

# Minimize your attention to negative behaviors while praising positive deeds

**Yvette:**

I see many articles written on bedtime routines and keeping one's child in his or her own bed. However, I have a somewhat different situation that all approaches to resolve have failed thus far. My daughter, age 10-1/2, has developed, what seems to be, a real fear of the night and sleeping by herself. She literally shakes with fear while in her bed if she's forced to sleep in her own bed by herself. And she never makes it through the night. This has been going on for about 10 months.

Our latest compromise is to allow her to sleep with her sister, which aids in everyone getting a good night's rest. I know this is not the answer. She relates her fear to her mind wandering on scary things and that she is afraid someone will break into the house. We are very cautious of what she watches on TV, and she even avoids looking at scary commercials or violence.

Any advice you can give is appreciated.

Melissa

**Melissa:**

There can be several explanations for your child's behavior. Often, changes in behavior are the result of significant life changes. Has there been a change in the family structure? Are there new people living in the house? Is she having night terrors? Have there been other changes in her behavior such as a change in her weight, eating habits, academic performance, mood shifts or friends?

I suggest completing a mental-health assessment. A mental-health assessment will help identify the issues behind your daughter's anxiety. If you choose to have the assessment, you can contact Columbus Children's Hospital Behavioral Health to schedule. You also can consult your pediatrician. You should be concerned. This level of anxiety suggests that there are issues that need to be addressed.

Yvette

**Yvette:**

My 16-month-old son has been biting for a few months now, but the biting is starting to become worse. He bites the children at the baby sitter's and even me and my husband. Usually, there was a reason that he bit such as he was upset or fighting over a toy. Now, he'll just walk by, bite the little girls' arms and keep on walking — without even stopping.

When my husband and I are witnesses to the biting, I tell him that biting hurts and that we shouldn't bite when we get upset. I make him sit in timeout for one minute, but he thinks it is a game.

Families are encouraged to send their parenting questions concerning their children's challenging or difficult behavioral issues to Brown at [columbusparent@thisweeknews.com](mailto:columbusparent@thisweeknews.com) or *Columbus Parent Magazine*, 7801 North Central Dr., Lewis Center, OH 43035.

I feel that he doesn't understand what is going on, and I am sure this is just his way of communicating. Is there a way to get him to keep his mouth to himself?

Jamie

**Jamie:**

Biting at this age is not uncommon. When you place him in timeout, is it in another room of the house or is it in the room where you and your husband are? Removing him to another location, such as his room, may help. How does the baby sitter respond to the biting? Does she also place him in timeout? At his age, consistency is important. Another approach is to give him a wet cloth or toy on which to bite when he feels frustrated. This helps sometimes. Dr. Olivia Thomas, chief of Ambulatory Pediatrics at Columbus Children's Hospital, suggests reinforcing positive behavior with him. Encourage him to share his toys, and praise him when he does share. Praise him when he handles his frustration without biting. When he does bite, don't give him a lot of attention because of it. Put him in a short timeout and move on to something else.

You want to show him that you'll offer him more attention when he does positive things instead of negative things.

Yvette

**Yvette:**

I have two sons who are 5 years and 17 months old. Donovan, my youngest, is very energetic and is beginning to develop his own mind and opinions on things. The two boys are like night and day. He tells us, "No!" a lot more, and he is not responding to firm words quite as well anymore. What is the best means of disciplining a child his age? I know he needs boundaries and firm discipline, but I am looking for a technique or strategy that will help him through this transition.

April

**April:**

First, saying, "No!" is normal for a toddler; he's exploring his independence. When a firm tone doesn't work, remove him and place him into another room or area for a timeout of one to two minutes. Another strategy is to remove items that are likely to cause a

problem. Remove toys or objects that he shouldn't touch or handle. Finally, make sure that you're not giving him too much attention for his negative behavior. If he is constantly the center of attention, or if you're constantly talking about his behavior, he will continue to display the negative behaviors. Children will seek a parent's attention through negative or positive behavior. Your effort should be to minimize the attention you give to the negative behavior and praise the positive.

Yvette

**Yvette:**

I have a 4-year-old daughter who has just started preschool. She's an only child and has never been to daycare or long-term sitters. She goes to school from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday. Every morning when it's time to go, she starts crying and holding onto me, begging and pleading for me to stay. She is usually OK for the rest of the day, but the goodbye is just horrible. Any suggestions on how to make this easier for everybody involved?

Tolliver

**Tolliver:**

Be calm and consistent. Saying goodbye under these circumstances is never easy. Your child's anxiety is normal. Develop and stick to a goodbye routine. Once you have said goodbye to her, you should leave. If you attempt to soothe her or stay longer because she is upset, she'll do it each and every time. Until you are confident she is happy at preschool, make random visits, unseen by your child, to check on her. It's also appropriate to make arrangements with the teacher to call back and check on her. If she is unhappy during the day, you should spend some time at the preschool observing how the children and teachers interact. It's important that the preschool be a good fit for your daughter. With this situation, I suspect it is just normal separation anxiety that's harder on you than the child.

Yvette



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