

When nothing

With all the discipline strategies out there it should be easy to maintain order. But what do you do when they just don't do the trick?

BY TORI HOFFMAN

Any mom with a toddler will tell you that raising her is no easy task. There's a reason why the term "terrible twos" was coined – and it's not just the two-year-old you need to be wary of. Little children are difficult – from one year, when they can walk and talk, right up to four and beyond. It's who they are, it's part of their nature and their development, and it's up to us, as parents, to curb their "misbehaviour" – so normal in many ways – and steer them in the right direction. But how do we, as parents, fulfil this momentous task? How do we get our little ones to listen to us? And what should we do when nothing else works?

Why they misbehave

According to Cape Town-based child play therapist in private practice, Jodi Lord, two-year-olds like to push boundaries: it's what they do. They try to see how much they can get away with, because everything is new. They haven't developed the means to deal with different situations or scenarios yet, and thus test boundaries and their parents all the time to see how far they can push them.

"Pushing and hitting is fine the first time but after this, they need to know – after being reprimanded by you – that it's not acceptable. The more they get away with, the more they will learn that their misbehaviour is acceptable, and this is why parents need to take a stance right from the beginning."

Two-year olds are also impulsive and "they don't always filter their actions

through their moral base or superego, like adults. It's normal, but we have to curb this almost natural behaviour and show them the right way, therefore developing a moral base to draw from," says Jodi.

"This doesn't mean that you should tell your toddler that it's not alright to be angry, cross, or frustrated. All of these are allowed. But rather, it means you should show her what to do with these feelings. Get your toddler a punching pillow or bag or let her run around the garden. Let her take her frustrations out on these things, rather than adults or other children."

Jodi adds that toddlers are busy developing a new sense of autonomy and trying to be an individual, separate from their moms, which is why they often want to do tasks and activities on their own; saying, "I can do this by myself." If they're not allowed to attempt things on their own, they feel shame and self-doubt and don't achieve that developmental milestone.

What works for the one-year-old

While it might be difficult to discipline a one-year-old, it's important to lay down the ground rules from early on. Just because they can't talk, doesn't mean they can't understand you. The one-year-old also needs to be monitored closely at all times – especially at playdates – so that if she does hit or bite, it's noticed and sorted out right away. A child of this age typically behaves in this way to see what will happen and to get a reaction; you need to show her that it's not on. A one-year old won't understand

the concept of time out (keep this for the "terrible twos") but she will understand your tone of voice and know what she's doing is wrong.

"Your child knows you. She knows your negative tone of voice, your facial expressions and your body language. She will know if what she's done is wrong," says Jodi.

Turning around and ignoring your young toddler is also a very strong form of discipline, and sends off signals to her brain that you don't approve of her behaviour. "Once you're done, you need to show your toddler how to behave properly and model good behaviour. For example, show her how to pack away her toys. Imitation is a very important tool in teaching your child how to behave."

“A child of this age typically behaves in this way to see what will happen and to get a reaction”

else works



Top 10 discipline don'ts

- **NEVER MAKE UP RULES ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT**, and don't punish your child for not knowing and not following that rule.
- **DON'T PUNISH YOUR CHILD WITH NO WARNING** – unless they're doing something to endanger themselves or others. Always give two warnings before sending your child to time out.
- **DON'T TAKE AWAY SPECIAL BONDING TIME** from your child as punishment – like a bedtime story. Rather take away luxuries like TV or ice-cream.
- **DON'T SMACK FLIPPANTLY** and impulsively with emotion, for every single thing. It loses its impact completely. If parents hit with emotion, it's abuse and is no longer about the behaviour of the child, but about the parents' emotions.
- **DON'T NEGOTIATE** or try to reason with your toddler. Give commands.
- **DON'T SHOUT AND SCREAM.**
- **DON'T GIVE YOUR CHILD TOO MANY CHOICES.** Tell him he can decide what he eats first, second and last on his plate, but he will eat what is given. They need you to be in control.
- **TRY TO STAY AWAY FROM GIVING SWEETS** or money as rewards.
- **NEVER BRIBE A TODDLER.**
- **DON'T DELAY DISCIPLINE** for later in the day. Always do it immediately and never give in.