

The Best Way to Discipline a 4-Year-Old Child



Behavior Management Strategies for Preschoolers

By Amy Morin, LCSW

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Preschoolers are interesting little characters. Although 4 year olds vary greatly in terms of their development, most of them show a remarkable ability to follow the rules. Compared to their younger counterparts, most of them have a clear understanding of negative consequences.

Disciplining 4 year olds can be a little tricky. They want you to know that they aren't babies anymore, but they certainly aren't in the same league as the big kids.

It's important to strike a balance that gives your child plenty of autonomy while also teaching him how to make better choices in the future.

Create Clear Household Rules

Like all other kids, 4 year olds need the same 5 types of rules that all children need. Create house rules that address on the most important issues. Focus on safety issues, such as, "Hold an adult's hand in a parking lot," and address personal safety by saying, "Keep your hands to yourself unless it is a gentle touch." By age 4, most kids begin taking a lot of pride in their ability to dress themselves and brush their teeth independently. But it's important to set limits about the types of things your child can reasonably do on his own. Provide reminders such as, "Ask for help if you want more milk."

Explain your expectations before you enter into new situations. A 4-year-old needs to learn what type of behavior is socially acceptable in each environment.

While it's important to speak in a whisper in the library, it's OK to yell at a baseball game.

Effective Disciplines Strategies

Of course the best way to deal with misbehavior is to prevent it. Stay a step ahead of your child and be mindful of situations that are likely to be difficult. Establish a daily routine so your child knows what is expected of him throughout the day.

No matter which of the 5 types of discipline you prefer to use with your child, these discipline techniques work best with 4-year-old kids:

- **Praise**- Since 4 year olds take pride in their work, praise motivates them to keep up the good work.
- **Ignoring**- Ignoring mild misbehavior can be effective way to reduce silly and annoying behaviors that tend to thrive on attention.
- **Reward Systems**- While some kids still respond well to sticker charts, others have graduated to more formal reward systems. Simple reward systems with free and low cost rewards can often be very effective. Allowing a child to stay up an extra 15 minutes because he behaved well can motivate him to have another good day tomorrow.
- **Time-Out**- Time-out can be a great way to help kids calm down when they are frustrated. Just be sure to use it as discipline and not punishment. Use a four-minute time-out.
- **Redirection**- Use a 4-year old's short attention span to your advantage. Use redirection to direct your child's attention away from something that you don't want him to do. If your child's really interested in trying to bang on your computer keys, give him something else (that you don't mind him banging on) to play with.
- **Remove Privileges**- Taking away privileges can be effective if a child refuses to go to time-out or when a big offense is committed. Just make sure to only take away a privilege for a very short duration of time. Sometimes 30 minutes is plenty while other times it makes sense to take something away for the rest of the day. But don't take anything away for days or weeks at a time as your child won't remember why it got taken away.
- **Logical Consequences**- Consequences need to make sense to kids in order for them to be effective. Use logical consequences that clearly link the misbehavior to the consequence. This will help prevent your child from repeating the behavior again.