

*Question:*

Jason is going to be 4 in June and he's always been a very energetic kid which is totally fine with me, that's how I was, but for the past few weeks he just won't listen to us and when asked to do something he refuses, runs into another room or does it half. For example the child lock doesn't work in my car and on numerous occasions opened the door while I'm driving and after taking things he likes like no T.V. or no car toys and still he does it again. My husband and I are at our wits end with this situation. I'm sure he's acting out because of something but I can't figure it out. I would love to hear anything you have to say about this!

*Answer:*

First, his behavior is really normal for a four year old. They tend to do all kinds of things they seemed have known in the past to be wrong. This is when the light socket becomes dangerous again, stealing can occur, lying starts, and plastic bags can kill. This time, even though they know plastic bags are not safe, they will try to put them over their head because they are trying to be a space man. They have the verbal skills to make you believe they know what they are doing - untrue, they are still very much in fantasy. He still wants to please you but his needs and wants are in the forefront now. He doesn't have a conscience yet. He doesn't understand time either. The best way to handle a 4 year old is with rules. They like to know and follow rules. You start each rule with We do not..... because no one in the house does that. We do not open the car door until the car is stopped. Write them and post them on the wall. Remind him the rule has been broken and that is not OK. He can get time out or something else you feel comfortable with. You have to be consistent and you are not allowed to break the rules either. Make sure the punishment fits the crime. Open car door- 10 minutes in time out. He cannot tolerate much more than 10 minutes. Talk to him after and let him tell you what rule he broke. Punishment- if you are one who will use it- isn't supposed to hurt. It is supposed to give them a brake to think about what happened. The reason he isn't so accommodating anymore is because he has separate wants from yours and he finally knows it. Four is a very trying age. Give him choices like "Jason, it is time for bed." Jason says, "I don't want to go to bed!" You say, "Jason, it is time for bed, would you like to walk or would you like mommy to carry you?" Jason may decide to choose and you do as he wishes. Jason may protest and refuse either choice. If he does you say, "Jason, it is time for bed and you can either walk or I will carry you, but if you don't choose, I will choose for you." If he still refuses you pick him up- screaming or not and take him to bed. Then you can make other choices like would you like to brush your teeth or do you want me to do it for you. Would you like a little music while you fall asleep or would you like quiet..... This helps them feel as though they have power and they need that. You can say, Jason, it is time to clean up. Jason refuses, say ok then you can do nothing else until you clean up. When he finally wants to do something else he will clean. Or you can say Jason let's play a game- It's a clean -up game let's see who can pick up the Legos the fastest. Or you can tell him pick up all your cars- it is a task he can complete and then tell him pick up all of his shoes, then have him gather the puzzle pieces..... One step at a time. It is overwhelming to have to pick up a big messy room- unless someone breaks it into small parts. This is also the time to pick your battles- all of his behavior cannot be fixed at once. Tackle one thing at a time. Good luck and this is just the beginning. Learn ways now to make it cooperative because it will help you throughout his life. That lovely little boy is still the and you need to point it out often. Look how helpful Jason is! Show him frequently what he does right.