



## SHOALHAVEN MANAGING CHILDREN PROGRAM (SMCP)

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### 7. Being consistent

When responding to your children, it is really important to be consistent. Your children need to know that the **rules** don't change from day to day and that you always expect the same standards from them.

If they think there's a chance they can get away with something, they'll always try, just like poker machine players who hope to hit the jackpot. Poker machine players never know what will happen when they push that button – mostly nothing, sometimes they get their money back, and, very rarely, someone hits the jackpot. In other words, a poker machine is inconsistent. It's this inconsistency that keeps people putting the money in. If they knew it never gave them any money, they wouldn't play it.

In the same way, your children need to know they won't get rewarded for misbehaviour, and that you won't give in to their nagging. That means that you need to give them the same message each time, with the same **consequences** for good behaviour each time and the same consequences for bad behaviour each time. It also means that they need to get the same message from both parents. If they know that Mum and Dad will both say the same thing and both give the same answer, they won't try to play Mum and Dad off against each other.

When your children nag or misbehave, you should be like a broken vending machine, and never give them a payoff.

When they are behaving well, that's when you should be like the poker machine and sometimes **praise** and reward that good behaviour so they keep on doing it

That's the goal. That's the strategy. That's the ideal to aim for in managing your children's behaviour.

In real life it's not always possible to be 100% consistent. In real life there are times when you are overwhelmed by everything else that's going on, or when you're not well, so that you end up giving in because you don't have the energy to resist. You're a person, not a machine. At these times it's better to give in straight away instead of trying to hold firm but then giving in later. If you do that, your children learn that a bit of a tantrum or a bit of nagging won't work, but a **BIG** tantrum and **LOUD AND LONG** nagging will work, so their behaviour will actually get worse.

The experience your children have should be that if you say "No", you stick to it. So if there's a time when you don't think you will be able to stick to it, say "Yes" in the first place. Don't say "No" if you are going to change your mind.