

# Lighthearted, Subversive, and Really Cool Ways to Improve Your Children's Behavior at Home and Have Fun, I



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In my experience, the reason kids don't do what grownups ask them to do is almost never that kids don't know what that is. What's more, many power struggles at home are about issues that do not pass the twenty-year test (in twenty years, who will know the difference?). When minor rules are broken, a humorous reminder may be all your child needs and may also be more effective than a heavy-handed penalty that creates bad feeling.

This is a lighthearted approach to behavior management. Once you have tried out a few of the wacky interventions below, you will undoubtedly think of more. Email me about them, please! There is plenty of room here for creativity, and we are all in this child-rearing business together.

## Deputies

If yelling, swearing, obscenities, and interrupting others when they are speaking are problems, you, Officer Parent, may find it helpful to turn the principal offender into a (police) deputy. Ideally, deputies should be able to wear a badge (silver star) and should have a pad of tickets similar to those given out for traffic violations. Whenever a deputy sees someone committing the offense in question, he is empowered to issue a ticket. A given family with several children might conceivably have several deputies, and of course Headquarters (you) would need to convene a conference to check in with the deputies from time to time regarding the status of offenders.

## Dueling Pistols

You need two water pistols, not too large and not too small and not Super Soakers. When conflict between family members seems about to escalate out of control, leap into the fray and say, "There's only one way to solve this problem. Choose your weapon!" Hand out water pistols, direct the combatants to the backyard, and declare the wettest person the loser.

## Just Chill

If obscenities and swearing are a problem in your family, reach for the ice cubes. Explain at a family meeting that anyone caught using bad language will be required from now on to put an ice cube in her mouth and hold it there, without crunching, until the ice has melted. Once you have enforced this rule a couple of times you may be able to ask family members whether or not they need to “just chill.” You may get results without leaving your chair.

## Masking Tape

You can explain to children that people sometimes joke about wanting to tape shut the mouths of people who habitually make offensive remarks and that while we can't actually apply the tape, we can mention it. To facilitate this process, buy several rolls of masking tape and plant them around the house. Then invite anyone who feels hurt or offended by someone else's words to pick up a roll and wave it. If no roll of masking tape is handy, the victim can simply say, “I sure could use a roll of masking tape right now.” Masking tape comes in especially handy when people have a tendency to mind each other's business.

## Red Handed

Impulsive younger children often push, punch, or grab other people in unwelcome ways. To solve this problem, go to the supermarket and buy a pair of the cumbersome rubber gloves that people sometimes wear when they wash dishes. At a family meeting, indicate which kinds of physical contact you want to eliminate, and prescribe as a consequence ten or twenty minutes spent wearing the rubber gloves without talcum powder (hands become unpleasantly sweaty without talcum powder). The wearer of the gloves is bound to feel silly in short order-- and to want free his or her hands. It is too bad that the gloves don't come in red, but I think the manufacturer didn't have this particular use in mind.

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