# Impulse Control Techniques That Work for Children

By Amy Morin, LCSW https://www.verywellfamily.com/ways-to-teach-children-impulse-control-1095035

A lack of impulse control is at the root of many behavior problems. An impulsive 6-year-old may hit when he doesn't get his way and an impulsive 16-year-old may share inappropriate content on social media without thinking about the potential ramifications.

Without appropriate intervention, impulsive behaviors can get worse over time. But the good news is, you can teach your child impulse control techniques.

The more impulse control your child gains, the less likely he'll be to grab things out of your hand and he'll be more likely to think twice about accepting that dare from a friend.

## 1. Teach Your Child to Label Feelings

Kids who don't understand their emotions are more likely to be impulsive. A child who can't say, "I'm angry" may hit to show she's upset. Or a child who can't verbalize, "I feel sad," may throw herself to floor and scream.

Teach your child to recognize her feelings so she can tell you, rather than show you, how she feels.

Start by teaching your child to label emotions, like angry, sad, or scared. Then, talk about the difference between feelings and behavior.

Make sure she knows it's OK to feel angry, but it's not OK to hit. When she can talk about her emotions in a meaningful way, she'll be less likely to act them out.

## 2. Ask Your Child to Repeat the Directions

Sometimes, kids behave impulsively because they don’t listen to directions. Before you’ve finished your instructions, they sprinting into action without any idea what you said.

Teach your child to listen to directions by asking him to repeat your instructions before he takes action. Ask, "OK, what did I just tell you to do?"

When he can correctly repeat back what you said—whether it's clean his room or put his homework in his backpack—let him take action.

You may need to start your instructions by saying, "Before you move, I want you to explain the directions back to me."

## 3. Teach Problem-Solving Skills

Although brainstorming solutions sounds simple, problem-solving can be one of the most effective impulse control techniques.

Teach your child there is more than one way to solve a problem. And it's important to evaluate several potential solutions before springing into action.

So whether your child is trying to fix the chain on her bicycle or she can't figure out her math problem, encourage her to find five potential solutions before taking action.

After identifying possible solutions, help her evaluate which solution is most likely to be effective. With practice, she can get used to thinking before she acts.

## 4. Teach Anger Management Skills

Low frustration tolerance may cause impulsive outbursts. Teach your child how to manage his anger so he can deal with his emotions in a healthy way.

Show him specific strategies, like taking a few deep breaths or walking around the house to burn off some energy. You can even create a calm-down kit filled with tools that will help him relax.

Send him to time-out when necessary, but teach him he can place himself in time-out before he gets into trouble as well.

## 5. Establish Household Rules

Use an authoritative approach to parenting. Create clear rules and explain the reasons behind your rules.

Make your expectations known before your child enters new situations. When he understands he needs to use an indoor voice in the library and walking feet in the grocery store, he'll be less likely to misbehave.

Explain the negative consequences of breaking the rules ahead of time as well. Then, he'll be able to make better-informed decisions about his behavior.

## 6. Provide Structure and Be Consistent

Keep your discipline consistent. Offer reminders like, “You need to hold my hand in the parking lot when we get out of the car,” each and every time you go to the store.

With enough practice, your child will grow accustomed to your rules and the consequences for breaking them.

Whenever possible, keep your child's routine the same. Less chaos can also reduce impulsive behavior.

## 7. Practice Delayed Gratification

Kids need opportunities to practice delaying gratification. Make delayed gratification fun by creating a reward system.

A token economy system can be a fun way to do this. Reward your child's good behavior with tokens. Then, allow him to exchange tokens for bigger rewards, like a trip to the park.

Create small incentives that only require one or two tokens as well as big rewards, that require 20 tokens. Then, encourage him to save up his tokens for bigger ticket items, like going to the movies.

Saving up for bigger rewards will help him practice delaying gratification. That's an essential skill that will help him resist temptations that may lead to impulsive choices.

## 8. Be a Good Role Model

Your child will learn a lot about impulse control by watching you. Model appropriate ways to wait patiently and tolerate delayed gratification.

Point out impulse control techniques that you're using by saying things like, "I'd really like to buy that new laptop but I'm going to save my money for our vacation next summer."

Researchers at the University of Toronto found that self-talk plays a major role in helping kids manage their impulsive behavior. Role model healthy self-talk by saying things like, "This is a long line but we have to wait patiently for our turn."

Talking to yourself out loud will teach your child how to develop an internal dialogue that will help him manage his impulses.

## 9. Encourage Plenty of Physical Activity

Encourage your child to play outside and ensure that she gets plenty of exercise. A child who has had an opportunity to run, jump, and climb will be better equipped to be more self-disciplined.

Limit your child's screen time and encourage her to play outside whenever possible. Look for opportunities to play outdoor games together as well. Tossing a ball, playing hopscotch, or playing tag will get some energy out.

## 10. Play Impulse Control Games

Games such as Simon Says, Red Light Green Light, and Follow the Leader will give your child opportunities to practice impulse control. And your child will enjoy playing them.

With practice, your child can train his brain to have better self-control. But make sure you make practice fun. If you force him to sit still or pay attention to boring tasks too long, your efforts may backfire.

**A Word From Verywell**

It's normal for young children to be physically impulsive. Hitting, jumping off furniture, or running in the grocery store are common impulse control problems.

By the tween and teen years, most kids have gained control over their physical impulses but they may still be verbally impulsive. Your child may blurt things out without thinking about how her words may be perceived or she may say unkind things when she's angry.

With practice and consistent discipline, impulse control should improve over time. If, however, you have concerns about your child's ability to make healthy decisions, or your child seems to be struggling more than other children his age, talk to your child's pediatrician.

Underlying conditions, like ADHD, may interfere with your child's ability to manage impulsive behavior. So it's important to get your child assessed if she's struggling to develop self-control.