

Language & Learning

Positive Parenting

Redirecting Behavior In Positive Directions

Babies and young children often do not misbehave deliberately. They may be experimenting with a behavior or with your reaction to it. If your reaction is "No, stop it!" then the behavior will probably be repeated. It got your attention, and the child didn't know what else to do. If your reaction is, "No throwing blocks. Throw Nerf balls," and you play Nerf balls for a little while, then Nerf ball throwing may become a favorite pastime. The baby just learning to use a spoon may like to throw food with it. Maybe it would be fun to feed Mommy instead, or feed a toy animal with an empty bowl, taking turns to practice self-feeding. "Feed Baby. Feed Mommy. Feed Bear. No floor."

A baby banging a spoon on a pot or high chair tray might trade for a kitchen tool with a sponge top. "Too loud. This sounds nice." Remember that babies who are deaf or hard of hearing may make noises that are too loud for us, but are just right for them. We need to redirect them to acceptable sounds, or help them use their hearing aids more efficiently. Babies who are deaf may vocalize too loudly as well. You can model calm vocalizations while playing with toys.

By using redirection, you are showing your baby what to do. You replace an unwanted behavior with one that is acceptable. It is tempting for us to say "No!" when we are alarmed or want to stop a certain behavior. But toddlers can sometimes see "No!" as a challenge to get around. Redirection is a good alternative to no. It lets you show your baby what you want him to do.