



Parenting Challenge: Taking Control of Young Children's Behavior

By Kelly Nault

Control. It's something most parents crave. Chaos is far from fun, but when everything is "under control," life is grand.

Moms and dads know this truth firsthand. When the three-year-old decides to throw a temper tantrum in front of company and the eighteen-month-old decides to taste-test the dog's new food—both at the same time, of course—for these parents, taking control of young children's behavior becomes a top priority.

"If I could just control them, everything would be fine!" exasperated moms and dads often exclaim. But the truth is, you can't control your children. You can only control you.

Parents Taking Control of Young Children's Behavior Rarely Succeed

Parents who seek to make their kids do what they want them to do often wind up feeling completely out of control. This sounds counterintuitive, perhaps, but the more you try to control your children, the more they will try to control you! You see, if your kids feel you're running a dictatorship, they might try and overthrow you—and when this happens, anarchy rules!

Now, you may think I am suggesting you let them rule the roost, but nothing could be further from the truth. What we are looking for is a democratic environment that is led and guided by you. This kind of environment doesn't mean turning your kids loose and letting them wreak havoc or allowing them to put themselves in danger, but it does mean taking control of your own actions so that your children learn to take control of theirs.

So if the thought "I need to be in control of my kids" is currently dominating your mind, remind yourself that ultimately you can only control what you do. In the end, parents taking control of young children's behavior will find themselves amidst even more chaos. Moms and dads must learn to foster good behavior instead of forcing it.

Parenting Control Strategies for Your Child's Behavior

One of the dozens of techniques that I teach on how to regain a sense of control and motivate your child to want to be well behaved is what I call a "Distraction Action" in chapter nine of my parenting book, *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You*. "Distraction Actions" are exactly what they sound like: when your child is doing something that you don't want them to do, a "Distraction Action" shifts your child's attention toward something positive and productive.

For instance, parents can quickly gain control of a situation by creating challenges in the midst of potential turmoil. If your child is doing something you don't want them to do, instead of saying "No" (which will only motivate them to want to do it more), say something like, "Let's see how fast we can run up the stairs while holding hands." Another way to take your child's focus off misbehaving is to ask them, "Would you give me the biggest hug you can possibly give?" or "How loud and then how quiet can we say 'I love you' to each other?"

Not only do these types of requests help calm rising chaos, but they also mend the emotional distance that can be created by ongoing conflict. "Distraction Actions" help parents. Taking control of young children's behavior is not effective, but taking control of the situation is. How do you do this? By showing your children how to participate in activities and behaviors that are positive and safe. You cannot force desirable behavior, but you can encourage, nurture, and foster it.

The Key to Experiencing Less Chaos in Your Home

One of the best ways parents can positively influence young children's behavior is to help their children feel useful.

We all need to be needed, and children are no exception. Sometimes shifting your child's mental state is just a matter of giving them an opportunity to feel useful.

I witnessed a great example of this a while ago when my young niece, age six at the time, was acting up at a family gathering. I looked at her and said, "Would you help me out?" She looked surprised and then flattered.

"Would you go into the kitchen and help Grandma bring out the buns and butter?" I continued. With a smile on her face she got busy and forgot all about misbehaving. Sometimes influencing positive behavior requires nothing more than asking your children to help out.

When it seems that chaos is ruling your household, there's hope for parents. Taking control of young children's behavior is not desirable—and, besides, it's impossible. Remember, the more parents try to control their children, the more young children will try to control their parents! Instead, parents can encourage, nurture and foster positive behavior and productive attitudes in their children. The end result is a happy home that everyone can be proud of—kids included.

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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