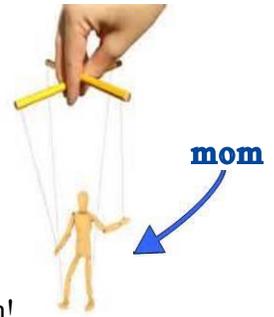


Six Ways Kids Test & Manipulate Parents*

Frustrated kids try to find ways to get what they want. This is normal. Their behavior, although annoying, has a purpose. We call this behavior the “testing and manipulation” of parents. In all of these techniques, the underlying message is “Just give me what I want and I will stop this behavior.” This giving in is very tempting, but doing so allows the “inmates to run the asylum.”



Below are listed the six basic testing tactics employed by children:

- #1 **Badgering.** This is the “please-please-please” or “why-why-why” or “Mom! Mom! Mom!” technique. It can be particularly taxing when done loudly in public.
- #2 **Temper.** Displays of temper, also called intimidation, involve aggressive behaviors. Younger children might throw themselves on the floor, bang their heads, and/or kick furiously. Older children often use language: calling you names, swearing, complaining loudly, and so forth.
- #3 **Threats.** Here are a few examples: “I’m going to run away!” – “I’ll never speak to you again!” – “I’m going to kill myself!” – “I won’t do my homework!”
The message is always that something bad will happen if the child does not get what they want.
- #4 **Martyrdom.** Here are some favorites in this category: “I never get anything I want!” – “You like her more than you like me!” – “No one around here loves me.” Kids learn when they are quite young that parents want them to be happy. They find that acting hurt or deprived can be a powerful way of influencing adult behavior.
- #5 **Butter-up.** This is a more sophisticated tactic. When the child using this approach, they say things that are designed to make the parent feel warm and loving. The parent, then, runs the risk of losing this good feeling if they subsequently frustrate the child. Below are some examples:
 - ❖ “Gee, Mom, you’ve got the prettiest eyes.” or
 - ❖ “I have the best parents in the world!” or
 - ❖ “Please, Mom. I promise I’ll eat this wonderful dinner if ...”
- #6 **Physical Tactics.** Here the frustrated child may physically attack the adult, hurt the dog, break something, or run away from home. Often older children use these tactics.

Children can blend tactics. Numbers 1 & 4 used together become **whining**. It can be valuable to look at these tactics to see if your child has a favorite. If they do, well... that is not a good sign. Having a favorite is an indication that they are getting some benefit from their choice of behaviors.

It is important to realize that in all of the above tactics, the child has a primary and a secondary goal. The primary goal is to get you to give in and let them have what they want. The secondary goal is subtler, and often not understood by parents. If the child cannot “win”(that is, get what they want), then at least they can feel some power when they can get you frustrated or angry. The child may hope that, after the angry scene, maybe you will feel guilty and be super-nice and loving toward them. **Effective parenting involves learning how to stay calm and respectful while not giving in to the child’s tactics.**

It is a gift to your child when you stay **calm, respectful** and **firm** with discipline.

* The above ideas are taken from **1-2-3 MAGIC** by Thomas Phelan. Check out his website at www.123Magic.com or contact the Center (925-855-1745) for more information.

