

TERRIBLE TWO'S REVISITED

Hey Deb,

Why is it that my four-year-old often acts like a two-year-old? He's bull-headed, belligerent and will often ignore me or stomp away when I ask him to do something or if I need to discipline him.

Signed A Mom Tired of the Terrible Twos in a Four-year-old

Dear Mom Tired of the Terrible Twos,

If two-year-olds weren't so darned cute, we wouldn't have so many bull-headed four-year-olds walking around. Yes, we let those Cutie Patootie twosies get away with a pout, a push, even a swear word or two. I've observed many a parent, grandparent and other adults laughing at a toddler's inappropriate comments or even egging them on to yank dad's hair, grab grandma glasses, or say the word, "Truck" when they know full well the child's T's come out sounding like F's. They're just so darned adorable when they stamp their little Reeboks and cry, "No!" Then what happens? They turn four and suddenly it's not cute anymore. It's annoying, disrespectful and downright embarrassing. And the child is confused. Suddenly, he's getting frowns and disapproving stares for behavior that used to bring grins, giggles and dad proudly replying, "He's a chip off the old block!" The rules have changed and nobody told the four-year-old.

According to extensive research conducted at the Slightly Off Institute of Whining (based on the results of raising three 2-year-olds and a husband), my mommy radar tells me that you're two years behind in tough love tactics, mom. It's time to take the bull-headed little bull by the horns.

First, be firm. Always give direct, specific messages: "It's not okay to ignore mommy when she's talking to you. It's not okay to walk away when mom asks you to do something."

Give a warning the first time he disobeys, a consequence the second.

Let me repeat that. A warning, the first time, a consequence the SECOND!

THE SECOND TIME, YOU FOLLOW THROUGH! Not the third time when you say, "One more time and I mean it!" Not the fourth time when you say, "If you keep this up, you'll be sorry!" Not the fifth time when you say, "If you do that again, I'll take that toy away! I'm not kidding!"

THE SECOND TIME!

SLIGHTLY OFF

by Deb DiSandro

And while you're disciplining, do me a big, big favor. Please, please, don't state your request and then follow it up with an "okay." As in, "Stop jumping on the bed, OKAY?"

I hate that. Okay? It undermines your credibility. Okay? It's wimpy when a parent does it and I won't stand for it, OKAY??!!

Here's the best part. Your child will absolutely love these new rules, hugging and kissing you with gratitude and appreciation all day long. (Ha! Just a little parenting humor there.) Of course, your kid will at first act even worse; he'll shout, pout, spout and let it all hang out. Hang tough, mom. It will get better and if you stick to it, you and your kid may be lucky enough to bypass the return of the terrible two's at age fourteen. Ha! I'm just kidding! No parent gets to bypass that! (I crack myself up.)

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