

# Active Ignoring

**Help for caregivers to identify when to not pay attention to your child's behavior.**

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## What Is Active Ignoring?

Sometimes kids do things to get attention, to get out of doing things they don't like, or even just to get their caregivers upset. "Active ignoring" means purposely not paying attention to these kinds of behaviors in order to make them go away. Active ignoring can quickly stop many types of problem behaviors. It does not cause any emotional harm to your child, and it also can help caregivers feel less angry and upset with their children. It is easy to learn, and with a little practice, it becomes easy to use.

### Use active ignoring for:

- Fussiness
- Complaining
- Pouting
- Grumpiness
- Talking back
- Making noises
- Mild arguing
- Whining
- Asking the same question over & over
- Repeating things
- Doing things to get your attention

### Don't use active ignoring for:

- Hitting, slapping, or pinching
- Throwing or breaking things
- Being mean to animals or people
- Disobeying an instruction
- Cursing or swearing
- Doing dangerous things
- Threatening others
- Getting a bad grade
- Forgetting to do chores or homework
- Being afraid or shy
- Wanting to be alone

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## Getting Ready

Pick a behavior you'd like to get rid of. Check the lists above to make sure it is the right kind of behavior for active ignoring.



**From now on, I will ignore my child when:**

Pick some behaviors you'd like to see instead of the problem behavior. These could be things like asking politely, getting along with a sibling, sitting still at the dinner table, or accepting a decision.



**From now on, I will try to pay attention and use praise, when my child:**

Think of ways to praise your child for demonstrating the behaviors you want to see. There are a lot of things you can do or say to praise your child.



**Here is an example of something I could say or do to let my child know I like what they are doing:**

Pick a time to tell your child and family about active ignoring. Try to choose a time when things are going well and everybody is calm. Make sure your child understands that you still care about them, but that some behaviors will get your attention and others simply will not. Explain that this will be a new rule for living in your family. It is not something the child can argue about, and it is meant to help everyone feel better and have fun when you are together.



**Here is when I plan to explain active ignoring to my family:**

## What to Do

When the problem behavior happens:

- 1** **Ignore it.** Look the other way or find some other way not to pay attention—such as reading the newspaper. You might find it helpful just to quietly leave the room.

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- 2** **Don't explain.** Don't argue, scold, or even talk with your child while they are misbehaving. You already explained active ignoring before. Now is the time to put it into practice.

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- 3** **Try not to look upset.** Instead, try to keep busy with something like TV, a book, or cooking to help hide your reaction.

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- 4** **Catch your child being good.** This is the “active” part of active ignoring. As soon as the bad behavior stops, pay attention right away. Show that you are interested by looking at your child, talking, and praising. If the problem behavior starts again, go back to ignoring.

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- 5** **Stick with it.** It's important to be consistent, even if things get worse at first. When your child can't get your attention, they might not give up right away, but instead might try even harder. This is normal, and it is a sign that active ignoring is working correctly. It means your child understands what you're doing and that it's starting to have an effect. Now is the time to stand your ground.

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## Help! Active Ignoring Isn't Working!

Problem:	Try This:
<b>Things are getting worse instead of better.</b>	Make sure you're ignoring the behavior the whole time. If you ignore a behavior for a little while but eventually give in or get angry, you've accidentally taught your child that the only way to get your attention is to behave even worse than before. So, once you decide to ignore a behavior, stick with it.
<b>Active ignoring is frustrating!</b>	Sometimes it can be very difficult to keep your cool when your child is whining, pouting, or engaging in other unpleasant behaviors. Try to stay focused on the long term goal. Remember that the more you dislike what your child is doing, the more it's worth getting rid of the behavior. As long as your child is safe, it might be helpful to leave the room.
<b>My child screams and cries.</b>	Even though it's difficult, you can ignore this behavior, too. Just make sure your child isn't harming himself or others.
<b>My child is becoming aggressive.</b>	If your child hits, slaps, throws things, or is going to hurt him- or herself or someone else, it may be time to try other tools, such as "time out." If you don't use "time out"—or even if you just want to double-check that you're using it in the most effective way—be sure to ask for help.
<b>Now that I'm using active ignoring, my child is always angry with me.</b>	Make sure you are only ignoring the unwanted behavior. If your child is angry, it may be because you've started ignoring him or her all the time, not just when they misbehave. Remember to give your child lots of praise and attention when they are good. Ignore only the problem behaviors, not the whole child!
<b>Other people in my home aren't helping me.</b>	Talk to your family about this at a time when things are calm. Explain that everyone has to work together and follow the same rules or the problem behaviors won't improve. In fact, they might even get worse.