

Limit Setting and Discipline

As infants' motor skills advance and mobility increases, parents are faced with the need to set safe limits to protect the child and establish a positive and supportive parent–child relationship (see [Safety Promotion and Injury Prevention](#) later in this chapter).

Although there are numerous disciplinary techniques, some are more appropriate for this age than others. An effective approach used in disciplining a child is the use of time-out. The basic principles are the same as those discussed in [Chapter 14](#) except that the place for time-out needs to be commensurate with the child's abilities. For example, a play yard is better for most infants than a chair. Although parents may be concerned about instituting discipline during infancy, it is important to stress that the earlier effective disciplinary methods are used, the easier it is to continue these approaches.

Parents must recognize the infant's cognitive and behavioral limitations; adequate protection from hazards must be implemented because infants and toddlers do not understand a cause-and-effect relationship between dangerous objects and physical harm. Additionally, parents may need reassurance that their infant's behavior is exploratory in nature, not oppositional (at this age) and primarily centered on the infant's basic needs of warmth, love, food, security, and comfort. Parents may verbalize that comforting the infant too much or meeting his or her needs will result in a spoiled child; there is no substantial evidence that meeting the infant's basic needs will result in such behaviors later in life. Children innately test limits and explore during the exploratory phase of growth; instead of discouraging exploration, parents should provide safe alternatives, put dangerous household items away, and give children consistent discipline and nurturing.

Effective teaching for injury prevention optimally begins in infancy by helping parents understand the nature of their child's normal development. It must be reiterated continually that infants cry because a need is not being met, not to intentionally irritate an adult. A fussy or irritable infant is a potential victim of shaken baby syndrome (or other bodily harm) because adults and caretakers may not understand the nature of the infant's crying.

Thumb Sucking and Use of a Pacifier