

7 Ways to Discipline Children in Foster Care

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Updated June 24, 2019

1. Ignore Mild Misbehavior

It's important to choose your battles wisely. Focus on the most problematic behaviors first and be willing to [ignore less serious behaviors](#)—like interrupting or a lack of table manners—until you've got the big ones under control.

Provide plenty of [positive attention](#). Spend one-on-one time together each day to build trust, which is an essential component in any healthy relationship. Have fun together and you'll likely prevent a lot of attention seeking behaviors.

2. Praise Good Behavior

Praise is a powerful tool that can reinforce good behavior. Catch your child being good and point out the specific behavior you appreciate.

Whether he's playing quietly with blocks, using good manners, or following directions nicely, praising his efforts will give him an incentive to continue. Pointing out good behavior also helps him understand your expectations better.

[Using Praise to Encourage Good Behaviors](#)

3. Use Grandma's Rule of Discipline

Grandma's rule of discipline gives children in foster care a sense of control, which is critical to children who have little control over most aspects of their lives.

Grandma's rule of discipline involves framing things as an incentive rather than pointing out the [negative consequence](#).

Rather than say, "No TV until you put your toys away," say, "When you finish putting your blocks away, you can watch TV." That slight difference in the way you word your statement will show your child he has control over how and when he earns privileges.

It's also important to offer a couple of simple choices. Ask, "Do you want peas or carrots with chicken?" or "Do you want to do your math homework or clean your room first?" Allowing your child to assert himself in simple, healthy ways can help him feel like he has some say in his life.

[Using Grandma's Rule of Discipline](#)

4. Redirect Your Child's Attention

Use a younger child's short attention span to your advantage. If he's banging his blocks together loudly and you want him to stop, invite him to help you put the dishes away.

Similarly, if he's yelling because you said he can't go to the park, remind him of something you're planning to do tomorrow. Redirection can [avoid a lot of power struggles](#).

5. Offer Rewards for Good Behavior

Reward systems can be very effective with children in foster care. A young child may do well with a [sticker chart](#) and an older child could benefit from a [token economy system](#).

Invest time in learning what type of rewards will motivate your child. And make sure your child sees it as a reward plan, not a punitive plan that causes him to lose privileges.

[How to Create an Effective Reward System](#)

6. Place Your Child in Time-Out

When negative consequences are necessary, a time-out may be an effective choice. It's important to choose the time-out space carefully and it should be discussed with the rest of your child's team. While a time-out chair may be appropriate for some kids, others may do better in a time-out room.

[Using Time-Out for Discipline](#)

7. Remove Privileges

Taking away privileges can also serve as an effective teaching tool. It's important to learn about what types of privileges will be most effective with your child. While taking away TV time may work for some kids, removing a specific toy may be most effective for others.

[How to Take Away a Privilege](#)

Work With Your Foster Child's Team

When specific behavior problems arise, work with your foster child's guardian, case manager, therapist, and other caretakers to identify the best strategies for intervention. Consistency is often the key to helping children in foster care learn the skills they need to manage their behavior.

The treatment team will also be able to help you identify a plan that will specifically address a foster child's mental health and behavioral needs. Children who have been abused or neglected are at a much higher risk of developing issues that will affect their behavior, such as [disinhibited social engagement disorder](#). Children in foster care require a discipline plan tailored to their specific needs.