

"Should I always give in to my child?"

"Linda is a friendly girl but her tantrums are terrifying! It is difficult for Linda to follow instructions since, she wants things done her way and it is difficult to ask her to do certain things," her mother commented. "I am usually left to clear her toys which were left on the floor. I notice that Linda does not complete her tasks entirely, whether it is homework or during playtime." Linda's mother continued.



"It is hard to have her sit down quietly especially during meal times. I have to chase after her so that she can finish her meal. If I force her to sit down at the dinner table, she will refuse to eat! Sometimes, my husband will help me, but he finds it exhausting as well. She would slump herself on the floor, cries and whines; and it is getting worse. It is tiring and frustrating. If she is in a good mood, she will do the things requested. I do hope she will out-grow this behaviour," says Linda's mother. Linda will be 6 years old in a month's time. Her parents are concerned about her. It came to a point when the parents ask "Should I always give in to my child?"



How will we respond to such a situation when a child such as Linda throws tantrum? It is very easy to give in to our children when they throw tantrum, especially in the public area. We will try our best to avoid all the possible attention from the public. Sometimes at home, a child can scream until the neighbours can hear. We will feel very embarrassed because others may be thinking "What is happening in that house?!"

Most young children go through a whiny stage in which many of their wants and needs are expressed in a whining, irritating tone¹. Giving in is not a negative issue. We need to assess any situations constantly; whether to give in or not. It will take time for negative behaviours to be eliminated. Nevertheless, if parents pay attention to good behaviour rather than bad, children will learn that there is little pay-off for behaving badly³.

Your response to your child's behaviour is very important. We can be reinforcing either the positive or negative behaviour in them, even without us realising. At times, our children may be testing our limits especially if they are trying to get away with some tasks. Children do not necessary misbehave every time. It is vital that we should be mindful of our reaction towards their behaviour.

*"There are two fundamental ways that small children learn about the world around them. The first way is through play, exploring objects in an imaginative way. The second way is one that we often overlook, and that is through their misbehaviour."
- Dr. Peter Williamson, clinical psychologist and author of Good Kids, Bad Behaviour*

MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR

WHAT?	WHY?
Know your child's abilities & difficulties 	It is very important to know your child's level of capabilities and areas of difficulty in various tasks. Children with learning disabilities who may have difficulty in expressing themselves may react differently. Some may cry while others might become restless and loose their concentration.
Respond immediately with an appropriate response to behaviour & follow up response later	This is to encourage good behaviour when your child is back in the game of trying to behave appropriately ¹ .
Be in control of the situation.. ALWAYS 	It is very easy to give in to the child's wants when he/she throws tantrums or unable to listen to instructions. This approach only reinforces the child's behaviour and he/she can take advantage of this 'privilege'. Hence, it is important to restrict so that the child will be able to take responsibilities for her actions and will only earn the privileges once he/she has abide by the restrictions laid out by the parents ¹ .
Anticipate your child's reaction	Parents need to learn to anticipate their child's behaviour. Identify and make a mental note what triggers the outbursts.

Keep your child informed	Children who love routine are unable to adapt to sudden changes very well. They might react adversely.
Practice reward system	A reward system can be in the form of a chart whereby the child is rewarded with something he likes after accomplishing numerous tasks from the chart. This simple system can enable the child to know that if he wants something, he is required to do his work properly.

Some children can be very stubborn and it is very difficult to deal with their behaviour. In order to discourage whining or tantrum throwing, it is important that your response to your child is consistent each time it occurs¹. At the same time, one should be observant in their methods when dealing with their children's behaviour. Concurrently, these methods must be applied to the other siblings so that this will not cause any confusion or jealousy amongst them.

"Look at me!"

Children also learn from our behaviour and observe how we respond to each other. Their willingness to become responsible will be shaped in part by your expectations and in part by his/her good intentions¹. Each of us is ultimately responsible for our own actions and behaviour¹. Therefore, we have the responsibility to conduct ourselves as good role models (i.e. to behave appropriately in speech as well as in action).








When disciplining our children, we must remember not to jump to conclusions or make any assumptions. We should investigate the situation first. A child will not like to be disciplined in front of everyone. If the child is really at wrong, bring him to a corner and discipline him.

Occupational Therapy & Your Child

Some children may present with learning disabilities, depending on the severity of their condition. Their behavioural patterns may be difficult to handle as well. Parents can bring their child for an assessment by the Occupational Therapist (OT) if they experience difficulty handling their children who behave stubbornly at home.

TIPS!

-  *Divide task into smaller and specific steps- assist child at each level and practice several times².*
-  *Identify tasks and alter task format so that the child does not throw tantrums*
-  *Rules make children feels safe; so establish some firm behaviour rules, but don't go overboard!*
-  *Inform child of any changes of plans so that he/she is prepared.*
-  *Remember to compliment or reward your child when they have behaved well!*

OTs work closely with other medical professionals such as paediatricians and psychologists who can assist in providing the child's diagnosis. Children with learning disabilities have to be assessed on their level of intellectual abilities and functional level. When handling children with learning disabilities, the Occupational Therapist uses behavioural modification approach which will help the child to gain control over tantrum throwing and other negative behaviours. The OT and parents need to cooperate when treating the child. At home, the therapist advises parents on how to deal with their child. It is important that parents continue to instil and practice regularly with their children the methods taught by the Occupational Therapist.



It is still important to instil good characters in our children, whether learning difficulties are present or otherwise. We have the responsibility to be good role models to our children and to discipline them accordingly. It is easier to discipline a child at a tender age and not to wait until they grow older.

Reference:

1. Conner, B. (2002). Everyday Opportunities for Extraordinary Parenting. Magna Publishing Co. Ltd.
2. Einon, D. (2002). Creative Child. Octopus Publishing Group Ltd. Hamlyn.
3. Herbert, M. (2000). Clinical Child Psychology: Social Learning, Development and behaviour (2nd Ed.) John Wiley & Sons. Chichester.

