



Active Ignoring

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 parents upset. "Active ignoring" means purposely not paying attention to these kinds of behaviours in order to make them go away. Active ignoring can quickly stop many types of problem behaviours as children learn that they are ignored following the behaviour. Active ignoring is the consequence of problem behaviour. It does not cause any emotional harm to your child, and it also can help parents 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 and 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
- Swearing
- Doing dangerous things
- Threatening others
- Getting a bad grade
- Forgetting to do chores or homework
- Being afraid or shy
- Wanting to be alone
- Situations where there is a risk of seizure or other danger



Getting Ready



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

From now on, I will ignore my child when:



Pick some behaviours you'd like to see instead of the problem behaviour. 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 behaviours 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 he or she is doing:



Pick a time to tell your child and family about active ignoring. Try to choose a time when everything is going well and everybody is calm. Make sure your child understands that you still care about him or her, but that some behaviours 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 more fun when you are together.

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

What to Do

When the problem behaviour happens:



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



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



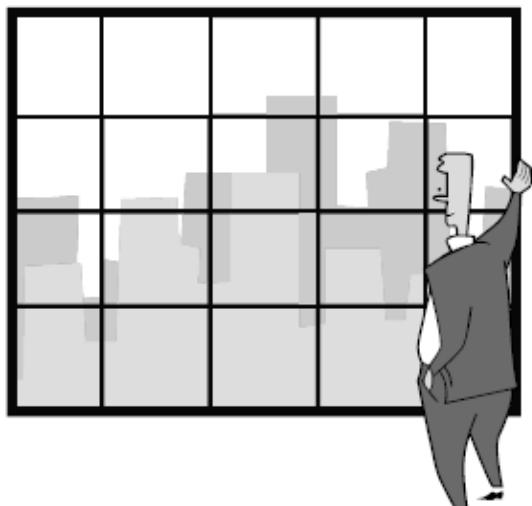
Try not to look upset. Instead, try to keep busy with something like TV, a book, or cooking to help hide your reaction.



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



Stick with it. It's important to be consistent, even if things get worse at first. When your child can't get your attention, he or she 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.



Help! Active Ignoring Isn't Working!

PROBLEM: Things are getting worse instead of better.

TRY THIS: Make sure you're ignoring the behaviour the whole time. If you ignore a behaviour 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 behaviour, stick with it.

PROBLEM: Active ignoring is frustrating!

TRY THIS: Sometimes it can be very difficult to keep your cool when your child is whining, pouting, or engaging in other unpleasant behaviours. 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 behaviour. As long as you're sure your child is safe, it might be helpful to leave the room.

PROBLEM: My child screams and cries.

TRY THIS: Even though it's difficult, you can ignore this behaviour, too. Just make sure your child isn't harming himself/herself or others.

PROBLEM: My child is becoming aggressive.

TRY THIS: 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.

PROBLEM: Now that I'm using active ignoring, my child is always angry with me.

TRY THIS: Make sure that you are only ignoring the unwanted behaviour. If your child is angry, it may be because you've started ignoring him or her all the time, not just when he or she misbehaves. Remember to give your child lots of praise and attention when he or she is good. Ignore only the problem behaviours, not the whole child!

PROBLEM: Other people in my household aren't helping me.

TRY THIS: 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 behaviours won't improve. In fact, they might even get worse.

