

Ways to Respond to Challenging Behaviour



When your child demonstrates challenging behavior and is pushing your “hot buttons,” remember to breathe, stay calm, take a break if needed, and then decide how you will respond.

When responding consider the following strategies:

1. **Calming Time** can be used when a child is having strong emotions. They may need to be redirected to a calming space or activity for a short period of time to “interrupt” the challenging behavior. This allows the adult and child time to calm down before addressing the issue.
2. **Respond to the message** your child is trying to communicate, not the behaviour! E.g. Rather than react to your child’s kicking, acknowledge the meaning behind it: “you are SO mad that we have to leave the playground.” The exception to this is if your child is hurting themselves or someone else. Stop the aggressive behavior and calmly but sternly say, “You can feel mad, but you cannot kick. That hurts.” (*Zero to Three – Coping with Defiance in the Early Years*)
3. **Logical Consequences** – teach children about the outcomes of their actions. When determining a logical consequence remember the 4 R’s (*Positive Discipline – Jane Nelson and Lynn Lott*):
 - a. **Related** to the challenging behavior
 - b. **Respectful** to the child, adult and other children
 - c. **Reasonable.** Less is usually best.
 - d. **Revealed** beforehand when possible
i.e. “Water needs to stay in the bathtub. If you pour the water on the floor, bath time will be all done.”

The Bottom Line

When we use positive parenting strategies to respond to challenging behavior, we are investing in our child’s social and emotional health and building life skills.

