

Triple P Tip Sheet

Elementary School Children

Behavior at School

Behavior problems at school can interfere with children's learning and development. Sometimes parents are not aware of a behavior problem until something serious happens. This can make it hard for parents to know what to do. However, parents can help resolve a school behavior problem by working closely with their child and their child's teacher. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you work with your child's teacher to teach your child to behave responsibly at school and follow school rules.

WHAT ARE COMMON SCHOOL BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS?

Problems that may concern teachers and parents include:

- not following the teacher's instructions
- distracting other children who are working
- swinging on chairs
- calling out
- wandering in the classroom
- not finishing set work
- not paying attention
- getting into fights

WHY DO CHILDREN MISBEHAVE AT SCHOOL?

All schools and classrooms have set rules and expectations for children's behavior. However, children may misbehave when they do not know or understand the classroom rules. The rules may not be clear or may be too difficult to follow. Problem behavior can also occur if there are no consequences for breaking the rules, or if the consequences for misbehavior change from day to day.

Sometimes children are accidentally rewarded for misbehavior. If children misbehave and get lots of laughter and attention from other students, or they can avoid doing their work, they are likely to continue misbehaving. In busy classrooms, teachers can fall into the trap of ignoring good behavior and only paying attention to a child when they misbehave. If this happens, children may misbehave more. Misbehavior can also be learned from watching others. If children see others misbehaving and getting attention, they are more likely to do the same thing.

Misbehavior at school can be a sign that a child is having difficulties coping with school work. Children who lack the ability or the confidence to do the work may try to

avoid tasks by misbehaving. Children who find the work too easy can also become bored and disruptive. If you suspect your child has learning difficulties, or is bored with work that is too easy for them, seek professional advice and an educational assessment.

HOW TO MANAGE SCHOOL BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

▼ Discuss the Problem With Your Child

Ask your child about any problems at school. Try to get your child's view of the problem before talking to the teacher. Do not lecture or nag your child about their behavior. Instead, ask your child for ideas on how to solve the problem.



▼ Discuss the Problem With the Teacher

Make an appointment to speak to your child's teacher. Ask the teacher to describe exactly what your child is doing that is causing concern. Try to understand the problem from the teacher's point of view.

Tell the teacher about any similar problems you may have with your child. Let the teacher know how you manage the problem at home. This can help the teacher to understand your child.

Ask the teacher to share their ideas on how to solve the problem. Some teachers will make specific suggestions about things you can do to help. Common suggestions include supervising homework and making sure your child brings to school everything needed for the day's activities.

▼ Act on Useful Suggestions

Use the teacher's suggestions, your child's ideas and your own ideas to develop a plan of action. Put the plan into practice. Discuss your child's progress with the teacher at the end of a week.

HOW TO MANAGE PERSISTENT SCHOOL BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

▼ Plan a Home-School Program With the Teacher

If problem behavior continues, you could suggest a home-school program that allows you and the teacher to work together to manage your child's behavior. With the teacher, set up a school behavior diary (see example).

Ask the teacher to explain what rules your child is expected to follow in class. For example, a 4th grade student might be expected to begin set work right away, put up their hand if they want to speak, work quietly and write down their homework for that day.



Example School Behavior Diary

Date: March 15th

Classroom goals	Possible Points	9.00 am-10.30 am	10.45 am-12.30 pm	1.15 pm-3.00 pm
Begin set work right away	2	2	1	1
Put hand up to speak	2	2	2	2
Work quietly	4	2	3	3
Do as teacher asks	4	3	4	3

Goal for Reward: 25

Comments: Jacqui did an excellent job remembering to raise her hand when she wanted to speak. For tomorrow she needs to practice working quietly when she is given a task to do.

Teacher's signature: _____ Parent's signature: _____

Break the school day into several time periods, such as before recess, before lunch and to the end of school. Playground time can also be included if problems occur outside of class. Write down the rules your child needs to follow. The teacher can give points for each rule your child follows during each period of the day. The teacher can also use the diary to write positive comments about your child's efforts or behavior during that day. Your child is to take the diary home each day for you to sign and return it to the teacher the next day. To avoid discouraging your child, do not make negative or critical comments in the diary or take away points that your child has earned.

▼ Explain the Program to Your Child

Let your child know how the school behavior diary will work. Explain to your child that they can earn points for each time period they follow the rules. Set a goal for the number of points to be earned each day. Make sure your child knows they need to take the diary to school and bring it home every day.

▼ Talk About Rewards

Decide on a daily reward for when your child reaches the goal. You may like to have another reward at the end of the week. Daily

rewards could include staying up an extra 30 minutes or playing a special game with Mom or Dad. Weekly rewards could include having a friend sleep over or choosing a video to rent. Tell your child what they can earn if they reach the goal.

▼ Talk About Consequences

Decide ahead of time exactly what to do if your child does not reach their goal, or does not have the diary with them for you to check. Suitable consequences involve the loss of an activity or privilege, such as watching television or playing with friends after school. It is also likely that there will be consequences at school if your child misbehaves. Tell your child what consequences will apply if they do not reach the goal or do not bring home the diary.

▼ Start the Program

Each day, check the points earned and praise your child if they followed the rules at school. Sign the diary and make sure it is taken to school the next day.

At the end of the agreed time, add up the number of points your child has earned. If they have reached the goal, give them the reward.

If your child has not reached the goal, or does not have the diary for you to check,

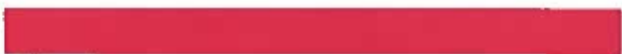
do not give them the reward. Tell your child the problem and the consequence. Ignore protests or complaints. Do not debate or argue the point with your child. Simply carry out the consequence you decided on earlier. Keep to the agreement and where appropriate return the activity or privilege at the agreed time. You may need to use consequences for a number of days before your child learns to follow the rules at school.

▼ Review Progress With the Teacher

After a week, meet with the teacher to check your child's progress. Make any necessary changes to the program. Thank the teacher for their efforts – *Thank you for your help, I'm glad we were able to work together on this problem.* Talk about phasing out the program.

▼ Phase Out the Program

When your child has reached the goal for 5 days in a row, start to phase out the rewards by making them harder to achieve. For example, only reward your child after they have reached the goal for 2 days in a row, then increase to 3 days, then a whole week. Use consequences consistently if your child does not follow the rules at school. Continue to praise your child for behaving well at school.



Once your child's behavior has improved, you can phase out the school behavior diary by sending the diary to school every second day, then once a week, and then not at all. Telephone the teacher at least twice during the term to make sure that your child's behavior continues to be satisfactory.

If your child's behavior worsens, simply go back one step and try again. For example, use the diary every day or give the rewards more often until your child has continued success. Then start to phase out the program again.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Develop a partnership with your child's teacher. State your concerns about your child's behavior clearly and calmly to the teacher. Since many factors influence your child's behavior, it is not helpful

to blame the school, teacher, yourself or your child for the problem. Focus on what you can do to resolve the problem rather than what caused it.

FOR FURTHER HELP See the Positive Parenting booklet for more information on positive parenting strategies. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet or contact:

Triple P is a parenting program developed by Professor Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues in the Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland with funding support from Queensland Health, Victorian Department of Human Services, Health Department of Western Australia, and National Health and Medical Research Council.

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KEY STEPS

- Discuss the problem with your child.
- Discuss the problem with the teacher.
- Try out useful suggestions.
- If problems persist, plan a home-school program with the teacher.
- Explain the program to your child, including the goal, rewards and consequences.
- Praise and reward your child for following the rules.
- Apply a consequence if your child does not reach the goal or bring home the diary.
- Review progress with the teacher after a week.
- Gradually phase out the program.