

Spring 2023-24 Extra Special Newsletter for Extra Special Kids

In this issue, you will find some ways that parents and caregivers can help children with disabilities.

Managing Child Behavior Problems at Home adapted from an article from Child Mind Institute

One of the biggest challenges parents face is managing difficult or defiant behavior on the part of children. Whether they are refusing to put on their shoes, or throwing tantrums, you can find yourself at a loss for an effective way to respond.

ABC's of Behavior Management at Home:

To understand and respond effectively to problematic behavior, you have to think about what came before it, as well as what comes after it. Here are three important aspects of any given behavior:

1. **Antecedents (or Triggers):** Preceding factors that make a behavior more or less likely to occur. Learning about these is an extremely helpful tool in preventing misbehavior.
2. **Behaviors:** The specific actions you are trying to encourage or discourage.
3. **Consequences:** Results that naturally or logically follow a behavior. Consequences -positive or negative- affect the likelihood of a behavior recurring. The more immediate the consequence, the more powerful it is.

Define Behaviors

The first step in a good behavior management plan is to identify target behaviors. These behaviors should be specific, so everyone is clear on what is expected. They should be observable, and measurable so everyone can agree whether or not the behavior happened.

An example of poorly defined behavior is "acting up", or "being good". A well-defined behavior would be running around the room (bad) or starting homework on time (good).



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"Believe in yourself!
Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble, but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy." Norman Vincent Peale



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Antecedents (Triggers), the Good and the Bad

Antecedents come in many forms. Some prop up bad behavior, others are helpful tools that help parents manage potentially problematic behaviors before they begin and bolster good behavior.

Antecedents to AVOID:

*Assuming expectations are understood: Don't assume kids and young people know what is expected of them – spell it out! When children are unsure of what they are supposed to be doing, they are more likely to misbehave.

*Calling things out from a distance: Be sure to tell children important instructions face-to-face. Things yelled from a distance are less likely to be remembered and understood.

*Transitioning without warning: Transitions can be hard for kids, especially in the middle of something they are enjoying. Having a warning gives children the chance to find a good stopping place for an activity and makes the transition less disturbing.

*Asking rapid-fire questions or giving a series of instructions: These limit the likelihood that children will hear, answer questions, remember the tasks, and do what they have been instructed to do.

Antecedents to EMBRACE:

Here are some antecedents that can bolster good behavior:

*Be aware of the situation: Consider and manage environmental and emotional factors — hunger, fatigue, anxiety, or distractions can all make it much more difficult for children to rein in their behavior.

* Adjust the environment: When it is homework time, for instance, remove distractions like video screens and toys, provide a snack, establish an organized place for kids to work and make sure to schedule some breaks — attention is not infinite.

*Make expectations clear: You will get better cooperation if both you and your child are clear on what is expected. Sit down with them and present the information verbally. Even if they “should” know what is expected, clarifying expectations at the outset of a task helps head off misunderstandings down the line.

*Provide countdowns for transitions: Whenever possible, prepare children for an upcoming transition. Let them know when there are, say, ten minutes remaining before they must come to dinner or start their homework. Then, remind them, when there are say, two minutes, left. Just as important as issuing the countdown is actually making the transition at the stated time.

*Let kids have a choice: As kids grow up, it is important that they have a say in their own scheduling. Giving a structured choice — “Do you want to take a shower after dinner or before?” — can help them feel empowered and encourage them to become more self-regulating.

Creating Effective Consequences

Not all consequences are created equal. Some are an excellent way to create structure and help kids understand the difference between acceptable behaviors and unacceptable behaviors while others have the potential to do more harm than good. Having a strong understanding of how to intelligently and consistently use consequences can make a big difference.

Consequences to AVOID

*Giving negative attention: Children value attention from the important adults in their life so much that any attention — positive or negative — is better than none. Negative attention, such as raising your voice or criticizing — actually increases bad behavior over time. Also, responding to behaviors with criticism or yelling adversely affects children's self-esteem.

*Delayed consequences: The most effective consequences are immediate. If much time passes after a behavior, your children are less likely to link their behavior to the consequence. Therefore, the consequence is much less likely to actually change the behavior.

*Disproportionate consequences: Parents understandably get very frustrated. At times, they may be so frustrated that they overreact. A huge consequence can be disturbing for children, and they may give up even trying to behave.

*Positive consequences: When children dawdle instead of putting on their shoes or picking up their blocks and, in frustration, you do it for them, you are increasing the likelihood that they will dawdle again next time.

EFFECTIVE Consequences:

Consequences that are more effective begin with generous attention to the behaviors you want to encourage.

*Positive attention for positive behaviors: Giving your child positive reinforcement for being good helps maintain the ongoing good behavior. Positive attention enhances the quality of the relationship, improves self-esteem, and feels good for everyone involved. Positive attention to good behavior can also help reduce anxiety, and help kids become more receptive to instructions and limit-setting.

*Ignoring actively: This should be used ONLY with minor misbehaviors — NOT aggression and NOT very destructive behavior. Active ignoring involves the deliberate withdrawal of attention when a child starts to misbehave — as you ignore, you wait for positive behavior to resume. You want to give positive attention as soon as the desired behavior starts. By withholding your attention until you get positive behavior you are teaching your children what behavior gets you to engage with them.

*Reward menus: Rewards are a tangible way to give children positive feedback for desired behaviors. A reward is something children earn, an acknowledgement that they are doing something that is difficult for them. Rewards are most effective as motivators when a child can choose from a variety of things: extra time on the iPad, a special treat, etc. This reduces the possibility of a reward losing its appeal over time. Rewards should be linked to specific behaviors and always delivered consistently.

*Time outs: Time outs are one of the most effective consequences parents can use but also one of the hardest to do correctly.

*Be clear: Establish which behaviors will result in time outs. When a child exhibits that behavior, make sure the corresponding time out is relatively brief and immediately follows a negative behavior.

*Be consistent: Randomly administering time outs when you are feeling frustrated undermines the system and makes it harder for the child to connect behaviors with consequences.

*Set rules and follow them: During a time out, there should be no talking to the child until you are ending the time out. Time out should end only once the child has been calm and quiet briefly, so they learn to associate the end of time out with this desired behavior.

*Keep it brief: A standard formula for time outs is one minute per year of age. Use a timer so your child can see that the time is being measured.

*Return to the task: If time out was issued for not complying with a task, once it ends the child should be instructed to complete the original task. This way, kids won't begin to see time outs as an escape strategy.

If your child won't stay in the time out, put them in a backup space like a bedroom without any fun toys. Explain they will stay there for one minute and leave once they are calm. Afterward, restart the time out in their time out place. Repeat this until your child learns it is better just to complete the first time out.

When time out is over, find something to praise them for, even something simple like petting the dog nicely. The idea is to let them know that even though they had to go to time out for doing something they should not have done, you still love them! And you know they're capable of doing well.



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