

Five-step plan to achieving your goals (steps 3–5)

Step 3 Put into action plans for managing misbehaviour

It is important to act *immediately and consistently* when misbehaviour occurs. There are several strategies you can use when managing your child's problem eating and mealtime behaviours:

A. Allow natural consequences to take effect

Q: What is a natural consequence?

A: A natural consequence is what happens without the input of another person. The consequence is contained in the behaviour itself.

The fussy eater, having decided against the prepared food, has chosen to go without food until the next meal. Refusing the meal contains the natural consequence of becoming hungry, and becoming hungry will make the next meal more appetising. Healthy children will not starve themselves, nor will a short period of hunger do them any harm.

Parents should encourage natural consequences wherever possible. However, if the behaviour is too dangerous (eg. allowing your child to eat food while moving around the house may present a choking hazard) or too pleasant (eg. the child helping themselves to biscuits) to allow the natural consequence to occur, use one of the following strategies:

B. Use planned ignoring

Use planned ignoring for minor problem behaviours, such as a silly voice or whining. Planned ignoring means withholding attention from your child until the problem behaviour stops. Be aware that the problem behaviour can, and probably will, get worse before it gets better. Praise your child when he or she is eating and behaving well again.

C. Use clear, calm instructions

If misbehaviour occurs, tell your child what to do, using clear, calm instructions. For example:

- 'Kate, stop using your outside voice at the dinner table. Use your quiet voice, please'
- 'Jamie, stop using your hands. Please use your knife and fork for eating'

For misbehaviour that cannot be ignored, tell your child what to *stop* doing, then tell them what you want them to *do* instead. Praise your child for doing what you have instructed. If your child chooses not to cooperate, back-up your instruction immediately, using logical consequences (for noncompliance or rule-breaking), quiet time (for noncompliance) or time out (for serious misbehaviour such as hitting).

D. Back up your instructions with... logical consequences, quiet time, time out

Q: What is an example of a mealtime misbehaviour that would be appropriate for quiet time or time out?

A: Fighting with sibling/s at the table, throwing food, refusal to come to the table, leaving the table before the meal is finished, climbing on the chair/table.

Logical consequences

Q: What is a logical consequence?

A: Unlike a natural consequence where 'the world does the teaching', logical consequences are decided and put into action by the parent or caregiver. Learning is more likely to occur if the consequence is 'logically' related to your child's misbehaviour.

Keys to success using logical consequences

- *Remove the activity* — Logical consequences work best if related to the problem. For example, a child is unlikely to learn to stop blowing bubbles in their drink if the outcome is that he or she cannot have a friend to play the following day. A better consequence in this case might be removal of the drink for the remainder of the meal. Do not debate the point with your child, remove the drink, explain why you are removing it and specify when it will be returned.
- *Keep it brief* — 5–30 minutes. It is important to give children an opportunity to show they have learnt from the consequences of their behaviour as soon as possible.
- *Return the activity* — Stick to your word and keep to the agreement. When the specified time has lapsed, return the activity to give your child an opportunity to behave correctly.

Quiet time or time out

Quiet time and time out are effective strategies for managing problem behaviour. The objective is to remove attention from the child's misbehaviour. Note that quiet time and time out are *not* appropriate strategies for food refusal. Instead use planned ignoring.

Quiet time

Quiet time occurs in the room that the misbehaviour took place. Instruct your child that he or she must stay quiet in quiet time for two minutes. When quiet time is over, your child is free to continue what he or she was doing, yet hopefully this time, in a less disruptive manner. Praise your child as soon as he or she starts behaving well again. If your child does not stay quiet in quiet time (allow 20 seconds), put them in time out.

Time out

Time out occurs in another room. The time out room should be unexciting, yet safe, with good ventilation and lighting. Instruct your child that he or she has not been quiet in quiet time and that he or she must now go to time out. Short periods in time-out are more successful than longer ones. One minute of quiet for two year olds, two minutes for three to five year olds, and a maximum of five minutes for children aged five to ten years.

Timing does not start until your child is *quiet*. If your child objects by screaming or calling out, do not give any attention. When time out is over, do not talk about the event. Instead, redirect your child to an acceptable activity and give praise as soon as your child starts behaving well. If misbehaviour occurs again, restart the time out process.

Step 4 Establish mealtime routine

Establish a mealtime routine and prepare your child ahead of time. We suggest that children need five to six small, frequent meals per day. You decide on when mealtimes will be, and if your child decides that he or she will not eat the food that is offered, then you can respond with 'the next mealtime will be...' (for example, breakfast tomorrow)'.

Step 5 Prepare yourself and your child

The final step to achieving your goal is to have everything ready. Before you start your new mealtime routine, develop a plan of action. That is decide on your rewards and consequences for your child's behaviour. Involve your child by holding a family meeting to discuss the rewards and consequences. Let your child know what will happen if he or she is unable to follow your instructions and exactly what is expected of them.