

When Parents Should Be Concerned About Their Child's Behavior

This grid is not meant to be comprehensive but presents some of the most common behaviors of concern in young children. It is designed to assist parents in understanding some of the markers for normal behavior and when to be concerned. Of course, any time you are concerned about your child for a period of time, you should contact a medical or other professional.

Age	Normal Behavior	Behavior of Concern	List of Suggestions for Parent Action
Infancy Birth to 1 year	Cries in response to frustration, hunger, or fatigue	Excessive crying that continues even when needs are met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Babies should not be disciplined; they are too little to know right from wrong Document and describe the behavior of concern If you are still concerned, call your pediatrician or a medical hotline Document all interactions with medical or help personnel
	Has regular sleep habits; sleeps soundly	Not sleeping; restless sleeper	
	Recognizes familiar faces; may be scared by strangers	Shows random affection with familiar faces; may show irrational fear without cause	
	Tracks movement with eyes by 2 to 3 months	Does not track movement with eyes by 2 to 3 months	
	Snuggles and relaxes when held	Muscles become rigid when held; doesn't want to be held	
Smiles responsively by 2 to 3 months	Seldom smiles		

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Toddler 1 to 3 years	Constant exploration, walking, running, and climbing	Fearful of exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be consistent and set time limits for behavioral interventions • Keep track of frequency and intensity of behaviors to see if there is a pattern • If you are still concerned, call your pediatrician or a medical hotline • Document all interactions with medical or help personnel
	Can be left with minimal anxiety	Severe separation anxiety	
	Interested in toilet training by 18 months to 2 years, but may not be successful	Attempts to toilet train are difficult and creates excessive anxiety and behaviors	
	Uses the word “no”	Consistently screams instead of using language	
	Responds with curiosity to stimulus; comfortable with touch and noise	Easily overwhelmed by stimulus; overreacts to touch or noise	
	May hit and bite, but can be redirected and stopped	Severe temper tantrums that cannot be redirected or stopped	

Resources:

healthychildren.org

cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones

helpmegrowmn.org

Age	Normal Behavior	Behavior of Concern	List of Suggestions for Parent Action
Early Childhood 3 to 5 years	More engaged in positive interaction with peers	Has difficulty playing or taking turns with peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce appropriate behavior by affirming the behavior you want • Develop a way to rewarding appropriate behavior and consistently implement it for several weeks to see if the behavior of concern is changing • Reassure your child that you love him or her despite the challenging behaviors • Inform or remind child of a schedule and what is going to happen next • Keep track of frequency and intensity of behaviors to see if there is a pattern • Call your school district to ask for the telephone number of the early childhood coordinator; ask this person to give you suggestions for responding to the behaviors of concern • Call your pediatrician to schedule an appointment
	Imaginary companions	Seems unusually cruel to animals	
	Likes one-on-one attention from caregivers, but can share attention as well	Responds aggressively to shared attention	
	Curious; asks “why” questions	Belligerent behavior in response to change in schedule or unexpected or unknown situation	
	Has fears; shows off and uses bad language to get attention	Excessive fears; uses bad language to get control	
	Aggressive behavior to family members or peers that can be redirected	Intentionally harmful behavior to self or others	
	Is actively exploring environment, but can take direction in safety	Excessively hyperactive; does not respond to or remember safety instructions Exhibits dangerous behavior; starts fires	

Related Material:

Download three separate PACER companion handouts:

Parent Documentation: Behavior Concerns for Infants - [PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c106b.pdf](https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c106b.pdf)

Parent Documentation: Behavior Concerns for Toddlers - [PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c106c.pdf](https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c106c.pdf)

Parent Documentation: Behavior Concerns for Early Childhood - [PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c106d.pdf](https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c106d.pdf)

