



Parenting A Three Year Old By Kelly Nault

Parenting Question

"I'm spiraling out of control with my three-year-old daughter. She won't listen to me and I know that the 'naughty bench' isn't working. I'm at a total loss and feel like such a failure. I don't want to hit her or use the kind of strong verbal yelling that my parents did. What do I do? I want her to understand that I'm the boss and when I ask her to do something or obey something, she should do it. My father was giving me parenting advice today and I feel so out of control. Is this normal child behavior for a three-year-old?"

From "Out-of-Control Mom"

Positive Parenting Tip from Kelly Nault: Clinical Counselor Award Winning Author and Motivational Speaker

Dear Out-of-Control Mom:

Firstly, you are NOT a failure—just a mom who needs some new tools.

My guess is that you haven't had many courses on how to deal with three-year-old behavior, so be gentle with yourself.

Many parents ask me what's "normal" when it comes to child behavior for a three-year-old. No matter what your child's age, what it comes down to is this: how is your child's behavior working for you, and how is it working for them. From your parenting question, I sense it just ain't working—period!

So let's first look at what is going on for your daughter. Children at the pre-school stage are developing a whole host of new skills, including: wanting more independence (for example, "No, I want to do it by myself!"); asserting their wants ("I want that!"); and learning about friendship ("Give that back!"). One of the best things you can do when parenting a three-year-old is to support your child in attaining these new skills without allowing them to become demanding or spoiled. To ensure you don't fall into unhealthy habits that promote power struggles, choose to use a firm—but kind—approach and look for ways that your child can learn from each situation.

The more you can allow your three-year-old to do things on her own (and they won't be perfect), the less likely she will be to fight you on everything. Look for household tasks that she can do at

her age and find ways that she can help you out. Have her fill the dog bowl, hold the door open for you when you are bringing groceries into the house, set the table, etc. The busier you can keep her doing positive behaviors, the less chance she will move towards negative ones.

Be warned: even if you take this approach, your daughter is still going to test you. **Below are six steps for dealing with three-year-olds when they simply won't listen:**

1. **Let Go of Timeouts** – Timeouts can work for some children (but there are far better techniques). Ultimately, the only person we can control is ourselves. If timeouts are not working (that is, your child refuses to go to the “naughty bench”, stay on the “naughty bench”, or tells you they make their own rules and have moved the “naughty bench”), look for other ways to inspire them to want to be well-behaved (as suggested in the following five steps).
2. **Fire Yourself as Boss of the Household!** – Many parents buy into the belief that mom should be the boss of the household and be in control. Yet, we must remember that we are modeling for our children how to act every single minute of the day. Our kids learn more from what we do than from what we say. If they see us pulling rank as “boss”, they will attempt to be “boss” too. Unfortunately, when this happens, they may outrank us and the real power struggles will begin!
3. **Provide Flexibility with Boundaries** – Instead of boss, see yourself as your child's coach or guide, responsible for providing them with experiences to learn from and allowing them to experience the consequences of their actions. Give clear guidelines, but also give them flexibility too. For example, “Your toys need to be cleaned up before we go to Grandma's. Do you want to clean them up now, or in 5 minutes from now?” If they still don't clean up, then you might not go to Grandma's that day. Children need to know what the rules are and, more importantly, they need to know you will follow-through with the rules. Once you become consistent with your behavior, your children will learn to trust what you say and will improve their behavior accordingly.
4. **Stay Firm (but Kind)** – If they fight, you follow-through. Do this without yelling, scolding or punishing. Don't buy into their tears, and definitely don't get into a debate. Stay firm, but stay kind. Tell them that when they want a hug, to come find you. I know keeping your cool is easier said than done. For more on this, check out the “Mom's Time Out” section (page 111-114) in the parenting book, *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You*.
5. **Use Parenting Consequences That Relate to Their Behavior** – Punishment teaches our kids to feel bad, but rarely teaches them how to “do good”. If you are encountering the same misbehaviors over and over again, your child is clearly not learning from their mistakes. To facilitate learning, make certain any consequences used are directly related to the misbehavior. For example, when your child is rough with the computer, computer time is over; when your child is splashing water out of the tub, bath time is over; or when your child is goofing off with their food, dinner is over. Again, do these quickly, but kindly.

6. **Thank and Appreciate Your Child for What They Do** – Children want to please and they want to know that their contributions make a difference. Remember to tell them so—and often.

Learning how to motivate our children to want to be well-behaved takes time and practice. Yet, taking the time now to learn these parenting tools can save you years of heartache and frustration. Keep reading, keep practicing, and keep empowering that three-year-old of yours: then watch their behavior change for the better!

Kelly Nault, MA corporate spokesperson and award winning parenting author of *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You* inspires moms to put themselves first—for the sake of their children. She shares time-tested tools that motivate children to want to be well behaved, responsible and happy! Sign up for her free online parenting course at www.UltimateParenting.com.

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