

Inappropriate Behavior

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Kids and inappropriate, perhaps even gross, behavior can go hand-in-hand. Sure, they can be on their best behavior much of the time, but dollars to donuts there will be many occasions when you wish that the little darlings belonged to someone else, especially if they've just humiliated you in public! Inappropriate behavior generally takes two forms: actions and verbalizations. I don't know which are more embarrassing—commercial grade cursing, purposeful bodily function noises or nose-picking—all are enough to make you pretend to be thinking “Whose children are these? Glad they're not mine!” as you escape from your twelve-year-old's cursing into the next aisle of the grocery store while pulling your little one's finger out of his nose for the zillionth time that day. Let's take a look at the gross behavior first, next month we'll look at inappropriate verbal behavior. Check out my suggestions and see if they help with your own children.

The Gross Stuff

Gross behaviors are often habitual—meaning that once the behavior begins, it is often repeated without the child even being aware that he or she is engaging in the action. It's up to you to bring it to your child's attention and to have an action plan to help them to tone it down. Okay—here's the top five nasty behaviors that tend to gross me out every time that I see them occurring:

- Bodily function noises without regard to others. Yes, it happens even to the most polite and well-intentioned of us, but burping and other body noises sure are embarrassing. Problem is, many kids think that these events are down-right funny and they often learn how to purposefully stimulate their occurrence. My son could burp out the first half of the alphabet in one fell swoop—very impressive to his buddies, but less well accepted in my presence. Let the little heathen know that if the noise (from either end of his body) comes out unintentionally, then an “excuse me” is in order. And, if you think that it's been accomplished on purpose then several minutes in timeout may be in order so that he'll think twice before doing it again!
- Picking scabs on wounds. Sure scabs are itchy, but the wound may not heal properly if touched by dirty fingers. And, even when the wound does heal, there may be discoloration of the skin, especially if your child's skin color is very light in tone. If the perpetrator is little, keep the lesion or scrape covered with antibiotic ointment and a band-aid—brightly colored, interesting bandages are often held in high esteem by little ones, and they just may leave it alone. For older children, explain how the scab-picking is only lengthening the time until the wound heals, and how friends may recoil from the behavior and question the youngster's hygiene.
- Nose picking. Uggh—just thinking of this creeps me out. How could a parent allow such a disgusting habit to have developed? Well, just about every child goes through a phase of picking their nose—they've either seen someone else do

it and are mimicking the older sibling or even the parent. Often, though, little ones' fingers just naturally find their way to their noses (and mouths, ears and most other orifices of their bodies). It's natural to stick fingers in things, and if it feels good, or produces a substance (such as is often the case in nose-picking) well, even better! With little ones, distraction is often the best technique—remove the child's finger from the nose and hand her an item to hold—it's difficult to shove a ball up your nose if your fingers are occupied. When slightly older, hand the child a tissue and help instruct her to blow her nose using the paper. I've also had good luck with chronic nose-pickers by placing a small amount of petroleum jelly in the nostrils—many kids do not like the feel of touching the gel with their fingers, and it also helps with the itching, if that is a stimulus for nose-picking. For chronic nose-pickers I've had success with wrapping a band-aid on the index finger to make it harder to go up the nose, keeping the finger nails clipped short, using a “secret word or signal” to bring to the child's attention that he's engaging in the inappropriate behavior, or having the child wash her hands after every nose-pick. That gets real old real fast, and most children will cease the behavior in order to avoid having to hit the sink several times a day.

- Eating food from the floor. Okay, here comes the five-second debate. I can't tell you how many times my own two kids tried to convince me that anything snatched from the floor within five seconds of it hitting the ground was safe to eat. As if germs need five seconds to attach to the potato chip! Yeah, right. Tell your children that food becomes inedible the second it touches the floor, and if you see them throwing it away you'll give them another piece. If they hit you up with the starving kids in third-world countries argument, remind them that your kitchen is not third-world material and that the debate is over. Throw the food away and replace it if you can—end of story. And, be careful about using the dog as a canine vacuum cleaner. Most “people food” wreaks havoc with the canine tummy and even if Fido doesn't care about germs it's not good for him either.
- Using the bathroom without washing up. Of all of the gross behaviors, this is the one most based on children modeling what's seen in the home. Even if the teacher insists on hand washing after toileting, if the child does not see the parents washing up and also insisting that the kids clean their hands after using the bathroom, then it probably won't become habitual. Studies show that a majority of women wash their hands in public restrooms, but that most men do not. So guys, if you want to keep your kids from getting all kinds of scary illnesses you need to be a good role model and wash up yourself. Also set up the habit of washing hands after outside play and definitely before all meals.

See your child in any of the above? If so, not to worry—it's perfectly normal, but it's up to you, the parent, to teach your kid to tone down, or maybe to even cease, some of these normal, but somewhat gross, behaviors!