commands** | **Instead of** |
| Pick up you toys. | Can you pick up your toys now? |
| Please turn off the TV. | Don’t you think it is time to turn off the TV? |
| It is time for dinner. Come to the table. | Dinner’s ready. |
| Choose another toy to play with. | Play nice with your sister, okay? |

*Giving mixed messages.* Children often do what we do as parents, rather than what we say. Make sure you act the way you want your child to act. If you yell when you get angry, then your child will be more likely to yell when he is angry. If you stay calm and talk through problems, this will encourage your child to do the same. In addition, make sure that all caregivers (especially Mom and Dad, but also grandparents, nannies) are giving similar messages.

*Asking Too much.* Sometimes parents ask their children to do something they are not able to do. This might include asking a child with ADHD to complete a list of five tasks or expecting a 4-year-old to play by herself for an hour. Just because other children are capable of completing a task, does not means your child will be able to at this point in time. The best guide to what a child is likely able to do, is what he has regularly done before.

*Being unprepared.* Sometimes it is better to prevent a misbehavior by planning ahead, then to expect a child to handle a challenging situation. For example, children are more likely to misbehave when they are tired, hungry, bored, or under stress. Anticipating times and places where these factors make it hard for a child to cooperate can help parents prepare for or prevent misbehavior.

**In summary, before expecting your child to behave, make sure you have made it clear what you expect him to do and that it is something he is likely able to do.**

# PROVIDING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS: SUMMARY

1. Define the problem
   1. Decide what you would like you child to stop doing
   2. Focus on the behaviors that are most important to change
2. Define Good Behavior
   1. Decide what positive behavior you want your child to do instead
   2. Be specific
3. Be Realistic
   1. Clearly communicate
   2. Make sure your child has the ability to do what you are asking