

Too eager for progress, mom may miss the magic

Yvette:

I have a 2-year-old who doesn't know his colors yet. I've worked with him on several occasions, but it isn't sinking in. He's so smart about so many things.

At what age will he start understanding colors?

Pam

Pam:

Relax. He's 2. At 2, he doesn't need to know his colors. He does need to enjoy learning and exploring his own capabilities — not be pressured to perform. Chief of Ambulatory Pediatrics Dr. Olivia Thomas, Columbus Children's Hospital, said that your child is too young for you to expect him to identify his colors. Some 3-year-olds know their colors. By age 4, most children do.

We can be so eager for our children to progress that we don't enjoy where they are. They're little for such a short time. Each stage has its own magic. Enjoy him as a toddler. He'll learn at his own pace.

Yvette

Yvette:

My son just turned 3 and is a very vivacious toddler with a zest for life. He can be very aggressive with other children, especially if he is having fun. He becomes so wound up that he usually ends up hurting someone by hitting someone or throwing something. I have tried everything from explaining why his behavior isn't acceptable to giving him timeouts. Nothing is working. I know he's in the terrible 3s, but I want his friends to want to play with him, not be afraid of him. Help!

Kelly

Kelly:

Three can be a challenging age. The behavior you describe suggests that your son responds physically when he wants something, isn't heard or doesn't

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get his way with his friends. Young children often respond aggressively because of frustration or too much stimulation.

Minimize opportunities for frustration until your son is better able to handle his emotions. For example, only have one friend over at a time. Avoid highly stimulating environments. Monitor his interaction with other children. When things seem to be escalating, step in and remove your child until he is in better control of his emotions. Continue to explain to him that you want him to play with friends but that it's not OK for him to throw things or hit his friends. When he has calmed down, he can rejoin his friend.

If you know he is possessive of a certain toy or game, have the children play with something else. Establish small expectations for your son and set limited playtime. Model problem-solving skills with him so he can learn how he should respond. Praise his successes. If he does throw items or hit another child, place him in timeout. Ask him to apologize to the other child when he returns from timeout. If these moderations and time do not improve his behavior, please consult your pediatrician.

Yvette

Yvette:

My 23-month-old is a terrible sleeper. Every night he fights going down. He does sleep in our bed with us.

We've tried that "cry-it-out" method. It only works for a week or so, and then he resorts back to getting up numerous times a night.

Do you have any suggestions for get-

ting him to sleep earlier? He doesn't get sugar, etc. before bed.

Michelle

Michelle:

The key is routine. Your toddler should have a regular routine that includes an opportunity for him to calm down from the day's activities. Avoid stimulants in the evening or playing activities that will create excitement. Begin the calm-down routine, which can include a bath and story time, at least 30 minutes before bedtime. Make this a special time for you and your son — something he enjoys. Once he's in bed, the goal is to keep him there. This will take some time, but if you're consistent each and every time, he'll learn to sleep through the night.

When he gets out of bed during the night, immediately return him to his bed. If he cries, wait a few minutes before going to check on him. If the crying persists, wait a little longer each time before checking. Remind him that it's time to go back to sleep and that if he stops crying, you'll come back in a few minutes and check on him. Do not give up and allow him in your bed. When he is successful staying in his bed through the night, praise him. Consistency is imperative. While you'll be a little tired for a few days, it's better to resolve this issue now because it won't become any easier as he grows older.

Yvette

Yvette:

My 6-year-old son continues to be disruptive and noisy in class. He refuses to listen to anyone's directions and acts

as if punishment doesn't faze him. How do I approach this?

Bobbi

Bobbi:

Have you observed your son's behavior in class? If not, please do. There may be reasons why your son is being disruptive. How does he relate to the teacher? Is the work too challenging or too easy? Is there another child who helps instigate misbehavior?

Your visit to the classroom may show your son the importance you place on his good behavior and your support for his teacher's classroom rules.

In addition to these strategies, progressive discipline is important.

Discipline has to be firm, fair, consistent and progressive.

At 6, your son should understand your expectations in relation to his behavior. If the discipline you're using is ineffective, evaluate other strategies. For example, if you're restricting television viewing but allowing time on the computer, this discipline may not be effective.

Successful discipline occurs when the consequences are too high for the child to risk the behavior. You have to keep raising the stakes until not complying is more costly than doing what's expected.

Finally, there is the possibility that your son may have a learning issue that interferes with his ability to sit still for long periods of time such as attention-deficit disorder or dyslexia. Consult your pediatrician to rule out medical issues.

Yvette



Yvette McGee Brown is a former Domestic Relations/Juvenile Court Judge. She is currently the president of the Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Columbus Children's Hospital.