

Five reasons children misbehave

There are a lot of reasons children misbehave. Since the beginning of time parents have tried to figure out how to parent their children. Even Adam and Eve clearly had issues with their children. Cain killed his brother Abel and was isolated from his family forever. They truly had a sibling rivalry. I will list five of the main reasons I see children misbehave.

1. **Attention.** It is human nature to want to have attention. We all have a need for belonging. A child is born into a family and has to try to find their place. At first, they receive a lot of attention from everyone, since of course they are an infant and so new to everyone. As they grow they seek independence, but they always need and look for their comfort and security in their parent(s). They want to say look at me, pay attention to me, spend time with me, don't you love me? Children will do whatever they think it will take to receive attention whether it is in a positive way or a negative way. How many times has a parent been on the phone when their young child wants to talk to them or engage them in some way? Before the parent was on the phone the child had no use for them, however when the parent's attention went somewhere else, now it is on. The child wants their attention. A child will whine, cry, beg, pout, talk loudly, make up things, fight with a sibling, break things, or act like they are unable to do something they can do without you, just to get your valuable attention. This is also very common in a family with siblings. Everyone must find their place and identify where they fit in the family.
2. **Power/Control.** Yes, your precious child can be a pain in your butt when they don't receive what they want. How many times have you had an argument with your child over a decision you made they didn't agree with? The word NO is used by a two- year old to show their control. Do you want to eat some vegetables? You ask, and the child will firmly say No and closes their mouth to show you they are serious. They might even cross their arms over their chest to solidify their defiance. They may have temper tantrums and fall out on the floor and scream and make a scene in the grocery store if you don't buy a snack or treat they requested. As they get older, they might try to use the silent treatment or go the opposite way and become loud and argumentative. It is not uncommon for parents to actually avoid their children and go into their room to escape. Work becomes not only the means to meet financial goals, but a place of refuge from your children. Relax and take a few deep breaths. It is Natural, yes and necessary for children to become independent and flexing their control muscles is a part of it. Some children over or under eat as a means of control. Some become aggressive and violent towards others. Some withdraw, or some threaten. Some become manipulative, spiteful, and even mean. All these behaviors suggest your child wants to be in control and have power over their lives.
3. **Display of inadequacy/fear of failure.** This happens when a child is faced with a challenge they feel they are unable to overcome. Maybe they are struggling in school and are afraid of failing or of showing their lack of knowledge in a subject. If the teacher asks them to perform and they feel insecure or lack confidence, they might misbehave to get out of performing. Maybe a child might fake an illness, or tell a lie to avoid a situation they have a fear in. Children must learn that no one is perfect and we all have shortcomings. They will regress to a level below their age

group as a way of showing inadequacy. They might not put forth their best effort because they have had a failure in the past and it haunts them in their mind.

4. **Revenge.** This is a difficult behavior to deal with, however it does happen with children and needs to be addressed. This misbehavior is displayed when a child feels he/she has been done wrong in some capacity. Maybe they think they are being treated unfairly or different from another child. Maybe they think they are overlooked or mistreated on purpose by someone. They feel their safety or security is in jeopardy and they retaliate. Children are not born with emotional regulation, and they must learn impulse and self-control. A child that becomes violent, yells, screams, hits, pushes, shoves, curses, bullies, threatens, withdraws, or lashes out are showing their dislike for some action they feel wronged in. Their goal is to get back at the person or people who caused some type of distress to them. In their mind they are defending themselves. They are only responding to what was done to them. They might plot and plan on how to get revenge without ever thinking of the words. Some children are intentional in harming others. They don't have a good emotional gauge or sense of empathy. They are only ego centric and self- focused. The goal is to pay you back for wrong done to them.
5. **Basic needs are not met.** This misbehavior is caused for a variety of reasons. If a child is hungry, sad, tired, sick or neglected they can misbehave. How do you as an adult perform if you are tired? Not at your best level for sure. Children are the same. It is unfair to expect a child to behave when they are hungry, sleepy, sick or otherwise not being taken care of. The body requires proper rest, health and nutrition to function efficiently. You can't ask a sleepy child to clean their room and expect it to be done the way you think it should be. A child can't focus properly at school if they are hungry and their grades and behavior will reflect that. If a child has been abused or neglected, many may not feel safe to talk about it, so they show it in their behaviors. If a person is sick, they can't perform at the same intensity as when they are well. Mental health issues, and disabilities can also be a reason child misbehave. If they can't function the way other children do, they can become frustrated and lash out at others.

How to deal with the misbehaviors.

First you must identify which type of misbehavior it is. Ask yourself some questions to figure it out.

Are my child's basic needs met? Is this an attempt to connect with me? Is the misbehavior done in malice or in anger? Is my child showing me they are fearful or uncomfortable with doing something? Is the misbehavior done to show the child is expressing their desire to be independent and uncompliant?

Once you can identify which type of misbehavior it is then you can address it.

If it is because basic needs are not met, then you as a parent must fix that. Feed your child, send them to bed without technology and make sure they are getting proper rest. Take them to the doctor or have them checked out to see what illness/condition they may have and get the treatment for it. Praise and encourage your child often. Show them their successes from the past and reaffirm them. Build them up. Someone, maybe even themselves, could be putting them down. I will say, "You can't talk about my child like that. I don't allow negative words that puts yourself or anyone else down." They will look at me like really mom, you mean it. Yes, I do. All children are valuable and capable of achieving great things. You be an example. Model success and get back up when you are down to show them life happens to everyone and how they can survive it with perseverance and dedication. Provide them with examples of people that are overcomers. Maybe someone they admire on TV or a relative they respect.

One simple phrase I tell my children when they want attention is. "Tell me you want to spend time with me." This cuts down considerably on the whining and bugging me in my house. Then tell the child when you can spend time with them and DO it. Hello, they were brought into this world from your womb. They used to have you all to themselves. Transition can be challenging. For control/power issues, have age appropriate discussions with your children. No, a three-year-old can't cut with a knife but they can help wash the vegetables or help set the table. A house rule may be you must meet the parents of anyone your child wants to have a sleepover at. Discuss safety and differences in households. Your child knows and needs rules and boundaries. They will however buck them when they can. Allow them to have some decisions once they have proven they can be trusted. Choices do create consequences. You can't put your child into harm's way. You shouldn't let them get whatever they want, or they will have a sense of entitlement that the world won't support. If you don't tell them No, then you are setting them up for failure and friction outside of the home. They must learn how to problem solve and to compromise.

For a child that misbehaves for revenge, use consequences to teach them to be disciplined and empathetic. Talk openly about what is and is not acceptable behavior and how their actions can negatively affect others. In our world of technology, you can have them use their phone, internet, or tablets to look up current situations where someone used poor judgment and the outcome of it. Help them identify how the person's behavior was counter-productive and maybe even detrimental to others. Teach them how to problem solve and learn how to show self-control. Have them make amends for their actions. If a young child destroys their room, have them clean it up along with you. Older children can clean it by themselves, and you check and let them know if it is done adequately. Remember some children clean is just moving things from one area to another. If it costs money, take it from their allowance or show them how something they wanted is the price of the repairs or even more. Once I had a six-year-old client who destroyed her class in anger see that the damage she did was the same cost as her buying ice cream at lunch for three weeks. She then realized how much that was and it helped her rethink about her choices. Maybe show your child examples of people who made choices of retaliation and the outcome of it. Age appropriate of course. Lives can be dramatically changed by the actions of others. Always be open to hear their concerns, frustrations, fears and goals. Help them set a goal of how they can express unhealthy feelings without hurting others. Children want to be included as well as become more self-sufficient and independent. You must talk to your children and talk often to see what is going on in their minds and in their world. It can be an unfair situation they are in, and they will react in a variety of ways. Know your child and look for signs of instability or change in character, or frustration. Address it. Help your child be self-controlled but check yourself. Some habits kids do learn from you.

The ultimate goal of parenting is to provide stable, happy, contributing, successful people to the world when they leave your home. Kids will misbehave for attention, control, revenge, fear of failure or not having their basic needs met, but we as parents can show them a better way to express their concerns and problem solve effectively. You can do it!