

## Behavior Management in Early Childhood

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## Objectives

- A foundation for behavior management
- Implementing behavioral strategies
- Early childhood problem-solving and examples



## Common Concerns in Early Childhood

- Tantrums, irritability & poor frustration tolerance
- Poor attention
- Hyperactivity
- Inappropriate and annoying behaviors (whining, etc.)
- Noncompliance (including flop & drop)
- Toileting problems
- Feeding and mealtime problems
- Bedtime and sleep problems
- Dangerous behaviors (elopement & wandering, climbing, etc.)
- Fear, avoidance, and anxiety
- Aggressive or self-injurious behaviors
- Transition problems



## You Are Not Alone!

- Top 3 problems seen by pediatricians:
  - Behavior concerns: 58%
  - Ear aches: 48%
  - Upper respiratory infection (e.g., cold/flu): 41%
- **90%** of mothers of 2, 3, and 4 year-olds have **some** behavioral concern
  - 20% of mothers of 4 year-olds have **significant** concerns
- Behavioral concerns are even *more* common in children with developmental differences



## The Good News

- Behavior problems in young children can often be managed quickly!
- Fixing problems early will prevent serious problems later
- The most successful interventions focus on positive interactions, teaching, and setting children up for success



## Myths About Young Children

Young children...

1. Understand explanations and reasoning
2. Don't understand consequences
3. Should do things "because I said so"
4. Have "learned" something after getting it right the first time
5. Know what we expect of them
6. Understand and believe everything that they say to us



## Typical Behavior in Young Children with Down Syndrome

- Do not think like adults
- Have short attention spans
- Are often impulsive
- Learn slowly and lack judgment
- Exhibit speech and language delays
- Are stronger in social responsiveness



These characteristics can cause problems.

## Why do children misbehave?

## Think about juggling...

Keeping the balls in the air is the right behavior.

Dropping the balls is the wrong behavior.

Why do you drop the balls?

Because you lack motivation?

Or because you don't know how to juggle?



## Think about juggling...

If a child can't juggle, giving more rewards or applying more punishment may not help him learn how.

Consider a child's wrong behavior as a skill deficit, and your job is to teach the skill.



## If misbehavior is a skill deficit, can my child acquire the desired skill?



## Not always

Some factors limit one's ability to do things

- Physical
- Developmental
- Emotional

## Within the limitations



He might be able to develop a skill that still meets his goal.



## How do you teach the skill?

- Identify the purpose of the wrong behavior.
- Identify and correct situations or events that influence the behavior.
- Introduce or strengthen an acceptable and doable replacement behavior.
- Eliminate the payoff for the wrong behavior.



## Purposes of Behavior

- To get something (positive reinforcement)
- To escape from or avoid something (negative reinforcement)



## To get something (positive reinforcement) *External*

Social



Non-Social



## To get something (positive reinforcement) *Internal*



## To escape from or avoid something (negative reinforcement) *External*

Social



Non-Social



## To escape from or avoid something (negative reinforcement)

### *Internal*



## Situations or Events that Influence Behavior

### *Physical*

- Poor sleep
- Hunger
- Illness
- Pain
- Unpleasant stimulation
- Health problems

### *Environmental*

- Presence/absence of key people
- Changes in routine
- Indirect conflict (e.g., between parents)
- Direct conflict
- Unknown stresses

## Indicators of influencing events or situations

- Predictable change in expected behavior when the situation occurs.
- Fairly sudden changes in expected behavior.
- Unexplained variability in behavior when the antecedents and consequences are fairly consistent.

## Correcting situations or events that influence behavior

### *Physical*

- Physical examination
- Consistent sleep schedule
- Sleep clinic referral
- Mealtime schedule
- Nutrition referral
- Sensory evaluation

### *Environmental*

- Maintain routine across people and places
- Forewarn changes
- Learn to resolve conflict in a healthy way
- Manage parental stresses
- Provide connection to important absent people

## Teaching the *right* behavior

## Start with the relationship

*Rules without relationship lead to rebellion.*



## Be an expert of your child

- Temperament
- State
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Likes and dislikes

## Love your child

- Spend quality time
- Give physical affection
- Use words
- Offer gifts
- Provide help and support

## Introduce or strengthen an acceptable and doable replacement behavior

## Children learn best through EXPERIENCE



[PRACTICE and FEEDBACK]

Behaviors that yield a desired outcome are more likely to be repeated.



Behaviors that fail to yield a desired outcome or that yield an undesired outcome are less likely to be repeated.



**The more frequent and consistent the experience, the stronger the learning.**

## Naturalistic Teaching

NATURALLY OCCURRING situations where:

- When right behaviors occur, they yield desired outcomes.
- When wrong behaviors occur, they do not yield desired outcomes.

**The outcome desired most...**

**ATTENTION!**

## Teach with Attention

Formula for teaching

- Behavior + Attention = **MORE Behavior**
- All "brands" of attention can teach and encourage behavior
- Unintentional "teaching" with attention occurs constantly

## Using Attention to Teach

- A steady stream of attention can actually **prevent** problem behaviors!
- Using targeted attention and labeled praise can teach and encourage good behavior
- Regular positive interaction builds **STRONG RELATIONSHIPS**
  - 5+ minutes of "special time" every day!



## Using Attention to Manage Behavior

- The Attention Tank 
- Adults often "save up" their attention for behavior problems and ignore ok behaviors
  - Attention + Behavior = **MORE Behavior!**
- Instead:
  - Pay a **LOT** of attention to good/ok behavior
  - Reduce attention to problem behavior

∩ AM WHEEL HEAR ME SQUEAK.



## Tips for Using Rewards

- A reward system **does not** have to mean coming up with new/expensive things to give kids
- Rewards are given **contingently** for good (and OK) behavior
- Small, immediate, frequent rewards can help get behaviors started



## Reward "Menu"



## Eliminate the payoff for the wrong behavior

- Monitor, monitor, monitor
- Expect a burst
- When the payoff is to avoid or escape
  - Reduce the unpleasantness
  - Gradually approach what is unpleasant

## What About Discipline and Punishment?

- Many problem behaviors are **annoying**, but not **dangerous**
  - For these, using attention and rewards for good behavior (and ignoring for annoying behavior) may be enough
- Behaviors that are potentially dangerous may require a punishment component

## What is Punishment?

- By definition, it decreases the likelihood of the behavior it follows.
- Two approaches
  - Remove something desirable
  - Present something aversive

## Qualities of Effective and Appropriate Discipline

- Predictable
- Immediate
- Non-harsh (does not rely on hostile interaction)
- Fast (maximizes opportunities to "try again")
- Portable
- Teaches child to self-calm and self-correct
- Balanced by LOTS of positive interaction for good behavior
- Effective enough to be used less often

## Time Out

- Time out is all about **CONTRAST**
  - Time In has to be **FUN!**
  - Access to that **FUN** must be immediately removed for a brief amount of time **EVERY TIME** the specific problem happens
- Many brief (5-10 sec) time outs are **MUCH** better than a single long (5 min) time out
  - Learning occurs through practice and feedback



## Preferred Use of Time Out

- Instead of nagging, lecturing, threatening, and repeated warnings...
- “Time out – Hitting” in a non-emotional tone
- During time out...
  - Provide **NO** attention
    - Reminders, eye contact, lectures, correction of other misbehavior, assurances, prompts, etc.
  - Ignoring is [probably] the hardest job parents have
  - Child directed to specific area (stairs, chair, room, etc.)



## Time Out Changes with Age

- Infants and toddlers: Simply removing child from whatever he is doing wrong and placing him elsewhere
- Preschoolers- time-out can be anywhere away from normal action and attention
- Around age 8-9, shift to privilege losses/grounding



## What if he won't stay in timeout?

- Does he have a good reason to stay?
  - Getting out sooner if he stays calm
  - Only way to regain attention and some/all of desired privilege
- Physical management is a form of attention
  - Options include:
    - Keep putting him back
    - Holding chair / restraining
    - Back-up room
    - Ignore

## Other Things to Check When Time Out Isn't Working

- Is there lots of time-in?
- Is the timeout located in a place that is not entertaining?
- Is the child getting attention during the timeout?
- Is timeout longer than it needs to be?
- Are you consistently reinforcing the *right* behaviors or the *wrong* behaviors?



## Rewards vs. Punishment

- Punishment communicates what *not* to do
- Attention and rewards communicate what *TO* do
- Never rely on punishment alone
  - **GOAL:** At least 4-5 positive interactions for every 1 discipline or corrective interaction

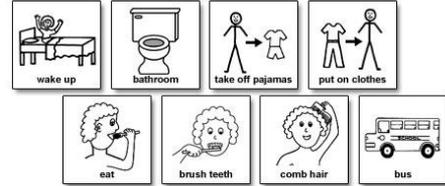
## Prompt What You Want

To increase the likelihood of your child doing the right thing, remind him of what he should do **BEFORE** he does the wrong thing.

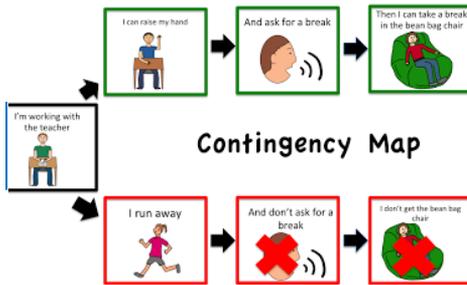


## Connect the cues with the experience

### VISUALS



Schedule



### Contingency Map



### WORDS



When cues don't match experiences, children default to what their past experiences tell them!



When cues don't match experiences, children default to what their past experiences tell them!



## Structured Teaching

**CREATING** situations where:

- Right behaviors are likely to occur, and when they do, they yield desired outcomes.
- Wrong behaviors are less likely to occur, and when they do, they do not yield desired outcomes.

Structured teaching is like practice to develop a skill.



While children practice many important skills, they often don't practice daily living and social skills.

## Identify What You Want Your Child To Do, Not Simply What You Want Her To Stop Doing

**Assess** the child's skills relative to the goal.

- When and to what degree does right behavior occur?
- When and to what degree does wrong behavior occur?

**Actively teach the right behavior.**

- Explain what the right behavior is.
- Demonstrate the right behavior.
- Rehearse the right behavior.
- Shape and chain the behavior.

**Cue and prompt the desired behavior.**

- Cues signal a contingency or condition
- Prompts indicate what to do
  - Visual
  - Verbal
  - Physical

**Provide a positive experience when correct behavior occurs.**

- Positive or negative reinforcement
- Natural or logical
- Tangible or intangible
- Now or later
- How often

**Provide no benefit or a negative experience when wrong behavior occurs**

- Remove attention
- Natural or logical consequence
- Now or later
- How often

## Common Examples

- My kids won't listen to me!
  - Explain the rule about minding.
  - Increase positive attention.
  - Give a prompt to mind.
  - Give a good command.
  - Monitor the response.
  - Allow a natural or logical consequence.
  - Practice.

## Using Attention to Teach Listening

- Children have to learn that instructions are different from other "noise" in their environment
- Make instructions stand out:
  - One at a time
  - Short
  - Clear
  - Gestures/examples
  - Clear FEEDBACK
- Did you know: Children (2-10 yrs old) take at least 5-10 seconds to process and respond to instructions!



## Listening Practice

- Children learn through PRACTICE and FEEDBACK
- For important instructions, use practice to get children ready for the situation!
- Start practice with fun, easy-to-follow instructions
  - Gradually add harder instructions once the child is doing well



"Hey, come on, can you help me clean up?"

vs.

"Sam, look at me" (pause)  
 "Thanks for looking!" (+ smile)  
 "Pick up that block" (gesture, pause)  
 "Fantastic, you got it" (+ smile and touch)  
 "Put the block in the box" (gesture, pause)  
 "You're cleaning! Very cool"

- Remember:
  - Big jobs should always be broken up into little ones for young children
  - Include breaks
  - Praise/enthusiasm matters!!



## • Whining and crying

- Explain the rule about whining.
- Examine when the child whines and doesn't whine.
- Increase attention to correct interactions.
- Ignore the whining.



- Pulling hair, glasses; hitting face when being held
  - Give verbal reprimand
  - Immediately put down
  - Ignore crying
  - Pick up and teach "nice touch"



- Bedtime refusal/crying
  - Eliminate caffeine, TV beforehand, active play beforehand
  - Consistent routine, bedtime (everyday)
  - Put in bed awake, drowsy; not asleep
  - No bottle, TV
  - Ignore protests, crying





- Getting into things they shouldn't
  - Give verbal reprimand
  - Immediately put in time out
  - After time out, provide opportunity for right and wrong behavior
  - Praise and attend to right behavior; time out for wrong behavior

- Aggression (bite, hit, pull hair)
  - Explain the rule about aggression.
  - Assess when and why aggression occurs.
  - Teach the right way for accomplishing the goal of the aggression.
  - Increase monitoring and structure in situations when aggression may occur.
  - Give attention to correct behavior in those situations.
  - Immediate time-out for aggression with practice of correct behavior afterwards.

- Throwing things not intended for throwing
  - Explain the rule about throwing.
  - Provide examples of what may and may not be thrown.
  - Practice throwing the right things.
  - Increase attention to throwing the right things.
  - Immediate time-out for throwing the wrong things.

- Flop and drop (aka going boneless)
  - Increase attention to walking.
  - Increase value of walking (e.g. remind of reward when arrive at destination).
  - Reward a positive opposite (e.g. delivering a message).
  - Treat as noncompliance and put in time out.
  - Ignore, outwait.

- Throwing cup, plate, utensils during meals
  - Increase attention for right behavior
  - Immediately remove attention and anything within reach when throwing occurs
  - Return item and resume attention for right behavior
  - Teach "positive opposite" (e.g. putting cup in specified place; sign "all done" to get down)

- Running off in public
  - Put identification on child.
  - Teach staying near (e.g. close enough to touch hand, cart).
  - Teach stop/return (e.g. like game "red light/green light").
  - Avoid game of chase.
  - Immediate time out, put in cart for running.

### • Elopement

- Explain rule about leaving the house.
- Assess when elopement occurs.
- Alarm the doors.
- Practice and praise the correct way of exiting (e.g. ask).
- Immediate time-out for elopement.
- Secure doors when unable to monitor.

## Take-home Points

- Children learn through experience, so start teaching early!
  - Practice and feedback teach
  - More talking is rarely the answer
- Behavior + Attention = MORE Behavior
- Positive relationships, attention & “Time In” are the key ingredients to successful teaching and behavior management
- Discipline must be predictable, non-harsh, quick, and **BALANCED** by lots of positive interaction and teaching

## Selected Resources

- *Achieving best behavior for children with developmental disabilities*, by Pamela Lewis
- *1-2-3 Magic*, by Thomas Phelan
- *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*, by Alan Kazdin
- *Setting Limits with your Strong-Willed Child*, by Robert MacKenzie
- *A Work in Progress*, by Ron Leaf & John McEachin
- MO Parent Training and Information: <http://ptimpact.org/>
- KS Parent Training and Information: <http://familiesaltogetherinc.org/>
- DSG of Greater Kansas City: <http://www.kcdsg.org/>
- Children's Mercy: [childrensmercy.org](http://childrensmercy.org)
- National Down Syndrome Society: <http://www.ndss.org/>
- Parents as Teachers: <http://www.parentsasteachers.org/>
- Family Center on Technology and Disability: <http://www.fctd.info/>