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## **DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS WHEN CHILDREN MISBEHAVE**

Why do children misbehave? It may be to satisfy their curiosity, to attract adult attention, or perhaps the child is ignorant and doesn't know any better.

A three-year-old squirted a bottle of lotion all over clean clothes in the laundry room. Was he misbehaving? Consider this. In his eyes he was just mimicking what his mother did as she put the clothes in the washing machine. He didn't know the difference between lotion and laundry soap nor the difference between clean and dirty clothes.

Parents shouldn't jump to the conclusion that their children are deliberately misbehaving. The child may not have adequate instruction, or may not realize the consequences of the behavior.

Sometimes a child's behavior may be motivated by a need for adult attention. Giving attention is important, but timing is vital. Parents often mistakenly encourage the very behavior they are trying to discourage.

If a child hungers for attention, even the negative attention of discipline, is better than no attention at all. To a child, even angry words are at least some form of response and attention. Those behaviors that parents pay attention to are the ones that the child is most likely to repeat. The message to parents is "catch them being good" and reward these actions.

To change a child's behavior, it's generally more effective to ignore the undesirable behavior and give the child your full attention when he/she is behaving appropriately.

There is always a reason for misbehavior. Has the child had enough sleep? Is he/she hungry? Need exercise? Feeling ill? Or perhaps the child feels insecure, afraid, discouraged, or unloved. When you understand why a child is behaving a certain way, it's easier to ignore the negative and reinforce the positive.

Preventing misbehavior is much easier than dealing with it afterwards. Try some of these suggestions:

- **Change the setting.** Find something new and interesting to do.
- **Provide interesting playthings.** This helps to prevent boredom, which can lead to misbehavior.
- **Make clear rules.** For preschoolers, the fewer the better. They should be reasonable and enforced consistently.
- **Revise the rules as the child grows in ability and responsibility.**
- **Set a good example.** Children imitate those around them.
- **Give choices.** This may be just a choice of two or three things. Make sure all the choices you offer are acceptable to you.
- **Get the child's attention.** When giving instructions get at their level and look them in the eye before you talk.

- **Give warning time.** Tell them 5 to 10 minutes ahead of time before you change the activity.
- **Provide regular undivided personal attention to each of your children.**

Make changes gradually. Try only one new technique at a time. Try it for at least two weeks. It takes time to form new habits, for both parents and children.