



FIRST YEAR AT SCHOOL

TROUBLE SHOOTING BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

Sometimes children's behaviour seems to go off track. Here are some things to keep in mind for trouble shooting. We know that children want to please their parents so if their behaviour is going wrong there must be a reason.

Remember: before tackling problems—work on your relationship first.

Some possible reasons for misbehaviour

- We are asking too much of them for their age and ability. Children starting school have a lot on their plate and many new things to learn. Make sure they are well and getting enough sleep and exercise. It helps to make times you know they will be tired, such as after school, as relaxed as possible.
- They are not really sure nor understand what is wanted. Do we clearly explain what to do and show them how to do it?
- They haven't yet learned to manage feelings. This takes a long time and there will be slips back but if your child always gets angry or distressed when something goes wrong they may need more help. (See *First year at school: Essential tips for parents and carers*, Chapter 4.)
- Sometimes they are just testing their boundaries as they grow and learn. They try something to see if they can do it and to see how you will respond.
- There is some stress in their lives that they can't cope with ... problems with friends, challenges at school or problems at home. The problems that stress children most are problems between their parents and if these are happening children need honest communication and as much reassurance as possible that their family is secure and that their parents will always be there for them. What they sense, but don't understand is more frightening than if they can talk to us about it.

What you can do

- You may have to respond to the behaviour and let your child know that it is not appropriate. You also need to respond to the feeling. You might say 'I can see you are feeling really upset, but we don't throw things, someone might get hurt'. Then you can ask the child to tell you what is bothering them. Sometimes they can. Sometimes they can't.
- Think about how long it has been happening and when it started. Were there changes about that time, e.g. a parent started work, change of teacher, friendship problem ...?
- Think about when it happened. Who was there? What happened before? What happened after?
- Try to work out the cause and try to do something about it. Remember to work on your relationship first. It is hard to solve problems if you and your child aren't feeling good about each other.
- Sometimes we can't see what is going on because we are too close to it. It is worth asking your partner, a close relative or friend. Often they can see what we can't.
- If the problem goes on for more than a few weeks, talk to a health professional about what you can do.

Tip

When you are talking with children about a problem, try to do it when you are not feeling frustrated or cross yourself. When a parent is angry with a child it is very frightening for the child because they fear the loss of parents' love more than anything. They need to see parents as there to help them with their problem, against the problem and not against them.

We all get angry sometimes, so if you are angry with your child make sure they know that you love them all the time whether you are angry or not, and take time to re-connect with them.

Want to know more? Visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/firstyear