



First Steps

Raising Well-Behaved Children *Is No Accident*

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Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

The responsibility for teaching children social skills and discipline clearly belongs to the parents. Disciplining children takes time and effort and requires that parents be consistent. Unpleasant behaviors are easily noticed and are often difficult to handle. Such behaviors need to be corrected immediately. Parents often take their children's good behavior for granted; however, even good behaviors are learned behaviors. Disciplining children is not only about stopping incorrect behavior; it is also about encouraging good behavior. The most powerful influence on a child is the example his/her mother and father set.

What kinds of good behaviors should parents expect from their children?

Respect means caring about the rights of others, thinking about others in a positive way, and not taking advantage of them.

Kindness means caring about the feelings of others and being concerned about their comfort and safety.

Honesty means telling the truth, being trusted by others, and caring enough to do the right thing.

Courtesy means being polite and kind to others, showing appreciation for the kindness of others by saying "please" and "thank you", not talking when others are talking, and being quiet in public places.

Cooperation means helping with age-appropriate chores around the house with or without being asked. The willingness to help comes from the desire to please and to think of the needs of others before our own.



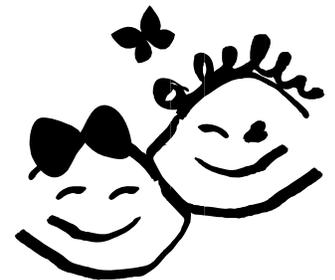
Source: Unell, Barbara C. and Jerry L Wyckoff, 20 Teachable Virtues

What Can Parents Do to Help Their Children Be Well-Behaved?

- Always model the kinds of behaviors you want your children to show--courtesy, kindness, respect, etc.
- Whenever possible, teach rather than punish. The goal of discipline is to teach children correct behavior. Hitting children does not teach correct behavior. It teaches children that hitting is a way to solve problems.
- View children's misbehavior as a mistake in reasoning. Doing so will make it easier to think of ways to teach more acceptable behavior.
- Whenever possible, make punishment relate to misbehavior. If a child hurts someone's feelings, the child should apologize. If the child makes a mess, she/he should clean it up.
- Have behavior rules. Make sure they are few in number, reasonable, and suitable for the child's age and level of development.
- Make sure that punishment for misbehavior is practical and clear. Tell your child, for example, if she interrupts you when you are on the telephone, she will have to spend time (like 3 minutes) alone in her room.
- Don't argue or nag children about rules. If a rule is broken, remind the child of the rule and the consequence. When you give a command, speak in a firm voice, and repeat the command only twice. Do not yell.
- Show your children the manners you expect at home first. This includes table manners, courtesy, patience, and being quiet when others are speaking. Manners are a part of respecting and caring for the feelings of others.

Source: "Ten Guidelines for Raising a Well-Behaved Child",
Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming info.@pcawyomng.org

Over and over again, parents must teach their children appropriate manners and ways of behaving both at home and in public. Parents must not be afraid to be the grown-up and the one who disciplines. Parents need to set reasonable rules of behavior, explain the rules to the children, and then enforce the rules. If parents don't do this, their children will behave badly and often be in trouble for their misbehavior. Children not only need, but also want rules to guide them. Too much freedom is frightening. Setting and enforcing rules tells children that their parents love them and care about their well-being.



For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.