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ARE YOUR CHILDREN MISBEHAVING? WHY?

You've done everything you could think of to prevent misbehavior. But the kids are still causing trouble. What can you do instead of screaming? A few points to remember:

- **Kids are kids.** All kids will misbehave sometimes, simply because they haven't learned the "social rules" of our world. Parents and child care providers need to help them learn acceptable behavior.
- **Kids have bad days, just like adults do.** Sometimes, all the planning and patience in the world cannot make up for the fact that a child is feeling grumpy because of something beyond your control. That's when it's best to give him/her space, time, and quiet, if possible, or change the plans to better fit the child's needs.
- **Kids usually act out for some reason.** Knowing the cause of a behavior can be helpful in changing it.

Adults love to ask "Why?" for just about everything. They ask kids "Why did you do that? Why did you say that?" Unfortunately, kids do not very often know why they have acted in a certain way. Adults need to be detectives and search for the cause if knowing the cause can help with the solution.

Children misbehave for many reasons:

- They feel they have something to gain from the misbehavior – attention, power, and/or revenge.
- They are unaware of the expectations/rules of the situation or setting.

- They lack the skills or maturity to meet the expectations/rules.
- Their temperament/personality does not fit the situation.

Although knowing the cause can be helpful in determining what to do next, it is not always necessary or possible. Do not dwell so long on the cause that you forget to act on the behavior.

Be ready to take action by:

1. **Changing the situation.** Adults sometimes over-schedule and over-plan in their eagerness to provide kids with a variety of activities. Look to see if the situation fits the needs of the children involved. Are the activities too easy? Too difficult? Too long? Too short?
2. **Redirecting the child.** Frequently, **misbehavior** is simply behavior **misplaced**. If the behavior is appropriate in a different setting or space, redirect the child to that setting. Example: If kids are running in a hall, can they go outside to run?
3. **Teaching the child.** A little knowledge can go a long way. Often children misbehave because they feel inadequate with the situation or do not know any other way to behave. Is there a social or physical skill you can teach the child to stop the undesirable behavior?

Try these ideas:

1. **Separate the child from the behavior.** When discussing a child's behavior with him or her, always identify the specific behavior you do not like, not the child as a whole. Say "I do not like it when you hit your sister." Do not say, "You are a bad boy/girl!" Children need to know that you still care for them

even if occasionally they behave in ways you do not like.

2. Look at the setting where the kids spend most of their time. Ask yourself

“If I were a kid, what would I want to do in this setting?” (Run? Sit? Play games? Talk to friends? Read?) Then ask yourself, “Is this what I want the kids to do?” If the answer is “No”, then change the environment.

The next time your children misbehave – think before you act. Why are they acting this way and what’s the best way to handle it?