

Breaking the habit, not the child

Habits are created in all of us, no matter the age. Some of these habits are good and some need to be worked on. Habits start being created in very young children. The Bible tells us:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

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You might have realised how frustrating it is to have a toddler with a habit that you abhor. It is very difficult not to react badly, so how do we deal with these habits without breaking our children?

What is a habit and what causes it?

A habit is a pattern of behaviour that develops over time and happens often, sometimes without thinking. Habits normally form when we need a coping mechanism and they make us feel good, which is why they are so difficult to break.

We need to remember that certain habits are normal for a developing child and while they shouldn't be encouraged they can be expected.

By Kerry Mc Arthur, ECD Co-ordinator

Footprints into ECD

A habit may form under different stress conditions:

- When they are tired or bored
- When they are worried or stressed
- At times of big change
- When parents are absent
- When they encounter new situations



Just as coping mechanisms and behaviour are learned from other family members, so can habits also be.

As your child feels safer and more secure they will have less need for their comforting habit. Consistent family routines can help children feel more secure, along with a warm, loving environment.

Most children will grow out of a habit without any intervention. If you ignore it and don't create a scene, it often goes away by itself.

However, if a habit gets in the way of everyday activities, or causes harm, there are things you can do to help children stop the habit.

With all habits it is important to remember the saying "It takes 21 days to break a habit". Don't, after a few days of trying something, give up. Stick to a game plan: just when you think it isn't working you will have a break through.

Ephesians 5:1 says "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."

Children are copiers: they need adults around them who model the good habits that we want them to adopt. It is important that we remember that the habit that a child, whether your own or in your classroom, exhibits often comes from a learned or modelled behaviour.

Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Remember to continuously refer to God's Word when deciding what is acceptable and what isn't. Allow God to guide you in guiding your children.

