



Strategies for Addressing Challenging Behaviors

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What is Behavior?

- Behavior is anything that a person does.
- Two basic principles:
 - A behavior that is reinforced is likely to occur again
 - A behavior that is not reinforced is not likely to occur as frequently



Functions of Behavior

The function of behavior is to **communicate**, usually for attention, escape/avoidance, or access to something.

Attention: Children may act inappropriately to get attention.

Escape/Avoidance: Children may be trying to get out of, delay, or avoid something such as tasks, environments, or people.

Access to Something: Children may act out to get something



Positive Discipline by Jane Nelson

In the beginning of her book Jane Nelson poses the question, “Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse.”



Positive Approach to Dealing with Behavior

- We often hear that kids aren't like they used to be “back in the old days” and “nowadays kids don't listen or take responsibility.”
 - These statements have truth to them because society is much different .
 - Children used to contribute to the survival needs of the family.
 - There are fewer opportunities to learn responsibility and motivation.



Three Main Approaches for Adult-Child Interaction

Strictness: Order without freedom, no choices, “You do it because I said so.”

Permissiveness: Freedom without order, unlimited choices, “You can do what you want.”

Positive Discipline: Freedom with order, limited choices, “You can choose within limits that show respect for all.”



Punishment

Punishment does sometimes work to stop the misbehavior immediately but you risk the four “R’s” of punishment:

Resentment - “This is unfair. I can’t trust adults.”

Revenge - “They are winning now, but I’ll get even.”

Rebellion - “I’ll do just the opposite to prove that I don’t have to do it their way.”

Retreat - “I won’t get caught next time.” “I am a bad person.”



Positive Discipline - Doesn't include excessive control or permissiveness.

The Four Criteria for Effective Discipline:

1. Is it kind and firm at the same time? (Respectful and encouraging)
2. Does it help children feel a sense of belonging and significance? (Connection)
3. Is it effective long term? (Punishment works in the short term, but has negative long-term results)
4. Does it teach valuable social and life skills for good character? (Respect, concern for others, problem solving, accountability, contribution, cooperation)



Kindness and Firmness at the Same Time

- A common mistake by parents is to become too permissive because they don't want to be punitive or authoritarian.
- When we rescue and protect our children from disappointment this is not being kind, it is being permissive.
- Instead of rescuing children from disappointment you can validate their feelings: "I can see that you are disappointed (or angry or upset)."
- Have children help set limits/rules - When adults only set limits and then use punishment, this breeds rebellion and power struggles.



Winning Children Over

4 Steps for Winning Cooperation:

1. Express understanding for the child's feelings. Be sure to check with him/her to see if you are right.
2. Show empathy without condoning. Empathy does not mean that you agree or condone. It means that you understand the child's perception. A nice touch is to share times when you have felt or behaved similarly.
3. Share your feelings and perceptions. If the first two steps have been done in a sincere and friendly manner, the child will be ready to listen to you.
4. Invite the child to focus on a solution. Ask for ideas on what to do in the future to avoid the problem.



Some Basic Concepts of Behavior

1. Children are social beings. Behavior is determined by our social context, such as family, school, and friends.
2. Behavior is goal oriented. It is based on a goal to be achieved.
3. A child's primary goal is to belong and feel significant. Misbehavior is based on a mistaken belief about how to achieve belonging and significance.
4. A misbehaving child is a discouraged child. A misbehaving child is trying to tell us, "I don't feel like I belong or have significance, and I have a mistaken belief about how to achieve it." When a child misbehaves, think of the misbehavior as a code and ask yourself, "What is she really trying to tell me?"



Some Basic Concepts of Behavior (continued)

5. Social responsibility or community feeling - Children want to belong and be significant.
6. Equality - All people (adults and children) have equal claims to dignity and respect.
7. Mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn. You can tell your child that we want to learn from our mistakes.
The 3 R's of recovery from mistakes:
 - Recognize - "I made a mistake."
 - Reconcile - "I apologize."
 - Resolve - "Let's work on a solution together."
8. Make sure the message of love gets through.



A New Look at Misbehavior

- Behavior is a way of communication.
- Think of misbehavior as “discouraged” behavior, lack of skills, or even age appropriate behavior.
- As parents, we should try to think in terms of responsibility and focusing on solutions instead of misbehavior and punishments.
- The best way to remove the motivation for misbehavior is to find a positive way to help the child feel like he/she belongs and is significant.



The Four Mistaken Beliefs and Mistaken Goals of Behavior

1. Undue Attention - The mistaken belief: I belong only when I have your attention.
2. Mistaken Power - The mistaken belief: I belong only when I'm the boss, or at least when I don't let you boss me.
3. Revenge - The mistaken belief: I don't belong, but at least I can hurt back.
4. Assumed Inadequacy - The mistaken belief: It is impossible to belong. I give up.



Positive Discipline Approaches to Mistaken Goals of Behavior

1. If a child is seeking attention - involve the child in a useful task(s), plan special time with the child, set up routines, establish nonverbal signals.
2. If a child is seeking power - don't fight but don't give in, withdraw from the conflict and calm down, be firm and kind, develop mutual respect, give choices (but limited), encourage, and redirect
3. If a child is seeking revenge - deal with the hurt feelings ("Your behavior tells me that you're hurt, can we talk about it?"), don't retaliate, listen, and encourage strengths.
4. If a child is feeling/behaving inadequate - Show faith in the child, stop criticism, teach skills and show how, and encourage positive attempts.



Using Natural and Logical Consequences

A natural consequence is when something happens in response to a child's behavior without parental involvement. For example: If a child forgets to study and receives a poor grade as a result.

Beware of disguising punishment by calling it a natural consequence. Do not use or let a natural consequence to occur if a child is in danger or if it interferes on the rights of others.

Natural and logical consequences need to be: Related to the behavior, Respectful, Reasonable, and Revealed in advanced. If not, it is a punishment and the child might then become resentful, want revenge, rebel, and/or retreat.

A natural consequence is useful when it redirects the child into contributing (useful) behavior.

Keep in mind: Privilege = Responsibility and Lack of Responsibility = Lack of the privilege



Focusing on Solutions

Traditional discipline focuses on teaching children what not to do or what to do because someone else said so.

Positive Discipline focuses on teaching children what to do because they have been invited to think through the situation and use some basic guidelines, such as respect and helpfulness, to find solutions. The children are active participants in the process, not passive receivers. *Let go of the feeling that children learn better when they hurt first.



Focusing on Solutions (continued)

Positive Time-out

1. Take time to train your children and show them that you can take positive time-outs when you need to.
2. Allow children to create their own time-out area. They can also name it (for ex: Vacation Spot).
3. Teach your children that when they feel better, they can follow up by working on a solution or making amends if there is still a problem.



Focusing on Solutions (continued)

Curiosity Questions

- What are you trying to accomplish?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What do you think caused it to happen?
- What did you learn from this?
- How can you use what you learned in the future?
- What ideas do you have for solutions now?



Using Encouragement Effectively

Encouragement changes long term behavior better than punishment. Consider the following when using encouragement to change behavior:

- Timing - You may have to wait until the conflict is over and you are both calm.
- Mutual Respect - Children will listen better and accept your words better if they feel that you respect them.
- Look for Improvement, not perfection.
- Build on Strengths, not Weaknesses.
- Redirecting Misbehavior - Try to redirect behavior in a contributing direction. If a child is constantly knocking blocks over, make him/her a “block” leader.
- Making Amends - When children do something irresponsible or disrespectful, give them the opportunity to make up for it by doing something that will make the person they offended feel better.



Using Encouragement Effectively (continued)

- Avoid Social Pressure - The child and the adult in charge can be influenced by social pressure. Try to avoid it if possible. Talk to the child privately.
- Schedule Special Time - Be proactive and give your children “special” attention from time to time. This could decrease attention-seeking behavior.
- Use Encouragement more than Praise - Praise will inspire some children to improve behavior but they may become “pleasers” and “approval junkies.” They can develop self concepts that are dependent on the opinions of others. This is not to say that we shouldn’t praise but you should use more encouragement. You want children to do things for themselves not others.
- Encouragement is More Effective than Criticism - Instead of criticism try this: “In which areas do you think you are doing well? In which areas do you think you need improvement?”



Using Encouragement Effectively (continued)

- Routine Charts - For chores, homework, etc. You and your child can refer to the chart to complete necessary tasks. Helps the student be a contributing member of the family. You can have your children help create them.
- Teach that Mistakes an Opportunity to Learn - Use mistakes as a way to teach or reteach skills.
- Curiosity Questions - Questioning is a good way to redirect children. For example: “What can you see that needs to be done before the kitchen is clean?”
- Try a Hug! - It lets your child know you care and it is a good way to deescalate a situation
- Try to see it from Your Child’s Point of View.



Class/Family Meetings

- Family meetings are a great way to learn and practice the democratic procedures of cooperation, mutual respect, and focusing on solutions.
- A family meeting involves your child in problem solving and coming up with a solution to issues.
- Purposes of family meetings:
 - To give compliments
 - To help one another
 - To solve problems
 - To plan events



Personality: How Yours Affects Theirs

- Parents act differently and handle situations differently. This can be confusing to children and can lead to misbehavior (testing).
- It is important to know yourself so that you can know how you affect your children.
 - For example: Control may be a priority for you. This could unknowingly make your child rebel, resist, challenge, and frustrate
 - If Pleasing is a priority for you, you could unknowingly make your child dependent on approval and reciprocation.



Class/Family Meetings (continued)

The 8 building blocks for effective family meetings:

- Forming a circle
- Practicing compliments and appreciation
- Creating an agenda
- Developing communication skills
- Learning about separate realities
- Role-playing and brainstorming
- Recognizing the reasons people do what they do
- Focusing on nonpunitive solutions



Class/Family Meetings (continued)

1. Begin the meeting with compliments
2. Read the first item of the agenda and ask the family member that submitted it if it is still a problem.
3. If the problem hasn't been resolved, go around the circle to get possible solutions.
4. Ask the family member when and how they will solve the problem based on the solutions offered by the family members.



Family Meeting Guidelines

- Sit in a circle at the same level as the children
- When they are ready, let the children lead the meeting
- The child “in charge” will start by complimenting someone, who will then compliment someone else



Putting it All Together

Positive Discipline Tools:

- Decide what YOU will do instead of what you will try to make your children do.
- Use kind and firm action.
- Use emotional withdrawal to stay out of power struggles and wait for a calm time to focus on solutions.
- Use routine charts to avoid power struggles.
- Get your children involved in solutions.
- Validate feelings.
- Give hugs.
- Use a sense of humor.
- Offer choices instead of making demands