

# Triple P Tip Sheet

## Preschoolers

### Having Visitors

**P**reschool children often get excited about having friends over to visit. However, having someone else in their home can lead to problems such as being silly or noisy, or showing off. Your child may become disobedient, refuse to share, refuse to play with the visitor or constantly demand your attention. Many problems can be avoided with a little planning. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your preschooler to behave responsibly when you have visitors.

Having visitors should be a fun time for your child to mix with others. It provides many opportunities for children to practise social skills such as greeting visitors, being a good host, talking politely with adults, entertaining friends and thinking about things other children might like to do. These are complex skills that take time to learn. Do not expect your child to be perfect when you have visitors.

#### WHY DO CHILDREN MISBEHAVE WHEN THERE ARE VISITORS?

Many preschoolers find it hard to wait for attention when they want it, or just find it hard to share their parents' attention with others.

Problems can arise if children are left to amuse themselves without adult attention for too long. If children are ignored when they play well and only get attention when there is a problem, such as when one child starts crying, problems are likely to occur more often.

To avoid conflict, some parents overlook problem behaviour when they have visitors. If this is the case, children quickly learn that having visitors is a time when they can misbehave.

Difficult behaviour may also occur if visitors stay too long. Children may behave well for a few hours but then become tired and irritable if their usual routine is disrupted.

Sometimes parents avoid having visitors because their children misbehave. If children are not given opportunities to learn how to behave responsibly when there are visitors, it is likely that the problem behaviour will continue.

#### HOW TO HELP PREVENT PROBLEMS WHEN THERE ARE VISITORS

##### ▼ Maintain Your Child's Routine

Try to plan visits around your child's usual sleep and meal times so they are

not tired or hungry when visitors arrive.

##### ▼ Prepare Your Child for the Visit

Tell your child who is coming and the reason for the visit — *Aunty Janelle and Ashleigh are coming over this morning. They will go home after lunch. I would like you to play with Ashleigh while I talk to Aunty Janelle.* Answer any questions about the visit.

Explain to your child that you would like them to share some of their toys. Help your child choose some toys they are willing to share and that they would like to play with. Encourage your child to put away special toys that they do not want to share.

##### ▼ Explain the Rules

Decide on two or three simple rules for when visitors arrive and discuss them with your child. After a while your preschooler will be able to say what the rules are. Ideally, rules should tell your child what to do

rather than what not to do. Here are some examples:

- Play with the other children.
- Share your toys.
- If you need to speak to Mum or Dad, say *Excuse me* and wait until we have finished speaking.

Before the visitors arrive, ask your child to tell you the rules — *So, what rules do you have to remember while our visitors are here?* Praise them if they tell you. If your child does not say the rules, calmly remind them.

If there were problems last time you had visitors, briefly and calmly describe one rule your child forgot to follow — *Last time we had visitors, you forgot our rule about sharing the toys we put out for everyone to play with.* Tell your child what you would like them to do differently this time — *Today, let's see if you can remember to share the toys with our visitors.*

##### ▼ Talk About Rewards

At first you may like to reward your child for following the rules. Tell your child what they can earn if they follow the rules while the visitors are there. Suggested rewards include a special game with Mum or Dad after the visitors have gone.

##### ▼ Talk About Consequences

Decide ahead of time exactly how to deal with problem behaviour. Tell your child what will happen if the rules are broken. Explain how you will use logical consequences (see over).

##### ▼ Plan Some Activities

It may also be useful for you to think of some suitable things for your child to do. For example, you may choose some inside and outside games the children could play. You can also think of things your child might like to show their visitor.



## HOW TO MANAGE VISITS

### ▼ Let Your Child Practise Greeting Visitors

Encourage your child to greet visitors when they arrive — *Steve, would you like to come and say hello to Sally?* Do not force your child if they are shy or unwilling to say hello. A battle at the beginning of a visit will only start things off badly.

### ▼ Set the Children Up in an Activity

Before you start talking with other adults, check that the children have something to do. If necessary, spend a few minutes helping them to choose and get started on an activity.

### ▼ Encourage Desirable Behaviour

From time to time, stop what you are doing to talk with and praise the children for playing nicely — *You three are doing very well at taking turns. Well done.* Ask a few questions about their activity. Help them get started on a new activity if they are losing interest in what they are doing. Do this before problems occur. Say you will come back soon to see how they are going. Remember to check briefly on the children every 10 minutes or so. If possible, offer the children a snack or drink when they are busy playing well. This avoids the problem of accidentally rewarding children with food when they are misbehaving.

### ▼ If Misbehaviour Occurs, Tell Your Child What To Do

Use your usual approach to discipline. In your home, ask visiting children to follow your rules. If a problem occurs, get close to the child. Using a quiet voice, tell them what to stop doing and what to do instead — *Oliver, stop throwing the cars like that. Keep them on the floor.* Praise the child if they do as you ask.

### ▼ Back Up Your Instruction With a Logical Consequence

If the child does not do as you have asked or breaks the rule again, use a logical

consequence. Choose a consequence that fits the situation. Where possible, remove the activity or toy that is at the centre of the problem. Explain why you are doing it — *You are not keeping the cars on the floor as I asked, I'm putting them away for 5 minutes.* Five to 10 minutes of missing out on the activity is usually long enough. Ignore protests or complaints. Do not debate or argue the point with the child. Simply carry out the consequence.

### ▼ Return the Activity

Return the toy or activity once the time is up, to give the child the chance to practise behaving well. Praise the child as soon as they follow the rules. If the problem happens again within the next hour after giving the toy or activity back, repeat the logical consequence for a longer period, such as the rest of the day. You may need to use logical consequences for a number of visits before your child learns how to behave responsibly when you have visitors.

For more information on how to manage other problem behaviours that may occur when you have visitors, see the tip sheets *Sharing, Tantrums, Disobedience I, Disobedience II, Interrupting, and Fighting and Aggression* in this series.

### ▼ Review the Visit

When the visitors have gone, tell your child what you liked about their behaviour during the visit — *Leon, you*

*were very good at sharing while you played with your cousins today.* If your child followed the rules, praise them and give them the reward you agreed on before the visit. If problems occurred, do not give the reward. Briefly and calmly describe one rule your child forgot to follow — *You forgot to say 'Excuse me' when you wanted to talk to me.* Set a goal for the next visit — *Next time they visit let's see if you can remember to say 'Excuse me' and then wait until I have finished talking.* Spend some quality time with your child.

## KEY STEPS

- Try not to disrupt your child's usual sleeping and eating routines.
- Remind your child of the rules for when visitors arrive.
- Talk about rewards and consequences.
- Make sure the children have interesting things to do during the visit.
- Encourage your child to greet visitors.
- Praise and reward the children for following the rules.
- Use your usual approach to discipline.
- Act as soon as a problem occurs.
- Tell the child what to do.
- Back up your instruction with a logical consequence.
- Return the activity after the set time.
- Review the visit with your child.

As your child learns to behave responsibly when you have visitors, you will not need to remind them of the rules, rewards and consequences each time you have visitors. Even though you will discuss the rules less often, they will still apply. Use consequences consistently if the rules are broken. Gradually make rewards less predictable by giving them every now and then. Continue to praise your child for behaving well when you have visitors.

**FOR FURTHER HELP** See the Positive Parenting booklet for more information on positive parenting strategies. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet.

Triple P is a parenting program developed by Professor Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues in the Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland with funding support from Queensland Health, Victorian Department of Human Services, Health Department of Western Australia, and National Health and Medical Research Council.

Written by Karen M.T. Turner, Matthew R. Sanders, Carol Markie-Dadds  
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