



himaya , in collaboration with **Moms & To Be** , aims to break the silence on children abuse which is still considered a taboo. This section is to help you recognize different forms of abuse and stop them from happening to ensure the safety and welfare of a child.

Understanding Children's Development

Adults often have expectations regarding the behavior of children. And they assess the way children act according to these expectations. However, it is important to ask ourselves: are my expectations age- appropriate? Are they aligned with my child's development?

Knowledge of a child's development, especially at an early age, can affect our perception of children's behavior, and can inform our choices of administering sanctions. Can I realistically expect of a 3 year old to stay still at the movies for an hour and a half? Is my 7 year-old waking up at night because she/he just doesn't want to sleep alone in his/her bed, or because of night terrors? How about a 2 year-old whose new favorite word is "no"?

A 2 year old that seems to refuse to follow any kind of direction isn't being defiant. Granted, toddlers that age may scream out "no" before hearing what is asked, which can be indurating for their parents and caregivers. However, he/she is actually going through a normal phase of negativism. Indeed, "the terrible twos", as they are often (mis) labeled get a bad reputation. What this really refers to is the fact that between 18 months and 30 months, toddlers strive for independence. With their newfound mobility, as they master walking instead of crawling, they are eager to discover their environment and to develop their autonomy.



The purpose of the toddler's negativism is not to be disrespectful. He/she is attempting to assert himself/herself as an individual, separate from his parents. And at that age, asserting their independence means doing the opposite of what is asked. "No" actually means "let me decide for myself". Once you've translated that, dealing with your child will become much easier. At that age, it is helpful to avoid "yes" or "no" questions, as these will most likely be met with "no". Instead, giving choices will allow the child to feel that he/she is able to feel more independent. So instead of asking "do you want to have breakfast?", ask "do you want to have cereal or fruits for breakfast?"

Temper tantrums can also be a sign of the struggle for independence. A child that doesn't get what he/she wants may scream, kick and yell. Since young children's emotional development and communication skills aren't developed enough, they are frustrated with their inability to express their feelings. Tantrums are the expression of that frustration. Children will learn to cope with intense emotions as his/her communication skills improve. At that stage, to guide their children, parents can verbalize the child's feelings, especially by naming the feeling, ("I know you're angry because you want to continue playing and I said it's time for bed, but you need to sleep if you want to stay healthy.



You can play tomorrow when you wake up”), practice and model effective coping skills (“what can we do when we’re angry/sad?”, “look, even mommy gets angry. And when she does, she counts to 10 to calm down”) and praise appropriate self-calming, self-control skills (“I am so proud of you because instead of hitting your brother when he took your toy, you came and told me that you’re upset at him”).

Another example of behavior affected by development is attention span. Parents and teachers are often frustrated by children who “can’t focus”. A 4 year-old that can’t sit straight for half an hour and finish tracing letters? Unacceptable, they’ll say. However, as a general rule, a child’s attention span is 2-5 minutes per their age. So a 4 year old should be able to stay focused on a task for 8 to 20 minutes. Keep in mind that attentions span has to be contextualized: it depends on the time of the day, whether or not the child enjoys the activity, the state of the child (tired, hungry etc.) But generally speaking, a child’s attention and concentration span is linked with his/her cognitive development.

As well as developmental concerns, it’s important to remember that no behavior occurs in isolation. Indeed, behavior occurs in a context and is impacted by other people, the physical environment, the task at hand, the time of day, health factors, etc.



So when dealing with children's behavior, ask yourselves:

- Is my child tired, hungry or sick?
- Can I avoid certain situations that will be frustrating, distracting, and difficult for my child?
- Are my expectations developmentally appropriate? Does my child have the cognitive, social, motor, communication skills required by the task I am asking?

Understanding a child's development can help us manage our expectations and avoid frustration. That way, we are less likely to lose our temper and punish children. On the contrary, we can be focused on the child's needs and abilities and on how to help them on their journey to a stable development.

So what can we do? It's recommended to inform ourselves about child development and especially developmental milestones. While every child is unique and development is never a straight line, it is necessary to keep in mind the major stages of development of children. These can help guide how we deal with them and can also inform us of any development delays.



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