Discipline strategies for parents of young children

Scenarios involving your child's tears and tantrums are commonplace for parents and caregivers of youngsters. However, these situations can also be challenging and exasperating. While there is no such thing as an easy answer or a one-size-fits-all response to managing these situations, the practical strategies and tips below can make a difference.



Think positive. To encourage desired behaviours, use a "When… Then" strategy, such as, "When you eat your dinner, then you can watch television."

Discourage negatives. To discourage undesirable behaviours, use an "If…Then" strategy, such as, "Mom has said no, that you cannot have the toy. If you continue to ask her to buy you things when she says no, then you will not be able to come to the store next time."

Think ahead. When asking a child to leave an activity that they are engaged in, give notice. Consider saying, "We are going to go into the house in 10 minutes. Next time I call for you, it will be time to come into the house."

Be heard. Children get easily absorbed in the activities they are involved in. Make sure that you have your child's attention before making the request. When eye contact is made, then state your request.

Time out. When a child is screaming and crying to get their way, it can be difficult to remain calm. Yet remaining calm and firm in your expectations is likely to get the best results. To break the power struggle that can unfold when both parent and child are emotional, take a time out—a break for both you and your child.

Be consistent. If parents and caregivers are inconsistent in communicating expectations, then children get mixed messages and use the best way they know how to get their way. Being consistent will help a child understand what is expected of them.

These tips can go a long way in managing typical yet tough situations with young children and remember, it's common for parents of young children to feel overwhelmed from time to time and to experience relationship stress as a result of parenting demands.