

# Setting aside special time for first child should curb sibling jealousy

**Yvette:**

My daughter was 2 when my second child was born. It's now seven months later, and my first child is still acting out, hurting the baby and not responding to timeouts.

We used to give her warnings when she was acting up; now that she knows it's wrong, we simply remove her and put her in a chair in the dining room for two minutes. But it doesn't do anything because she goes in there with a smile.

I get her out of timeout and calmly explain what she did wrong. I ask for an apology and a hug and tell her to apologize to her sister. She then goes to her baby sister, says sorry and hits her on the head again or pushes her over.

What are we supposed to do when she smiles with any form of discipline and continues to repeat the behavior? We used to put her in her bedroom, shut the door and lock it for two minutes. She would pee and poop on the floor each time, and she's potty trained. Please help.

**Heather**

**Heather:**

Children often act out when a new sibling arrives. This is normal behavior that usually abates in a short time. However, your daughter has been receiving a lot of your attention as a result of her behavior and therefore has no incentive to change. Children want their parents' attention. If negative behavior gets them the attention they crave, the behavior will continue.

Columbus Children's Hospital's Behavioral Health Clinical Director Dr. Nancy Cunningham does not recommend parents kiss or hug children after a timeout. Rather, your reaction should be fairly matter of fact: "This is the rule. This is what you did. You are going to timeout." When the child has complied, remove her from timeout. Done and over with.

Dr. Cunningham suggests spending separate, special time with your first daughter. A new baby is consuming. It's important that your older child feels she is special and has some of your attention.

Special time with your toddler doesn't have to last an entire day. It can be a portion of the day when your toddler can look forward to mommy-and-me time that includes activities such as reading a book or playing with toys. Make her feel good about being a big sister. Look for opportunities to praise

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her for doing good things for her sibling.

**Yvette**

**Yvette:**

My almost 4-year-old son refuses to poop in the potty. In fact, he has never pooped in the potty. He knows exactly what he is doing because I tell him that if he poops in his underpants at a friend's house, we will have to leave. Instead of using the potty, he will hold it until the moment we get in the car and then poop.

We have tried placing him on the potty until he pooped. After three days of having him sit on the portable potty, (We moved it all over the house based on what we were doing.) I turned my back on him for a couple minutes and he ran to his room, put on underpants and promptly pooped in them.

We have tried having him clean up his mess, but his stools are very loose. This creates a mess beyond compare. Do you have any suggestions?

**Elizabeth**

**Elizabeth:**

My first suggestion is to take your son to his pediatrician where you can eliminate the possibility of a medical condition called encopresis or soiling. The condition is rare and only occurs in 1 to 2 percent of all children. When a child older than 4 is soiling himself, you have to start by removing the possibility that there is a medical cause.

If there is no medical reason for your son's soiling, establish a clear, consistent routine. Dr. Bruce Meyer, chief of ambulatory pediatrics for Columbus Children's Hospital, suggests placing your son on the commode at regular times, four times a day while you talk or read to him for five or 10 minutes. Praise him a lot when he does go. You can institute a star system for when he does go in the potty. Offer him a token reward, starting at twice a week, if he does well.

If the positive reinforcement doesn't work, I suggest using timeout and privilege restriction. If he can't play with his friends or go out and participate in activities, including watching TV, the price will become too high for him.

This is not something I would recommend if your son were a toddler and you were just beginning potty training.

If these suggestions don't work, and there is no medical issue, it's obvious that your son's behavior is intentional. With intentional behavior, it is important that you establish boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not.

**Yvette**

**Yvette:**

How do I get my 4-, 6- and 8-year-old boys to get along without hitting? They play well together at times. Then, all at once, they're smacking each other and screaming, "He took that from me!" or "I had that first. It's mine!" I am at my wits' end. I have four boys in all, but the 1-year-old isn't into the mix just yet.

I try telling them to ask before taking an item that doesn't belong to them, to take turns with games and to ask to see something and wait until that person finished before they take anything. How can I get them to stop hitting and arguing all the time?

**Tina**

**Tina:**

It's important for you to set clear ground rules for behavior and to consistently enforce expectations. According to our experts at Columbus Children's Hospital, it is important to give clear, simple statements about what's off limits for your family without

using threats or putdowns.

Sit the boys down and calmly explain to them the behavior you expect. Here are some examples:

- In this family, we don't hit or push or shove.
- No screaming is allowed.
- No door slamming is allowed.
- No name calling.
- We do not throw things or break things on purpose.
- As a family, we treat each other with respect. If you are unhappy about something, use your words.

Children must understand how their parents expect them to act before they can exhibit that "good" behavior. When they fail to live up to that communicated expectation, they should be placed in timeout, away from siblings. When the timeout is over, they should be directed toward another activity until they can demonstrate that they can play together appropriately. Allow time for the boys to play with other friends, and allow time for two brothers to play together while the third does something else. Establishing ground rules now will help the boys learn to solve problems without fists and anger. The thing that will help this behavior the most is parental consistency. When your boys forget to be respectful toward each other, there should be a clear consequence.

**Yvette**



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