

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LOST: 8 STEPS TO TAKE—FAST

PARENTING

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Rosie, 6 months

Growing up
can make a kid
grumpy



The "Terrible Sixes"



Your 6-year-old refuses to dress herself, won't let you comb her hair, and even throws tantrums—behavior you haven't seen since she was a toddler. But this is different from 2-year-old defiance. "Children this age feel overwhelmed," says Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, author of *Raising Your Spirited Kid*. A 6-year-old's world is expanding outside her home orbit to include peers and extracurricular activities. "She wants to separate from her parents and be grown up, but that's scary too," Kurcinka says.

The terrible sixes can last anywhere from three months to an entire year. To get through this trying stage:

► **Keep life simple.** Entering first grade can be stressful, so limit after-school programs to one or two a week. And don't add any new activities to her schedule until the spring or second grade. What your child needs most is downtime to recharge from her day.

► **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Battles over minor issues—like matching clothes and eating every pea on her plate—are counterproductive. Focus your energy, and discipline, on truly problematic behavior, such as rude language or hitting.

► **Deflect tantrums with humor.** Is your daughter balking about putting on her coat? Put on your own jacket backward and ask her for help zipping it up.

► **Schedule one-on-one time.** It could be as simple as treating her to a pedicure with sparkly nail polish or taking a trip to the library.

► **Focus on the positive.** As she becomes more self-assured, you'll see glimmers of a friendlier nature. Encourage it with such comments as "I love it when you smile" or "You said that in such a nice way!"

With time, plus understanding, love, and acceptance from you, your 6-year-old will soon leave behind her heel-digging behavior. At least until adolescence. —MARCIA PASSOS DUFFY