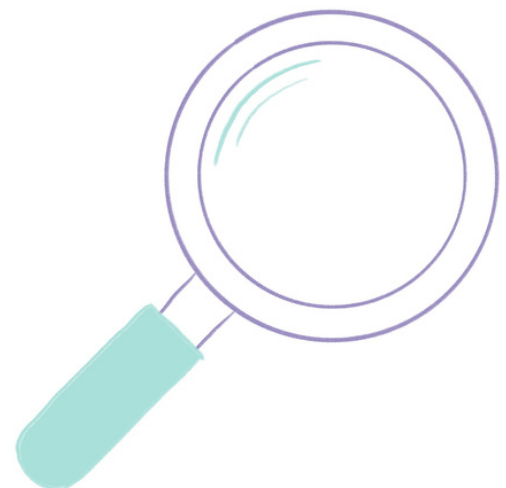


## Disobedience, Tantrums and Aggressive Behaviour

It is very common and normal for disobedience, tantrums, and aggressive behavior to start or get worse after a hospital admission. This is nothing to worry about in the first few weeks. However, these changes may be due to the trauma and can have negative effects on social relationships (parent-child; siblings; friends), family life or the child's development over time. Parents may feel guilty about the PICU admission or sad for their child and, as a result, may become more lenient in their parenting or respond to unacceptable behaviours in a different way to usual. However, it is important that parents manage behavioural problems by using consistent and clear responses. Young children need their parents to help manage their feelings and benefit from having predictable daily routines and support in behaving properly. This helps children to feel safe and secure and makes parenting easier. This tip sheet gives you some suggestions on what you can do to help your child.

### Be mindful of your response

- While you may be feeling frustrated or distressed at your child's behaviour, it is most helpful if you respond to it in a calm manner. You might need a few minutes to yourself to think through your response, or to take a few deep breaths before reacting.
- Remember that sometimes when children appear to be misbehaving (e.g. frustrated, whiney, demanding, aggressive, out of control), they are actually communicating that they are overwhelmed and they need you. This can be a sign that they are frightened, confused, or angry. Looking at their behaviour in this way can help you get to the bottom of the problem rather than focusing solely on the "symptoms" of the problem. Your child really needs you to be calm, to take charge, help them to understand their feelings and to offer comfort. Usual routines and parenting strategies are familiar and calming for your child.



## Increase positive, happy interactions

- Spend quality time with your child.
- Praise and reward good behaviour.
- Have clear expectations for appropriate behaviour (e.g. speak kindly, keep your hands and feet to yourself).
- Consider introducing a reward system to increase positive behaviours.



## Use your parenting tools to manage inappropriate behaviour in a kind but firm, clear and calm way

- Give your child clear and specific instructions and allow time for them to comply.
- Look out for early signs and try to react before the tantrum or the aggressive behaviour starts (e.g. distract with another activity, help your child with what is frustrating them).
- Use appropriate consequences for unacceptable behaviour (don't feel guilty!)
- Respond immediately and consistently.
- Use a sensible consequence (e.g. fighting over a toy - remove toy for 5 minutes). Return once your child is behaving (i.e. reward positive behaviour).
- Respond to aggressive acts immediately and with gentle firmness (e.g. unclamp the child's hand), and let the child know it is not ok (e.g., "It is not ok to hit your sister; you need to keep your hands to yourself"). If they continue, remove your child from the situation for a brief time.
- Actions speak louder than words. Talking to your child about problem behaviour is often less effective than using behavioural consequences, particularly with very young children.
- Remove your child from the situation and give them something else to do.
- Help your child express anger in other ways.

