



## BEHAVIORS OF 0–18-MONTH-OLD CHILDREN

### Situation #1: A crying baby

My 4-month-old baby just won't stop crying. I'm exhausted. I haven't had a full night's sleep for months, and here it goes again: Another night of horror—A screaming baby and no sleep!

### Why is this happening?

Because babies

- Cry to tell us that something is wrong and that they need help.
- Cry when they are sick, hungry, cold, have a dirty diaper, are tired, or can't calm down.
- Can be frightened by the presence of strangers.
- Can cry until someone takes away the discomfort or until they are too exhausted to stay awake.
- Can be different: Some cry a lot, others hardly at all. This depends on the baby's temperament and personality.

Remember: Babies don't cry to annoy their parents or caregivers.

### What can adults do in the situation described here?

- Check the causes of a baby's crying and do what is needed to eliminate it.
- Comfort the baby: This will not spoil the child. When babies cry, they need warm and caring attention to feel secure and safe.
- Don't punish a crying baby —be patient. Harsh responses will frighten the baby and will make the situation worse.
- Never shake a baby. It can cause serious injury like brain damage and even death.
- Watch for patterns. Some babies cry a lot, others not much, some cry at sunset. Try something different, like walking outside or having music in the room.
- Know your baby's style: Some need quiet, dark places to calm down; others can sleep in the midst of a crowd.

### What can adults do if nothing works?

- Call another adult to be there to help calm the baby or simply to listen and support you.
- Leave the baby alone, safely in bed or in an infant seat, then dim the lights, close the door, and get some rest!

# BEHAVIORS OF 18–36-MONTH-OLD CHILDREN



## Situation #2: A toddler in a grocery store

A father was in a grocery store when his 2-year-old son grabbed a box of candy off the shelf. The father told him that he couldn't have the candy and that if he wants something, he has to ask. Instead of obeying him, the boy started to cry, scream, and hit the father and then fell on the floor in a full-blown tantrum.

## Why is this happening?

### Because children at this age

- Think they are the center of the universe and want things immediately.
- Have difficulty waiting for what they want and are easily frustrated.
- Don't know how to control emotions like anger and frustration.
- Still don't know how to use words to express feelings and desires and use tantrums instead.
- Are beginning to develop a sense of being separate individuals with their own power, and they regularly test the limits of this power. They frequently say "NO!" or grab what they want.
- Are learning how to behave in public.

## What can adults do in the situation described here?

1. Stay calm and remember that tantrums are normal at this age.
2. Use a few gentle but firm words to calm the child.
3. Do not use physical punishment because it will teach the child to use violence.
4. Ignore the behavior and wait for the storm to pass.
5. Distract the child with something else, like a toy or a book.
6. Ask the child to help you choose something else in the store.
7. If the child can't calm down, take him/her to a quiet place.

## What can adults do to prevent this problem in the future?

- (a) When you have to go to a public space:
  - Be patient: Children at this age are learning to behave in public.
  - Make the trip short, and never go when the child is tired or hungry.
  - Always have toys and treats to entertain the child.
- (b) Avoid bringing a toddler to
  - Adult places, like restaurants, movie theaters, hospitals.
  - Tempting places such as grocery stores.
- (c) Teach your child
  - To ask things in a polite way.
  - To choose between objects and activities that are permissible.



## BEHAVIORS OF 3–5-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN



### Situation #3: Fighting for a toy

Two 4-year-old girls were playing and were happy to be with each other. Everything seemed fine until Emma started screaming. Her friend Sally was on top of her, yanking her hair. Emma was screaming and pointing to a broken doll on the floor.

### Why is this happening?

Because children at this age

- Have difficulty sharing their things and toys.
- Still don't know how to control their emotions.
- Are learning to use words to solve problems.
- Want to control the people and things in their lives.
- Can be angry when they cannot decide how things should be.
- Have a hard time understanding that other people have different ideas.

### What can adults do in the situation described here?

1. Stay calm: Don't yell and don't use physical punishment.
2. Stop the fight and comfort the injured child.
3. Give time-out to the aggressive child to calm her: No more than 1 minute for each year of the child's age.
4. When both children are calm:
  - Ask them to use their own words to explain what the problem was.
  - Ask them to use words to tell how they are feeling about the fight.
  - Help them think of nonviolent ways to resolve the problem.
  - Tell them clearly that it is NOT OK to hurt someone.
  - Praise them if they go back to playing peacefully.

### What can adults do to prevent this problem in the future?

- Have different kinds of toys so the children can move from one to another.
- Put away the toys that your child absolutely does not want to share.
- Make sure that your child understands that the friends will not take the toys away when they leave.
- Use everyday life situations to teach your child to share his/her things.
- Whenever there is a conflict, teach your child to use words to show his/her feelings and to think of different ways to solve problems and resolve conflicts.



# BEHAVIORS OF 6–8-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN



## Situation #4: Bullying in school

Lately, Melissa does not want to go to school. She is 8, overweight, and shy. She has started to complain that kids at school have been tormenting her, making fun of her, and calling her names.

### Why is this happening?

#### Because

- She is a victim of bullying.
- There are some children who feel they are more important and stronger, and they intimidate others whom they see as weaker or smaller.
- Bullying allows some children to dominate others and get what they want, when they want.
- Peers have great influence on children of this age.

### What can adults do in the situation described here?

#### 1. Understand what bullying is and its consequences

- Bullying is the frequent use of physical or verbal intimidation and occurs when there is no adult supervision at home or in the school.
- Bullying occurs when there is a difference of power: The stronger, older child hurts the younger, weaker, or socially isolated.
- The consequences of bullying include anxiety, shame, depression, seeing oneself as a failure and as unattractive.

#### 2. If your child is the bully,

- Talk to him/her to understand why he/she needs to bully others.
- Establish consequences and withdraw some privileges.
- Look for professional help if the child's behavior is part of a complicated set of emotional problems.
- Talk to the school about how they can help.

#### 3. If your child is the victim,

- Have loving conversations to talk about your child's feelings about the situation.
- Teach your child to ask for adults' help.
- Encourage your child not to fight back.
- Talk with your child's teacher, counselor, and principal to call their attention to the problem.

#### 4. If your child is a witness,

- Tell him/her to inform an adult.
- Encourage your child to be kind to the victim.
- Tell your child to never encourage a bully and to show that he/she doesn't approve of such behavior.

### How can adults prevent bullying?

- Be a positive role model and never bully someone else.
- Encourage schools to implement prevention programs.
- Participate in the school's existing prevention programs.
- Talk to the PTA, principal, teachers, and counselors about providing constant adult supervision in the school.

