

Difficult Kids?

Any parent will tell you that some of their children are more difficult than others. Happily, there are things you can do to keep difficult children from growing into difficult adults.

- **Set reasonable, consistent limits** with appropriate consequences. When Johnny hits a playmate, it makes more sense to send him to time-out than to take away his television privileges.
- **Enforce limits promptly.** Respond at the first sign of trouble instead of waiting until you're angry and apt to over-react. If you don't react to the small tantrums, children will move on to more dramatic means of seeing whether you mean what you say.
- **Take charge.** Don't get involved in power struggles with your children. If you allow yourself to be drawn into bickering with your children or punish them out of anger instead of love, they'll see you as a peer instead of an authority figure.
- **Have confidence** in your parenting skills. If you believe you're in charge, your child will believe it, too. If you allow yourself to be bullied or dissuaded when you set limits, the child will know he's in the driver's seat!
- **Criticize the behavior, not the child.** Children often *behave* badly because they've come to believe that they are bad. Make it clear that even when you don't like what they do, you still love them.
- **Insist that children take responsibility for their actions.** The earlier difficult children learn that there is a consequence to their actions, the easier their adult life will be.

Guidelines

Confront Rude Behavior

Insist on Action

Question Closely

Be Realistic

Give Strokes

Be Encouraging

Don't Take It Personally

Taking Control

We can't change people who are difficult, but we can do a lot to decrease our discomfort when we're around them by taking charge of the situation. Here are some ways you can do that:

When someone is being threatening or intimidating, **respond to the way he's talking** to you rather than *what he's saying*. "*Don't talk to me that way; I deserve respect as much as you do.*"

When you're dealing with a chronic complainer, listen quietly and then **repeat your request for action**, phrasing your question, "*Will you . . . ?*" Don't give up until they answer your question **directly**. Few people are willing to say "No" flatly, so if they say "Yes" ask **when** they will do it.

If someone seems to be **evasive** or if you suspect they are actually lying, don't be afraid to **ask as many questions as necessary** until you're satisfied you have the whole, truthful answer.

Outflank procrastinators by **setting deadlines that are well in advance** of when you need something done. They'll still procrastinate, but you'll be in charge because you have anticipated it. This also works well with people who are always late for appointments.

Avoid the irritation caused by people who frequently interrupt you with unnecessary questions by planning to **give them some positive attention each day, before they ask for it**. Give them sincere compliments, or ask how their day was; you'll **prevent** many interruptions before they start!

Passive people who are **afraid of being criticized for making mistakes** often blossom when given patience, encouragement, praise, and support.

When people are difficult, **their behavior is not aimed at you** in particular; they're just being themselves, reacting more to their own doubts and fears than to the world around them. They're not trying to make you unhappy, but trying to protect themselves.