



Three R's for Preschoolers: Redirection, Repetition, and Role Modeling

featured article **By Kristen Meyer Stroud**

Do you ever wish for a day when you and your curious, active, independent-minded preschooler can sail smoothly through your daily routine? Use these simple techniques to prevent meltdowns—yours and theirs! Hopefully, recognizing your preschooler's developmental capabilities, demonstrating respectful interactions, and collaborating on solutions together will allow you to enjoy each other more.

REDIRECTION: COLLABORATE TO CREATE ACCEPTABLE CHOICES.

Redirection is the number one tactic of choice when your young child discovers a dangerous, messy, or annoying behavior that is unacceptable to you. Your best bet is to offer an appealing alternative that you consider acceptable. Or open up the discussion to engage their creativity in sleuthing potential alternatives. For instance, if your child loves to climb on and jump off the furniture, frazzling your nerves each time you hear the thump of another precarious landing, work together to choose a different activity that appeals to your little ad-

venturer and gives you peace of mind. How about making a fort out of couch cushions and blankets or putting couch cushions on the floor and jumping on those? It doesn't matter what the solution is as long as it is acceptable to you both and eliminates the undesirable behavior, for now. Which brings us to the next helpful tip...

REPETITION: PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

We should not expect our young, curious, experimentalists to adhere to new requests immediately. Imagine if we were required to absorb all of the details of a new job on the first day. We might all get fired! Then neither should we admonish our precious young learners to "get it" on the first try. Young children may mentally register what is expected of them, while their physical impulse control is not sufficiently developed to obey. Little hands that repeatedly pull the cat's tail, or can't stop picking at the tempting birthday cake are not sufficiently capable of stopping themselves. Our job is to manage the environment to reduce unwanted behaviors and reinforce desired behaviors (repeatedly) until children are capable ▶



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of handling their own impulse control.

Expectations play a huge role in how we react. If we accept that it will take many tries for young children to learn to control themselves, our frustration level will be less than if we have an unrealistic expectation that they should be getting it right away. Simply repeat tip number one: redirect their behavior to something acceptable until they can manage themselves.

ROLE MODELING: EXPECT RESPECT

As our children's first and foremost role models, our conduct, from best to worst, is our children's primary instruction in human relationships. We all want our child to get along with others, have good manners, and get their needs met without being too aggressive or overly passive. Remember the saying "Do what I say, not what I do?" Then it is no surprise that children learn primarily from what they witness. So, save your breath from lecturing, nagging, or yelling and ham it up with your children by acting out what you want and don't want to see and hear.

For instance, how often have you heard a well-intentioned mother or father urgently commanding their oblivious preschooler

to "play nice," "be nice," or "talk nice?" What exactly does that mean to a two- or three-year-old engaged in a crucial tussle for a treasured toy or an impassioned struggle over who is going to get first dibs on the playground slide? Not much! If children learn by example, then get specific about what you mean by "nice."

Simply demonstrate what you expect and they will respond. Instead of demanding something ambiguous, show them so that they can practice by imitating. As they get older they can play the parts: ask the polite way vs. the whining way. (Note: Focus more attention on desired behaviors, less on undesirables you are trying to prune.) With repetition and practice, children begin to routinely demonstrate positive choices that get their needs met and yours too. By acting respectfully, we can expect respect in return. And remember to have fun! ■



Mother of two, writer Kristen Meyer Stroud, who has read too many parenting books for her own good, still enjoys plenty of fun, silly moments with her tween and teen aged sons.

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