

differently than if you see it as behaviour that is not about you. Maybe the child is having difficulty emotionally or does not have well-developed coping strategies to conquer the anxiety he/she has about being away from home or most likely, he/she just made a mistake. There are dozens of possible reasons why the behaviour is occurring - the least likely is that it was done intentionally. But if you think the behaviour was intended to push your buttons, you are more likely to respond with negative emotions, rather than responding in a calm way, paying attention to how you can discourage such behaviour in future or how you can support your child through difficult tasks. It will also be harder to praise the behaviour you do want to see if you are angry.

- **What to do** - Take the word 'manipulative' with regard to your children, out of your vocabulary. There is nothing positive that will come from thinking of your children as the masterminds and yourself as the victim. When your children are acting out, try to remember that they have not developed adult self-control. Throwing a tantrum is usually less calculated than it is desperate. You want to muster as much insight as you can into how the behaviour may have developed and what function the behaviour serves for the child. This will be a way to maintain a cool head and then plan how to respond in an effective way. <https://childmind.org/article/three-common-parenting-traps/>



Keep safe and should you require counselling, you are welcome to contact Social Work Services at 079 880 5966 or 012 393 5472 or liaise with any of the SAPS's Family and Relationship Desk members:

- Lt Col C Kleingeld at 012 393 5192 and kleingeldc@saps.gov.za
- Capt V Nkosi at 012 393 5244 and NkosiViolet@saps.gov.za
- Capt LK Mahlase at 012 393 5187 and MahlaseL2@saps.gov.za.

**ON A JOURNEY TO A SAFER
SOUTH AFRICA**

**THREE COMMON
PARENTING TRAPS**
AND TIPS TO START AVOIDING THEM



Despite generations of knowledge and experience being passed down, it seems like it always comes down to a situation where it is after bedtime, you are sleep-deprived and running on leftover macaroni and cheese and you will do just about anything to get your child through the bath. This is how any well-meaning parent can fall into certain parenting 'traps'. Without some kind of course correction, these can become patterns that are harder and harder to break - like quicksand that suck you in bit by bit, until you are stuck. However, armed with some good information, a parent will be less likely to be tempted by the initial allure of the trap and more likely to recognise it when it is happening.

Here are some of the most common parenting traps, adapted from the Positive Parenting Programme's list of common parenting mistakes:

1. The 'Escalation' trap - The escalation trap can happen in two different ways. The first is when the child becomes loud. Perhaps your child wants something - for example a chocolate or to play a video game. You tell him, "No, it is too close to dinner," or "You have already used up your screen time for today." The child responds with whining, begging or even a tantrum and he is going on until you eventually give in, thinking that you will do anything to stop the whining.

What your child has learned is that **the way he/she gets the chocolate or the game time, is by becoming louder, throwing a bigger tantrum and whining or crying more.** This learning



increases the chances that next time he/she encounters a 'no' and becomes frustrated, he/she will be very likely to try that same strategy again.

The escalation trap also works in the other direction. Sometimes it is a child teaching a parent that he/she will only respond after the parent becomes loud. The classic example is when you say, "Okay children, it is time to wash your hands for dinner." They are watching TV and do nothing. So a few minutes later you come back and you say, a little louder, "I said it is time for dinner!" Maybe they say, "Okay in a minute," but a few minutes later they are still not at the dinner table. The third time you are visibly angry and you order them to wash up, probably by shouting, and that is when they finally listen. They know that they do not really have to move until you raise your voice.

The problem here is that you are learning that the only way to get them to do what you want them to do, is to shout and they are learning that the first time you say something, it does not really count. Mom or dad **does not really mean it unless they are shouting.**

- **What to do** - Avoiding escalation/becoming loud, requires sticking to your guns and remaining calm while doing so. If you said no to a child's request, your goal is to ignore behaviour directed at getting you to change your mind. It is not easy, but it is an investment in reducing that behaviour in the future. When the child stops acting out and goes back to playing quietly or speaking in a calm tone of voice, be ready with positive reinforcement. "I like the way you calmed down," or "It is so nice when you speak to me this way."

The same is true if you are making a request and your child is ignoring you. You can repeat your request once, without escalating/becoming loud and let him/her know that there will be a consequence if you do not get results. "I said it is time for dinner; if you do not come wash your hands, you are going to lose 10 minutes of screen time after dinner." And when he/she does comply, be ready with praise even if you had to ask twice.

2. The 'It is just a phase' trap - Another trap that parents fall into, is when you notice behaviour that is problematic which you hope will go away on its own. You do not respond, because you think: "It is just a phase," minimizing the behaviour so that you will not have to address it.

For instance, maybe your toddler is being aggressive toward friends. You think: "Surely this is just some kind of passing developmental thing - this is what children do." It very well may be that your child will eventually stop engaging in problematic behaviour - hitting, pushing or grabbing. However, the way you and others respond to it may be the key to how quickly it goes away. If children test the limits of those around them and no one intervenes, they learn that this kind of behaviour is acceptable or worse - that it gets them attention (even if it is negative). This kind of learning is harder to undo as children grow older.

- **What to do** - All toddlers are going to hit, bite and/or take toys away - they are exploring this as new behaviour. But it is important that you respond in a way that let them know what is off limits - think of the behaviour as an experiment by the child and you are providing the result to the toddler's experiment. Setting limits, coupled with praise as often as possible when the child does not engage in the problematic behaviour, can help you manage this behaviour as it happens.

3. The 'You do this on purpose' trap - This is interpreting a child's behaviour as something done intentionally to annoy you. For instance, you tell your child it is time to stop playing and be ready to leave to go to Grandmother's house. When you come back 10 minutes later, he/she is still playing. You hear yourself say: "I told you to get ready to go to Grandmother's house and you know that this is important to me and yet you did not do it - you are doing this on purpose to annoy me!"

The danger here is that if you think a child is doing something intentionally to hurt you, you are going to respond a lot