How many times have we heard a child – or teenager – say, “No, I’m not going to do it! And you can’t make me!” Or, seen a young child on the floor, kicking and screaming?

Of course, it’s even worse when it’s your child who is making the fuss.

Tantrums, disobedience, bad behavior – whatever you call it, they are hard to cope with. At different times in your child’s life, toddler or teen, this may be a natural part of children becoming more independent and testing their limits. But, that doesn’t mean you have to accept it. How can we get through these stressful events and reduce the chances of them happening again?

The first thing to remember is that it is the behavior that is bad, not the child. Show them you love them, even though you don’t love the behavior.

Equally important, a parent is different from a friend. If you are the parent, you need to set the limits, and stick with them.

Modeling Good Behavior

Parents often get frustrated when children talk back, will not do chores, or whine and scream. Do not let your frustration get out of control. Do not get into a yelling match with your child. If you yell or hit your children, you are teaching your child to yell and hit others to get their way. Show your children that you can calmly talk about what is bothering you, just as you want them to calmly “use their words” to tell you why they are upset.

Taking Away Privileges

It is important to figure out what your child considers a “treasure”– something they will miss if you take it away as a punishment. Many children have so many toys that they barely miss one that is taken away. And, if we take away something for too long, they may find other interests – making this strategy ineffective. The key is to take something important away, be consistent, and do not give in early and return the privilege too soon. For teenagers, the choices are especially limited – the car, computer games, TV time.
Even so, you need to be just as consistent for teenagers as for young children.

**Rewarding Good Behavior**

Most important, be sure to use praise, hugs, and other rewards for the behavior that you like. A calendar chart (with gold stars or stickers for younger kids) can also reinforce the kinds of behaviors you want your child to do everyday, such as going to bed on time or putting away their toys.

It may seem like teenagers don’t care about praise or hugs, but even if they don’t show it, even the most sullen of adolescents appreciate praise from their parents.

Food and gifts are not good ways to reward good behavior on a daily basis, unless you want your child to be overweight and demanding. The occasional use of a more substantial reward (a reasonably-priced toy or special treat) is effective for a very important accomplishment—not for behaviors you expect every day or every week. You can use the daily and weekly calendar charts we mentioned earlier (with or without gold stars) to show your kids how their daily accomplishments add up to a more substantial reward, and together you and your child can help decide what that will be.

**Quality Time**

As parents, we have a lot of things competing for our time and attention. They may want us when we’re busy, and when we are ready to spend time with our children, they may have other things they want to do. Notice the times when your children are most likely to talk, for example, at bedtime, before dinner, or in the car. Let your children know that you are interested in what is happening in their lives. If those times don’t work, try to set up a time for weekly one-on-one activities with each child.

When kids want to talk, express interest in what they say and listen to their point of view, even if it’s difficult to hear. Instead of lecturing, discuss their options and help them make the right choice.

Being a parent is a tough job. You need to listen, but also need to tell them in words and actions what you expect from them.

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**What to do? Try time-out**

If you want to see how giving children a “time-out” can work, watch the primetime TV show, *Supernanny*. The nanny uses the “naughty stool” to show children that bad behavior is unacceptable. A naughty chair or stool works well, or pick a place you can see, such as the corner.

**Time-out Tips!**

Time-out is used immediately after a bad behavior, to show children the consequences. It is also a good time for them to think about what they have done. After the time-out (usually 5 -15 minutes, depending on the age of the child), parents once again:

* explain the reasons for the discipline
* state the behavior that is unacceptable
* ask for an apology from the child
* end the time-out with a hug for the child

**Be Consistent!**

It’s important to be consistent, use time-out immediately (no matter how busy you are), and do not back down.

Time-out should never be in a bedroom or other room with fun things to do. That isn’t an effective punishment.

Is there an effective “time-out” for teenagers? Perhaps it is time spent without a cell phone, computer, or TV. Or, being “grounded” when they would otherwise spend time with their friends.