

# Self-Control for Little Ones

*It's no secret that children who have good self-control behave better—even when grown-ups aren't watching. Use these strategies to help your child be in control of his behavior.*

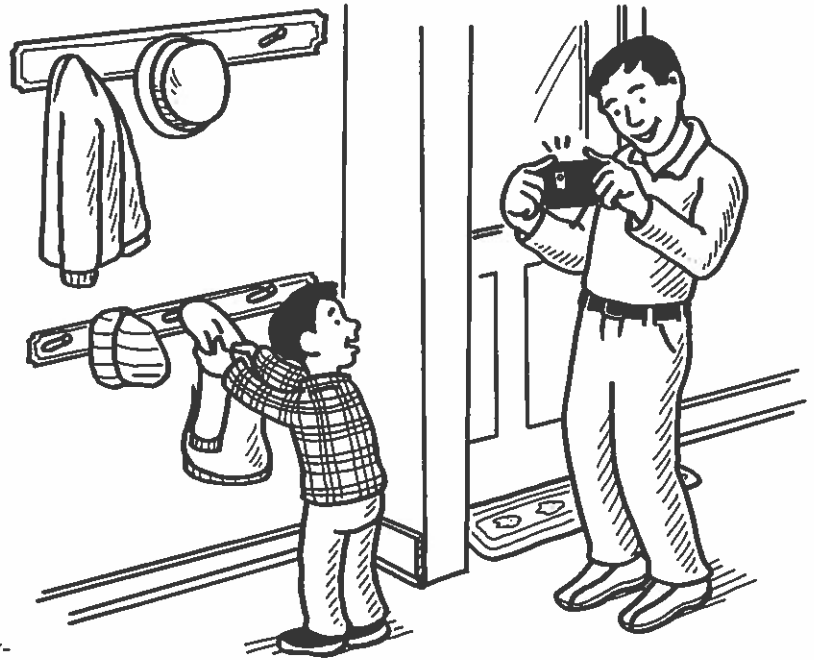
## Be clear about boundaries

One of the first ways to improve your youngster's self-control is to be specific about what you expect. Routines and rules can keep him on track.

- **Create daily routines.** Take photos of your child doing tasks that you expect him to do without being reminded. Examples might include hanging up his jacket, putting away his backpack, and washing his hands. These tasks give your youngster everyday opportunities to be in charge of his behavior. To help him remember the routine, print the pictures, and let him glue them onto a poster to hang in his room.

- **Make a family rule book.** Together, think of rules and write each one on a page in a notebook. Try to keep the rules positive. For instance, if your child suggests, "Don't make a mess," you could write, "We clean up after ourselves." Let your youngster draw a picture for each page. She'll gain a solid understanding of what she is supposed to do.

- **Reap the rewards.** This caterpillar project shows your child the benefits of self-discipline. If he does a nice job of taking



charge of himself, help him write about his behavior—and the result—on a circle of colored paper. ("I got ready for bed all by myself. We had time to read an extra story!") On a bulletin board, hang the circles in a row to form a caterpillar. As he adds new circles and his caterpillar "grows," read the old ones together to celebrate his accomplishments.

## Set your child up for success

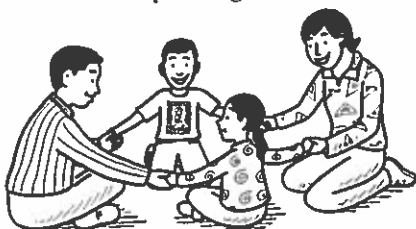
When children have a plan for staying in control, they are more likely to succeed. Here are tools your little one can use to exercise self-discipline in everyday life.

- **Give a sneak preview.** Before heading into a situation, let your youngster know what will happen. "We're going to the bakery to pick up your brother's birthday cake. We aren't buying anything else today." Knowing ahead of time that she won't get a cookie may make her less tempted to ask for one or to throw a fit when you say no.



## Pass the squeeze

Here's a fun game that teaches little ones to control their impulses. Hold hands in a circle—the more the merrier. One person gently squeezes the hand of the next player. That person squeezes the next player's hand, who squeezes the next person's hand, and so on...until the squeeze goes around and around the circle. The trick, of course, is waiting until it's your turn to squeeze!



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*continued*

● **Brainstorm “replacement” activities.** What could your child do in place of something that’s not allowed? For example, if you’re going to a museum, have a quick chat about ways to avoid touching the displays, such as putting his hands in his pockets or practicing counting on his fingers. Or if he has watched enough TV for the day, help him come up with alternatives like riding his bike or drawing a picture.

● **Teach self-talk.** Have you ever repeated a reminder to yourself to buy milk or lock the door? The same strategy can help your youngster remember to behave. If she’ll need to wait her turn to go down the slide, for instance, tell her to think of a can-do phrase to whisper. (“I can wait my turn. I can wait my turn.”) She may find that self-control pays off and she enjoys her turn on the slide more!



## Practice during playtime

Children learn many skills through play, and self-discipline can be one of them. Consider these ideas.



stuffed animals nap. On a pretend train ride, the passengers need to stay seated and wait to arrive at their stops. Or play

● **Let’s pretend.** During imaginary play, look for opportunities to encourage self-discipline. For instance, if you play house with your child, you could talk quietly while

school, and the student has to raise his hand and speak only when the teacher calls on him.

● **Enjoy games.** It takes self-control to do well at games like Simon Says or Freeze Tag—your child must listen carefully and follow commands. During Simon Says, give instructions like “Simon says do a leap. Spin around.” Your youngster will have to keep herself from spinning around because Simon didn’t say to do that.

● **Try activities.** With these ideas, your youngster will build self-control without even knowing it! Get bubble solution and a wand, and challenge him to blow the biggest bubble possible. He’ll have to resist the urge to pop the bubbles so he can see how big they’ll get. Or ask him to count animals at the park—he can feel proud of himself for sitting quietly as the birds and squirrels come closer.

## Temper, temper

Getting angry or frustrated can cause big blow-ups for little ones. If your child has an outburst, wait until she is calm again, and then try these steps to help her keep her cool next time.

1. Talk about the physical signs that show a person is angry. You might point out characters in book illustrations—what does your youngster notice? *Examples:* clenched fists, narrowed eyes, gritted teeth.



2. Help your child name ways to calm down when she starts to feel mad. Her list might include taking a deep breath, counting to 10, or walking away. Now when she struggles with anger or frustration, she’ll have a plan for dealing with it.

3. Use puppets or stuffed animals to role-play being angry and trying out ideas from your youngster’s list.

## Early Years